

Understanding Conflict

Understanding Conflict – Study Notes

1. What Is Conflict?

Aspect	Description
Definition	A perceived clash of interests, values, goals, or needs between two or more parties. • Interdependence – parties rely on each other in some way. • Perceived incompatibility – at least one party believes the other's actions
Key Elements	threaten their goals. • Emotion – feelings such as frustration, fear, or anger often accompany the clash. • Intrapersonal – within one person (e.g., values vs. desires). • Interpersonal – between individuals.
Types of Conflict	• Intragroup – among members of the same team or group. • Intergroup – between different groups, departments, or organizations. • Organizational – structural or systemic disagreements (e.g., resource allocation).

2. Sources (Causes) of Conflict

Category	Typical Triggers
Goal?related	Competing objectives, ambiguous priorities, limited resources.
Task?related	Disagreements about how work should be done, role ambiguity, quality standards.
Relationship? related	Personality clashes, mistrust, poor communication, cultural differences.
Process?related	Unclear procedures, unfair decision?making, lack of participation.
Structural	Hierarchical imbalances, siloed departments, inadequate policies.

3. Conflict Styles (How People Respond)

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Style	Behavior	When It Works Best	Risks
Competing (assertive, uncooperative)	Pushes own agenda, uses power or authority.	Quick decisions in crises; when a clear solution exists.	Can damage relationships; may breed resentment.
Collaborating (assertive, cooperative)	Seeks win-win by exploring underlying interests.	Complex problems needing creative solutions.	Time-consuming; requires trust.
Compromising (moderately assertive/cooperative)	Finds a middle ground, "split the difference."	When parties have equal power and a temporary solution is needed.	May result in sub-optimal outcomes; both sides give up something.
Avoiding (unassertive, uncooperative)	Withdraws or postpones dealing with the issue.	Low-stakes situations; when emotions need cooling.	Issues may fester; can be perceived as indifference.
Accommodating (unassertive, cooperative)	Yields to the other's needs.	To preserve harmony, when the issue is more important to the other party.	May encourage exploitation; personal needs ignored.

Tip: Effective managers often shift styles based on the context.

4. The Conflict Process (Stages)

1. **Latent Conflict** – Underlying incompatibilities exist but are not yet recognized.
 2. **Perceived Conflict** – Parties become aware of the disagreement.
 3. **Felt Conflict** – Emotional responses emerge (stress, anger, anxiety).
 4. **Manifest Conflict** – Behaviors surface: arguments, negotiations, or avoidance.
 5. **Conflict Resolution** – Parties engage in problem-solving, mediation, or other interventions.
 6. **After-effects** – Outcomes may be constructive (learning, stronger relationships) or destructive (resentment, turnover).
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5. Conflict Management Strategies

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| Strategy | Description | Suitable Context | |-----|-----|