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| CAUSES OF WORKPLACE / PERSONAL CONFLICT IN THE ORGANIZATION. Prepared for Ms. R. Panchani |

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Organizational conflict \

Organizational conflict is a state of discord caused by the actual or perceived opposition of [needs](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Needs), [values](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Values) and [interests](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conflict_of_interest) between people working together. [Conflict](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conflict_(process)) takes many forms in [organizations](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Organization). There is the inevitable clash between formal authority and power and those individuals and groups affected. There are disputes over how revenues should be divided, how the work should be done, and how long and hard people should work. There are jurisdictional disagreements among [individuals](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Individual), [departments](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Departmentalization), and between [unions](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trade_union) and [management](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Management). There are subtler forms of conflict involving rivalries, [jealousies](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jealousies), [personality clashes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Personality_clashes), role definitions, and struggles for [power](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Power_(social_and_political)) and favor. There is also conflict within individuals — between [competing needs](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Competition) and demands — to which individuals respond in different ways.

PERSONAL CONFLICT\

A conflict between two people, most often generates from a mutual dislike or personality clash to each other. Conflict styles are typically seen as a response to particular situations. By contrast, we can argue that individual conflict differences may shape an employee's social and work environment, affecting their level of ongoing conflict and thus his or her experience of stress. Conflict sometimes has a destructive effect on the [individuals](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Individual) and [groups](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Group_(sociology)) involved. At times, however, conflict can increase the capacity of those affected, urging them to deal with problems, and therefore it can be used as a motivating force toward innovation and change. Conflict is encountered in two general forms. Personal conflict which mostly refers to an individual's inner workings and personality problems.

Many conflicts in this area are beyond the scope of [management](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Management) and more in the section of a [professional counselor](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Professional_counselor&action=edit&red), or workplace mediator but there are some aspects of personal conflict that managers should understand and some they can possibly help resolve. Social conflict may refer to interpersonal, intra-group, and inter-group differences. Organizational conflict at the interpersonal level includes disputes between peers as well as supervisor-subordinate conflict. [Party-directed mediation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Party-directed_mediation) is a mediation approach particularly suited for disputes between co-workers, colleagues or peers, especially deep-seated interpersonal conflict, multicultural or multiethnic disputes. The mediator listens to each party separately in a pre-mediation before bringing them into a joint session. Part of the pre-mediation also includes coaching and role plays. The idea is that the parties learn how to converse directly with their adversary in the joint session. Some unique challenges arise when organizational disputes involve supervisors and subordinates.

It was pointed out that there is a basic incompatibility between the authority and structure of formal organizations and the human personality. [Human behavior](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_behavior) cannot be separated from the diverse culture that surrounds it.

Another facet of personal conflict has to do with the multiple roles people play in organizations. [Behavioral](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Behavioral) scientists sometimes describe an [organization](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Organization) as a system of position roles. Each member of the organization belongs to a role set, which is an association of individuals who share interdependent tasks and thus perform formally defined roles, which are further influenced both by the expectations of others in the role set and by one's own personality and expectations. For example, in our common form of classroom organization, the students are expected to learn from the lecturer by listening to them, following their directions for study, taking exams, and maintaining appropriate standards of conduct. The lecturer is expected to bring students high-quality learning materials, give lectures, write and conduct tests, and set a scholarly example. Another in this role set would be the dean of the school, who sets standards and supervises faculty, maintains a service [staff](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Employment), readers and graders, and so on. The system of roles to which an individual belongs extends outside the organization as well, and influences their functioning within it. As an example, a person's roles as partner, parent, descendant, and church member are all intertwined with each other and with their set of organizational roles.

As a consequence, there exist opportunities for role conflict as the various roles interact with one another. Other types of role conflict occur when an individual receives inconsistent demands from another person; for example, they are asked' to serve on several time-consuming committees at the same time that they are urged to get out more production in their work unit. Another kind of role strain takes place when the individual finds that they are expected to meet the opposing demands of two or more separate members of the [organization](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Organization). Such a case would be that of a worker who finds himself pressured by their boss to improve the quality of their work while their work group wants more production in order to receive a higher bonus share.

These and other varieties of role conflict tend to increase an individual's anxiety and [frustration](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frustration). Sometimes they motivate him to do more and better work. Other times they can lead to frustration and reduced efficiency.

Theories\

Maturity-immaturity theory\

According to Maslow, Argyris, McGregor, Rogers, and other writers of the so-called growth schools (theories), there is a basic tendency in the development of the human personality toward self-fulfillment, or self-actualization. This implies that as an individual matures, they want to be given more responsibility, broader horizons, and the opportunity to develop their personal potential. This process is interrupted whenever a person's environment fails to encourage and nurture these desires.

Formal organizations are rational structures that, based on their assumption of emotions, feelings, and irrationality as human weaknesses, try to replace individual control with institutional control. Thus the principle of task specialization is seen as a device that simplifies tasks for the sake of efficiency. As a consequence, however, it uses only a fraction of a person's capacity and ability. The principle of chain of command centralizes authority but makes the individual more dependent on their superiors. The principle of normal span of control, which assigns a maximum of six or seven subordinates to report to the chief executive, reduces the number of individuals reporting to the head of the organization or to the manager of any subunit. Although this simplifies the job of control for the manager, it also creates more intensive surveillance of the subordinate, and therefore permits him less freedom to control himself.

Under such conditions, subordinates are bound to find themselves in conflict with the formal organization, and sometimes with each other. They advance up the narrowing hierarchy where jobs get fewer, and "fewer" implies competing with others for the decreasing number of openings. Task specialization tends to focus the subordinate's attention on their own narrow function and divert him from thinking about the organization as a whole. This effect increases the need for coordination and leads to a circular process of increasing the dependence on the leader.

They may respond to organizational pressures and threats by defensive reactions such as aggression against their supervisors and co-workers, fixated behavior or apathy, compromise and gamesmanship, or psychological withdrawal and daydreaming. All of these defense mechanisms reduce a person's potential for creative, constructive activity on the job. Finally, employees may organize unions or unsanctioned informal groups whose norms of behavior are opposed to many of the organization's goals. As a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy, all of these reactions to the constraints of the formal organization merely serve to reinforce and strengthen them.

The conflict between the formal organization and the individual will continue to exist wherever managers remain ignorant of its causes or wherever the organizational structure and the leadership style are allowed to become inconsistent with the legitimate needs of the psychologically healthy individual. Everyone recognizes the necessity for order and control in organizations. Those of us who enter management, however, must learn to recognize in addition that order and control can be achieved only at the expense of individual freedom.

Subordinates adapt to these conditions in the organization in several ways. In the extreme, they may find the situation intolerable and leave the organization. Or they may strive to advance to positions of higher authority, there to adopt the controlling style they are trying to escape.

Conflict within groups\

Conflicts between people in work groups, committees, task forces, and other organizational forms of face-to-face groups are inevitable. As we have mentioned, these conflicts may be destructive as well as constructive.

Conflict arises in groups because of the scarcity of freedom, position, and resources. People who value independence tend to resist the need for interdependence and, to some extent, conformity within a group. People who seek power therefore struggle with others for position or status within the group. Rewards and recognition are often perceived as insufficient and improperly distributed, and members are inclined to compete with each other for these prizes.

In western culture, winning is more acceptable than losing, and competition is more prevalent than cooperation, all of which tends to intensify intra-group conflict. Group meetings are often conducted in a win-lose climate — that is, individual or subgroup interaction is conducted for the purpose of determining a winner and a loser rather than for achieving mutual problem solving.

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Results of group conflicts\

Conflict in the group need not lead to negative results, however. The presence of a dissenting member or subgroup often results in more penetration of the group's problem and more creative solutions. This is because disagreement forces the members to think harder in an attempt to cope with what may be valid objections to general group opinion. But the group must know how to deal with differences that may arise.

True interdependence among members leads automatically to [conflict resolution](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dispute_resolution) in the group. Interdependence recognizes that differences will exist and that they can be helpful. Hence, members learn to accept ideas from dissenters (which does not imply agreeing with them), they learn to listen and to value openness, and they learn to share a mutual problem-solving attitude to ensure the exploration of all facets of a problem facing the group.

Intergroup conflict between groups is a sometimes necessary, sometimes destructive, event that occurs at all levels and across all functions in [organizations](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Organization). Intergroup conflict may help generate creative tensions leading to more effective contributions to the organization's [goals](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Goal), such as competition between sales districts for the highest [sales](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sales). Intergroup conflict is destructive when it alienates groups that should be working together, when it results in win-lose [competition](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Competition), and when it leads to compromises that represent less-than-optimum outcomes.

Intergroup conflict occurs in two general forms. Horizontal strain involves competition between functions, for example, sales versus production, research and development versus engineering, purchasing versus legal, line versus staff, and so on. Vertical strain involves competition between hierarchical levels, for example, union versus management, foremen versus middle management, shop workers versus foremen. A struggle between a group of employees and management is an example of vertical strain or conflict. A clash between a sales department and production over inventory policy would be an example of horizontal strain.

Certain activities and attitudes are typical in groups involved in a win-lose conflict. Each side closes ranks and prepares itself for battle. Members show increased loyalty and support for their own groups. Minor differences between group members tend to be smoothed over, and deviants are dealt with harshly. The level of morale in the groups increases and infuses everyone with competitive spirit. The power structure becomes better defined, as the "real" [leaders](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leader) come to the surface and members rally around the "best" thinkers and talkers.

In addition, each group tends to distort both its own views and those of the competing group. What is perceived as "good" in one's own position is emphasized, what is "bad" is ignored; the position of the other group is assessed as uniformly "bad," with little "good" to be acknowledged or accepted. Thus, the judgment and objectivity of both groups are impaired. When such groups meet to "discuss" their differences, constructive, rational behavior is severely inhibited. Each side phrases its questions and answers in a way that strengthens its own position and disparages the other's. Hostility between the two groups increases; mutual understandings are buried in negative [stereotypes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stereotype).

It is easy to see that under the conditions described above, mutual [solutions](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Solution) to problems cannot be achieved. As a result, the side having the greater power wins; the other side loses. Or the conflict may go unresolved, and undesirable conditions or circumstances continue. Or the conflict may be settled by a higher authority.

None of these outcomes is a happy one. Disputes settled on the basis of power, such as through a strike or a lockout in a labor-management dispute, are often deeply resented by the loser. Such settlements may be resisted and the winner defeated in underground ways that are difficult to detect and to counter. When this happens, neither side wins; both are losers. If the conflict is left unresolved, as when both sides withdraw from the scene, intergroup cooperation and effectiveness may be seriously impaired to the detriment of the entire [organization](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Organization). Disputes that are settled by higher authority also may cause resentment and what is called "lose-lose" consequences. Such settlements are invariably made on the basis of incomplete [information](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Information) — without data that the conflict itself obscures — and therefore are poor substitutes for mutually reasoned solutions. Again, both sides have lost. A specific approach to resolving intergroup conflict is outlined in the next chapter on organization development.

Thus, [conflict](https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Conflict) affecting organizations can occur in [individuals](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Individual), between individuals, and between groups. Conflicts within work groups are often caused by struggles over control, status, and scarce resources. Conflicts between groups in organizations have similar origins. The constructive [resolution](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conflict_resolution) of such conflicts can most often be achieved through a rational process of problem solving, coupled with a willingness to explore issues and alternatives and to listen to each other.

Conflict is not always destructive, it may be a motivator. When it is destructive, however, managers need to understand and do something about it. A rational process for dealing with the conflict should be programmed. Such a process should include a planned action response on the part of the manager or the organization, rather than relying on a simple reaction or a change that occurs without specific action by management.

Conflict management and resolution\

1. [Counseling](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Counseling) - when personal conflict leads to frustration and loss of [efficiency](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economic_efficiency), counseling may prove to be a helpful antidote. Although few [organizations](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Organization) can afford the luxury of having professional counselors on the staff, given some training, managers may be able to perform this function. Nondirective counseling, or "listening with understanding", is little more than being a good listener — something every manager should be. Sometimes the simple process of being able to vent one's feelings — that is, to express them to a concerned and understanding listener, is enough to relieve frustration and make it possible for the frustrated individual to advance to a problem-solving frame of mind, better able to cope with a personal difficulty that is affecting their work adversely. The nondirective approach is one effective way for managers to deal with frustrated subordinates and co-workers. There are other more direct and more diagnostic ways that might be used in appropriate circumstances. The great strength of the nondirective approach (nondirective counseling is based on the client-centered therapy of Carl Rogers), however, lies in its simplicity, its effectiveness, and the fact that it deliberately avoids the manager-counselor's diagnosing and interpreting emotional problems, which would call for special psychological training. No one has ever been harmed by being listened to sympathetically and understandingly. On the contrary, this approach has helped many people to cope with problems that were interfering with their effectiveness on the job.
2. [Conflict avoidance](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conflict_avoidance) - non-attention or creating a total or partial separation of the combatants allowing limited interaction
3. [Smoothing](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smoothing) - stressing the achievement of harmony between disputants
4. [Dominance or power intervention](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Power_(social_and_political)) - the imposition of a solution by management at a higher level than the level of the conflict
5. [Compromise](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Compromise) - seeking a resolution satisfying at least part of each party's position
6. [Confrontation](https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/confrontation) - a thorough and frank discussion of the sources and types of conflict and achieving a resolution that is in the best interest of the group, but that may be at the expense of one or all of the conflicting parties.

A trained conflict resolver can begin with an economical intervention, such as getting group members to clarify and reaffirm shared goals. If necessary, they move through a systematic series of interventions, such as testing the members' ability and willingness to compromise; resorting to confrontation, enforced counseling, and/or termination as last resorts.

Change\

Management is presumed to be guided by a vision of the future. The manager reflects in their decision-making activities the values of the organization as they have developed through time, from the original founder-owner to the present top-management personnel. In navigating a path between the values of the organization and its objectives and goals, management has expectations concerning the organization's effectiveness and efficiency and frequently initiates changes within the organization. On other occasions, changes in the external environment — [market demand](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Market_demand), [technology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Technology), or the political, social, or economic environment — require making appropriate changes in the activities of the [organization](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Organization). The organization faces these demands for change through the men and women who make up its membership, since organizational change ultimately depends on the willingness of employees and others to change their attitudes, behavior, their degree of knowledge and skill, or a combination of these.

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