MODULE 4 – CONFLICT SOLVING

**M4.WS1 - CHARACTERISTICS OF CONFLICT**

**Principles**

* The absence of conflicts leads to the stagnation of the system and its degradation.
* Failure to resolve conflicts leads to destabilization and revolutionary change of the system.
* There are many types of conflicts.
* Conflict resolution stabilizes the system.

Conflict causes a great degree of discomfort, anger, frustration, sadness, and pain to people. In the workplace, a simple disagreement between team members, if unresolved, may escalate into avoidance, inability to work together, verbal assaults, and resentment. In the worst cases, it may also lead to hostility and eventual separation from the organization. Therefore, it is important that the conflict be resolved as soon as possible.

**Types of conflicts**

* Intrapersonal conflict
* Occurs within our own mind
* Intrapersonal conflict takes place in the psyche or soul of each individual. These can be internal conflicts, such as the use of our free time, or setting goals or decisions.
* A simple example of an intrapersonal conflict would be a woman unable to make up her mind whether she should go to the office party or stay at home and relax. Or, a student in conflict with herself, when she is unable to decide if she wants to go to the club or finish her assignment.
* Interpersonal conflict
* Interpersonal conflict arises between 2 or more people or groups of people. Almost all situations that we consider to be conflict fit into this conflict.
* The conflict may be due to any reason or subject, but the fact is, the two individuals involved have opposing views about the same thing.
* Consider a simple subject like the health benefits of a vegan diet. One individual may argue that vegan is the way to go, while the other may opine that a non-vegan diet is better for the body.
* Extrapersonal conflict (a type of conflict in which people are indirect participants)
* Unhealthy conflict (relationship conflict) – counterproductive and even destructive if not managed effectively, some of the consequences of unhealthy conflict include:
* Damaged relationships
* Poor decision-making
* Dissatisfaction and stress
* Wasted resources (time, energy, and money) dealing with the conflict
* Withdrawal and disengagement
* Lack of teamwork (decreased productivity)
* Harmful to the overall culture
* Healthy conflict (task conflict) - beneficial when managed effectively. Some of the benefits of healthy conflict include:
* Positive change
* Better decision making
* Stronger relationships
* Better problem solving
* Increased commitment
* Beneficial to the overall culture
* Conflict management serves as a way to address the conflict in positive terms.

**General phases of conflict**

* stage of potential formation of conflicting interests, values, norms
* incubation – the conflict has not yet erupted, but preconditions have already been made (e.g. different work pace of individual co-workers, temperature in the office)
* first symptoms – first manifestation (e.g. reduced number of eye or personal contacts, reduced interest)
* transition from a potential conflict to a real one
* outbreak – open conflict or, conversely, blocking communication between the parties regarding the conflict
* polarization – the conflict is getting worse by involving other participants
* solutions – suggestions for solutions
* consensus – discussion and selection of a suitable solution
* stage of conflict resolution

**TASK 2**

*What is your behaviour before an open outbreak of conflict? How do you look, do you use the tactic of sharing information with another person? (“I need your advice, he/she annoyed me, what should I do?”) Or do you quietly think of a solution with a smaller number of social contacts?*

**Causes of team conflict**

Conflict arises from a multitude of sources that reflect the differences in personality, values, ideologies, religion, culture, race, and behaviour. It also arises from simple misunderstandings. Conflict begins due to poor communication, seeking power, dissatisfaction with management style, weak leadership, lack of openness, and change in leadership.

**8 causes of conflict (the most common reasons for conflict)**

1. Perceived breach of faith and trust: When one puts faith and trust in another person, and that confidence is broken, it can create an emotional response that elevates to conflict.
2. Unresolved disagreements: Disagreements are normal. When they are left unresolved, however, the associated feelings and emotions will remain in force, at least at some level. When another situation brings this disagreement back to the forefront, these suppressed emotions can erupt with force, usually far in excess of those associated with the original disagreement.
3. Miscommunication: The ability to communicate is one of our most commonly used skills. We sometimes use words that do not always clearly communicate the picture in our minds. When this occurs, errors often result that lead to frustration. Depending on a multitude of factors (stress level for one), the error sometimes results in conflict if neither person is willing to accept responsibility for it.
4. Personality clashes: We are all different. Experts say that our personalities are genetically determined resulting in different sets of preferred behaviours. These natural sets of differences are some of our greatest strengths as individuals and teams; however, they are also sources of conflict.
5. Differences in acquired values: Our values are the beliefs we hold that help us to make decisions about what is right or wrong, good or bad, and normal or not normal. Our values come from parents, siblings, friends, mentors, coaches, teachers, books, churches, movies, television, music, and life in general. No two people ever have the same life experience, so we ultimately have different sets of values and beliefs that guide our decisions and behaviour. So, value system is a strong driver of behaviour and a frequent source of conflict in our lives and in our teams.
6. Underlying stress and tension: Our lives today place enormous demands on our time and energy. But frequently those demands exceed our capacity to deal with them. We come to work and attempt to function normally with our team members. Too often, however, this underlying stress surfaces at the slightest provocation, and we find ourselves in conflict.
7. Ego problems: Ego is another strong driver of human behaviour and decisions. Ego wants us to be ‘right’, and moves people into defending their position, sometimes unreasonably. One of the quickest ways to diffuse an argument or conflict is to admit one's mistakes. At a minimum, move out of ego and attempt to see the situation from the other person’s point of view.
8. Combinations of the above

