

Chapter 13

Conflict and Stress

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What is Conflict?

- Interpersonal conflict – the process that occurs when one person, group, or organizational subunit frustrates the goal attainment of another person, group or subunit, e.g., conflict b/n sales manager and sales rep., and purchasing group with shipping and receiving.
- Antagonistic conflict can result in name calling, sabotage, physical aggression.
- Conflict might be managed in a collaborative way or suppressed and may not be so obvious.



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Causes of Organizational Conflict

- Factors that contribute to organizational conflict:
 - Identification with a particular group of people
 - The in-group and out-group mentality
 - In an organization people identify themselves with groups; management group, economists, women, young, old...
 - Interdependence – when individuals or groups are mutually interdependent to meet their own goals, e.g., sales staff dependent on production staff
 - Interdependence necessitates coordination
 - Interdependence means parties have power over the other...if there is abuse of power conflict will arise.
 - Whether interdependence prompts conflict depends on the presence of other conditions

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Differences in Power, Status and Culture

- Conflict can arise when parties differ in power, status and culture (imbalance)
 - Power – if dependence is one way antagonism can arise, e.g., quality control workers and production workers.
 - Status – when there is reversal of roles, e.g., expert power of lower level employees
 - Culture – strong cultural differences might develop between groups, e.g., we care for the environment you don't, our work ethic is strong yours is not, our style is participative yours is autocratic, etc.

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Ambiguity and Scarcity of Resources

- **Ambiguity** – ambiguous goals, jurisdictions (boundaries not clear...) or performance criteria can lead to conflict. Ambiguous performance criteria are a source of conflict between management and employees during employee evaluation.
- **Scarce Resources** – conflict often arises in the process of controlling resources, e.g., sharing limited budget, office space, office equipment,...

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Types of Conflict

- Are conflicts the same? No. We can distinguish between relationship, task and process conflict.
 - Relationship Conflict – interpersonal tensions among individuals that have to do with their relationship per se, not the task at hand, e.g., personality clashes.
 - Task Conflict – disagreements about the task to be accomplished, e.g., differences of opinion about goals or technical matters.
 - Process Conflict – Disagreements about how work should be organized and accomplished, e.g., responsibility, authority, resource allocation, e.g., admissions officer to the dean who interferes in the admission process, it is my job to admit or reject students applying to the university, etc.,

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Conflict Dynamics

- When conflict arises we observe the following events take place:
 1. Winning the conflict becomes more important than developing a solution to the problem.
 2. The parties start to conceal information or to pass distorted information.
 3. Each side becomes more cohesive and deviants are punished. Conformity is expected.
 4. Contact with the opposite party is discouraged except under formalized, restricted conditions.
 5. While the opposite party is negatively stereotyped, the image of one's own position is boosted.
 6. On each side, more aggressive people who are skilled at engaging in conflict may emerge as leaders.
- A problem that starts with interdependence, ambiguity, scarcity, etc. quickly becomes a problem in itself. The conflict continues to cycle "on its own steam".

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Modes of Conflict Management

- According to Kenneth Thomas there are several basic reactions that can be thought of as styles, strategies or intentions for dealing with conflict.
- These approaches to managing conflict are a function of both how assertive you are in trying to satisfy your own or your group's concerns or how cooperative you are in trying to satisfy those of the other party.
- Five styles of dealing with conflict are:
 - Avoiding (bury your head in the sand)
 - Accommodating (kill your enemies with kindness)
 - Competing (might makes right)
 - Compromise (split the difference)
 - Collaborating (two heads are better than one)

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Avoiding

- Avoiding – CMS characterized by low assertiveness and low cooperation with the other party.
 - Bury your head in the sand.
 - Of limited effectiveness because it does not change the situation.
 - Effective when
 - The issue is trivial,
 - People need to cool down
 - Information is lacking
 - The opponent is very powerful and very hostile

Accommodating

- Accommodating – CMS in which one cooperates with the other party while not asserting one's own interests.
 - Not effective when people see that as a weakness
 - Effective reaction when you are wrong
 - Effective when issue is more important to the other party
 - Effective when you want to build good will.

Competition

- Competing – CMS that maximizes assertiveness and minimizes cooperation.
 - Full priority is given to your own goals.
 - Holds promise when
 - you have a lot of power,
 - you are sure of your facts,
 - the situation is truly win or lose, and
 - you do not have to interact with the other party in the future.

Compromise

- Compromise – CMS that combines intermediate levels of assertiveness and cooperation.
 - It is an attempt to satisfice rather to optimize your outcomes, e.g., plea bargain.
 - Places a premium on determining rules of exchange, thus it contains seeds of procedural conflict. It does not always result in the most creative response to conflict.
 - Not so useful for resolving conflicts that stem from power asymmetry – weaker party does not have much to offer to stronger party.
 - Sensible reaction to conflict arising from scarce resources.

Collaborating

- Collaboration – CMS that maximizes both assertiveness and cooperation.
 - Emphasis is put on win-win resolution.
 - It is assumed that the resolution will leave both parties in a better condition.
 - It works when the conflict is not intense and when each party has information that is useful to the other.
 - Effective collaboration can take time to develop but frequently enhances productivity and achievement.

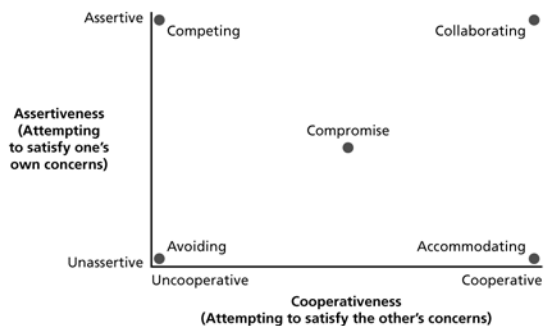
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Modes of Managing Conflict

Exhibit 13.1
Approaches to managing organizational conflict.

Source: Taken from Thomas, K. W. (1992). Conflict and negotiation processes in organizations. In M. D. Dunnette & L. M. Hough (Eds.), *Handbook of industrial and organizational psychology*. (2nd ed., vol. 3). Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press.



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Managing Conflict with Negotiation

● Negotiation – a decision making process among interdependent parties who do not share identical preferences.

- It is an attempt to prevent conflict or to resolve existing conflict.
- An attempt to reach a satisfactory exchange between parties.
- Can be explicit or implicit, e.g., labour negotiation and to leave work early.
- Distributive – win-lose negotiation in which a fixed amount of assets is divided between parties.
- Integrative Negotiation – win-win negotiation that assumes that mutual problem solving can enlarge the assets to be divided between parties.

Distributive Negotiation Tactics

Party: would like \$90,000 but can settle for \$70,000

Other: spend as little as \$60,000 but willing to go up to \$80,000

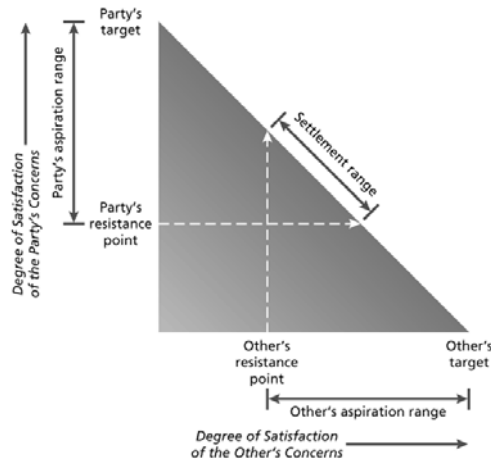


EXHIBIT 13.2
A model of distributive negotiation.

Source: Modified and reproduced by special permission of the Publisher, Davies-Black Publishing, an imprint of CCP Inc., Palo Alto, CA 94303 from *Handbook of Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, Second Edition, Volume 3, by Marvin D. Dunnette and Leetta M. Hough, Editors. Copyright 1992 by Davies-Black Publishing, an imprint of CCP, Inc. All rights reserved. Further reproduction is prohibited without the Publisher's written consent.

How can a settlement be reached?

● Threats and promises

- Threat – implies punishment if the other party does not concede. Has merit if one party has more power.
- Promise – pledges that concessions will lead to rewards in the future.

● Firmness vs Concessions

- Firmness - invites reciprocation and increases the chances of deadlock.
- Small concessions with face saving explanations might be a better technique.

Persuasion...

● Persuasion

- attempt to change the attitudes of the other party toward your target position
- Persuaders are most effective when they are expert, likable and unbiased.
- Bias is a problem – the introduction of an unbiased party is important.

Integrative Negotiation Tactics

- IN – rejects fixed-pie assumption and strives for collaborative problem solving that advances the interests of both parties.
 - People have a decided bias for fixed-pie thinking. Why?
 - Integrative negotiation requires degree of creativity.
 - The stress of typical negotiation does not provide the best climate for creativity.

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Characteristics of Integrative Negotiation

- Copious Information Exchange –
 - provide information, listen and share interests.
- Framing Differences as Opportunities –
- Cutting Costs
 - Cut the costs that the other party associates with an agreement
- Increasing Resources
 - Trying to increase resources instead of squabbling on the share of fixed resources.
- Introducing Superordinate Goals
 - The best example of creativity in integrative negotiation.
 - Both parties collaborate to achieve goals that neither can reach alone.

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Third Party Involvement

- Some times third parties get involved in negotiations, e.g., manager between two employees
 - Mediation – occurs when a neutral third party helps to facilitate a negotiated settlement.
 - Mediator can help in the process or atmosphere of negotiation.
 - Can help parties to calm down, clarify their interests, impose a deadline, ...
 - Intervene in the content of agreement, highlighting points of agreement, pointing new options, encouraging concessions, etc.
 - If the mediator is not seen as neutral, it does not work so well.

Third party involvement...

- Arbitration – when a third party is given the authority to dictate terms of settlement of a conflict.
 - It means negotiation has broken down and the arbitrator has to make a final distributive allocation.
 - In conventional arbitration, the arbitrator can choose any outcome such as splitting the difference between the two parties.
 - In final offer arbitration, each party makes a final offer and the arbitrator chooses one of them.

Is All Conflict Bad?

- There has been growing awareness of some potential benefits of organizational conflict.
- The argument is that conflict can promote necessary organizational change.

CONFLICT → CHANGE → ADAPTATION → SURVIVAL

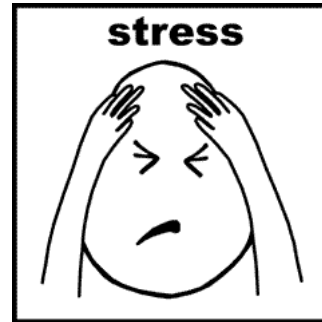
- How does conflict promote change?
 - New ideas that would not be offered without conflict
 - Errors of parties might become apparent prompting change
 - Signal that a redistribution of power is necessary.
- Conflict Stimulation – a strategy of increasing conflict to motivate change.

Conflict...

- How does a manager know that conflict might be a good thing?
 - When peaceful coexistence take precedence over organizational goals
 - Parties that should be interacting closely withdraw from each other to avoid conflict
 - When conflict is suppressed by exaggerating points of agreement
- Conflict in organizations, causes a lot of stress.

Stress in Organizations

- Stress has become a serious concern for individuals and organizations.
- A recent survey in the US found that 40% of workers found jobs very stressful.
- The Bureau of Labour Statistics determined that stress is a leading cause of worker disability.
- Annual cost of time lost due to stress in Canada is \$12 billion.



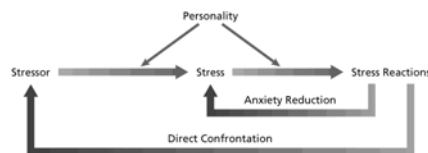
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Model of Stress

- Stress – a psychological reaction to the demands inherent in a stressor that has the potential to make a person feel tense or anxious because the person does not feel capable of coping with these demands.
- Stress becomes a problem when it leads to especially high levels of anxiety and tension.
- Stressor – environmental events or conditions that have the potential to induce stress.
- Stress Reactions – the psychological, and physiological consequences of stress, high blood pressure, reduced immune function.

Exhibit 13.3
Model of a stress episode.



More interesting is the fact that the individual personality often determines the extent to which a potential stressor becomes a real stressor and actually induces stress.

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Stress...

- Personality and Stress – personality can have an important influence on stress experience.
- It can affect both the extent to which potential stressors are perceived as stressful and the types of stress reactions that occur.
- Let's look at three key personality traits:
 - Locus of Control – compared to internals externals are more likely to feel anxious in the face of potential stressors. Internals are more prone to simple anxiety-reduction strategies that only work in the short run.
 - Type A Behaviour Pattern – personality pattern that includes aggressiveness, ambitiousness, competitiveness, hostility, impatience, and a sense of time urgency. Type A people report heavier workloads, longer work hours, and more conflicting work demands.

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Personality and Stress...

- Negative Affectivity – People with negative affectivity view the world and other people in a negative light. They are pessimistic and downbeat.
- They tend to report more stressors in the work environment and to feel more subjective stress.
- They are particularly likely to feel stressed in response to the demands of a heavy workload.

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Sources of Stress



Exhibit 13.6
Sources of stress at various points in the organization.

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Sources of Stress...

Workplace stressors

- **Executive and Managerial Stressors** – as key decision makers, managers experience some special forms of stress:
 - **Role overload** – requirement for too many tasks to be performed in too short a time period. The open-ended nature of management as an ongoing process with no definite ends contributes to stress especially when it is coupled with frequent moves.
 - **Heavy Responsibility** – responsibility for key decisions puts tension and guilt on managers, e.g., closing a division and putting employees out of work.

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Operative Level Stressors

- Poor Physical Working Conditions – excessive heat, cold, noise, pollution and unsafe working conditions.
- Poor Job Design – Monotony and boredom can prove extremely frustrating to people who feel capable of handling more complex tasks. Job scope can be a stressor at levels that are either too high or too low.
- According to **Robert Karasek's** Job demands-job control model, jobs that make high demands on employees while giving them little control over workplace decisions are especially prone to stress, e.g., nurse aids, assembly line operators, etc.

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Boundary Role Stressors, Burnout and Emotional Labour

- *Boundary roles* are positions in which organizational members are required to interact with members of other organizations or with the public.
- One's role as an organizational member might be incompatible with the demands made by the public or other organizations, e.g., gap between the qlty, qty and time the public demands and the organization can offer.
- Burnout- Emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment among those who work with people, teachers, nurses, paramedics, etc.

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Stages of Burnout Symptoms

- Burnout follows a process that begins with emotional exhaustion:

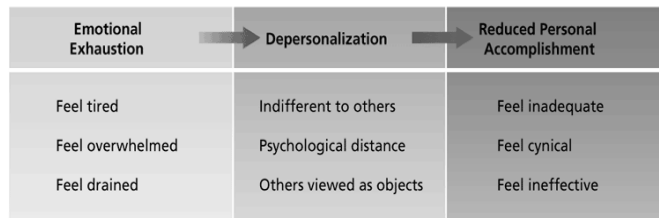


EXHIBIT 13.5
The stages of burnout and their symptoms.

Source: Chart based on Organizational practices for preventing burnout, from *Handbook of Stress Coping Strategies* by Amarjit Singh Sethi and Randall S. Schuler, p. 92. Copyright © 1984 by Ballinger Publishing Company. Reprinted by permission of HarperCollins Publishers, Inc.

Some General Stressors

- Stressors that are experienced equally by occupants of all roles:
 - Interpersonal Conflict
 - Bullying – persistent negative physical or psychological behaviour
 - Mobbing – ganging-up against an employee
- Work-Family Conflict – interrole conflict between being a member of a family and the member of an organization:
 - Increase in the number of homes where both parents work. Finding adequate daycare and disputes of sharing childcare responsibilities create stress.
 - Providing support for elderly parents.

Some General Stressors...

- Job Insecurity and Change
- Role ambiguity
- Sexual Harassment

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Reactions to Organizational Stress

- Can be divided into behavioural, psychological and physiological responses.
 - Behavioural Reactions – overt activities that the stressed use in an attempt to cope with the stress.
 - Problem Solving: delegation, time management, talking it out, asking for help, searching for alternatives.
 - Performance: reduced job performance.
 - Withdrawal: absenteeism, turnover.
 - Use of Addictive Substances: smoking, drinking, drug use.

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Reactions to Organizational Stress...

- Psychological Reactions – primarily involve emotions and thought processes, though they might be revealed in the individual's speech and actions.
 - Defence mechanism – psychological attempt to reduce the anxiety associated with stress.
 - Rationalization – attributing socially acceptable reasons to one's actions so that they will appear reasonable and sensible.
 - Projection – attributing one's own undesirable ideas and motives to others so that they seem less negative.
 - Displacement – directing feelings of anger at a safe target rather than expressing them where they may be punished.
 - Reaction Formation – expressing oneself in a manner that is directly opposite to the way one truly feels.
 - Compensation – applying your skills in a particular area to make up for failure in another area.

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Physiological Reactions

- Work stress is associated with electrocardiogram irregularities and elevated levels of blood pressure, cholesterol and pulse.
- Associated with the onset of diseases such as respiratory and bacterial infections due to its ill effects on the immune system.
- The accumulation of stress into burnout is particularly implicated in cardiovascular problems.

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Reducing or Coping with Stress

- Job Redesign – enriching jobs, giving more autonomy, hire more staff
- Social Support – having close ties with other people contributes to self-esteem, provides useful information and offers comfort and humour.
- Family Friendly Human Resources Policies – daycare facilities, telecommuting, flextime
- Stress Management Programs – meditation, training in muscle-relaxation exercise, training in time management.
- Work-Life Balance Programs – leisure activities combined with healthy diet and physical exercise can reduce stress and counteract physiological effects of stress. Participation in mental and physical fitness exercises. Medical doctors, nurses, chiropractors may be on staff.

The End

Have a nice day!