Intergroup Conflict
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Introduction

• Refers to the collective incompatibility or disagreement between two or more divisions, departments, or subsystems in connection with,
  – tasks,
  – resources,
  – information,

• This form of conflict implies each member of a group is in conflict with those of another, the actual dispute is carried out between representatives,
  – department heads,
  – labour-management negotiators
A “law of intergroup conflict” states that all groups are in partial conflict with each other,

It is very common in complex organizations having differentiated subsystems with,
- different goals,
- norms, and
- orientations

To increase overall effectiveness, complex organisations create different subsystems with homogeneous tasks and distinct goals.

Interface conflict (Blake & Mouton, 1984)

Examples of organizational intergroup conflict are between
- Line and staff,
- Manufacturing and sales,
- Production and maintenance,
- Headquarters and field staffs, and
- Labour and management
DYNAMICS OF INTERGROUP CONFLICT

• Social identity theory posits that individuals tend to classify themselves and others into various social categories.
• “causes individuals to compare their in-group–with out-group and to perceive the in-group as preferable, even in the absence of intergroup conflict.
• Perceived in-group–out-group similarity can be threatening,
Behavioural and Perceptual Changes

- When intergroup conflict of win–lose orientation occurs, the groups become more cohesive.
- Team conformity and loyalty to the group increase,
- win–lose intergroup conflict creates significant distortions in the judgment and perceptual processes of the conflicting groups.
- Two types of errors occur that tend to magnify the differences between groups and escalate the conflict,
  - The two groups fail to see the similarities in their solutions and see only the differences between their solutions.
  - The other kind of perceptual error relates to the belief of the in-group members that their solutions are superior to those of the out-group.
Structure Formation

• The emergence of autocratic leaders and the establishment of a new power structure,
• There is also greater pressure on the leader to carry out the wishes of the in-group when interacting.
• A structure of interaction is formulated, rules and procedures are established prohibiting intergroup communication.
Decision Process

• Differences among in-group members are no longer tolerated,
• This suppression of intra-group conflict blocks the process that could lead to effective solutions.
• The groups establish the means of negotiation, which are usually;
  – bargaining,
  – ultimatums, and
  – nonnegotiable demands
• Contacts with other group(s) become;
  – formal,
  – rigid, and
  – carefully defined.
Conflict Aftermath

• If bargaining is utilized as a method of conflict resolution, both groups will perceive themselves as partly losers,

• If a third party imposes a solution on the conflicting groups, there is a possibility that a victor and a vanquished will be created.

• the outcomes of win–lose type of intergroup conflict will probably be dysfunctional for the organization.
## Consequences of Inter-unit Conflict

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attributes of conflictful lateral relationships</th>
<th>Illustrative consequences</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competition in general</td>
<td>Motivates or debilitates</td>
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<tr>
<td>Concealment and distortion</td>
<td>Provides checks and balances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Channeled interunit contacts</td>
<td>Lowers quality of decisions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rigidity, formality in decision procedures</td>
<td>Enhances stability in the system</td>
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<td>Appeals to superiors for decisions</td>
<td>Enhances stability in the system</td>
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<td>Decreased rate of interunit interaction</td>
<td>Lowers adaptability to change</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low trust, suspicions, hostility</td>
<td>Provides more contact for superiors</td>
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<td></td>
<td>May increase or decrease quality of decisions</td>
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<td>Hinders coordination and implementation of tasks</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Psychological strain and turnover of personnel or decrease in individual performance</td>
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MANAGING INTERGROUP CONFLICT

Sources
• The sources of intergroup conflict are mainly structural.
• System Differentiation
• Task Interdependence: three categories of interdependence;
• Pooled interdependence refers to a situation where the groups are relatively independent of each other,
• Sequential interdependence exists where the output of one unit becomes the input of another unit, as in the case of automobile assembly line activities,
• Reciprocal interdependence, the outputs of one group become the input of other groups, in any direction.
• **Dependence on Scarce Resources**
  – the greater the perceived dependence on common resources, the greater is the possibility of intergroup conflict.

• **Jurisdictional Ambiguity**
  – purchasing and production or between line and staff

• **Relationship Between Line and Staff**
  – the success of staff depends on the acceptance of their ideas by the line. But the success of line does not necessarily depend on the staff advice, which line can have when it pleases.
INTERVENTION

Process

• Interventions are useful when the intergroup conflict is strategic rather than frictional or minor.
• Two intervention strategies for managing intergroup conflict,
  – problem solving (help the members of two groups to learn the integrating style to handle their differences), and
  – organizational mirroring (appropriate when more than two groups are having problems in working together)
Intergroup Problem Solving

• Blake and Mouton (1984) have discussed the following conventional approaches to the resolution of intergroup conflict,
  1. Cooperation by edict.
  2. Negotiations.
  3. Leadership replacement.
  4. Personnel rotation.
  5. Structural solutions.
  7. Flexible reporting relationships.
  8. Mediation and arbitration
Contd.

• 1. Problem Formulation
• 2. Problem Solution
• 3. Implementation Plan.
• 4. Implementation of the Plan.
• 5. Implementation Review.
Organizational Mirroring

• This intervention is designed to improve the relationship among three or more groups,
• Requires careful planning and management through an efficient consultant is required,
• This intervention is suitable where the solution of an interface problem requires the collaboration of several work-related groups,
Structural

• **Analysis of Task Interdependence**
  • Structural changes also may be made by the superior through authoritative command.
  • Intergroup conflict may be increased or reduced by hiring, transferring, or exchanging group members to increase homogeneity-heterogeneity within-between groups.
  • Intergroup conflict may be altered by clarifying and formulating rules and procedures that affect intergroup relationship,
    – altering the system of communication between groups;
    – developing an appeals system; and
    – Providing valid information to reduce distortion.