Organizational Behaviour- II
Prof. Sangeeta Sahney
Vinod Gupta School of Management
**Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur**

Lecture - 22
Conflict (Contd.,)

Namaskar. We are now going to continue with our discussion on the topic, Conflict, which is a part of our subject on Organizational Behaviour II. We have already discussed what conflict is in the first lecture, which was Module V, Lecture I, where we talked about Conflict and gave an introduction to conflict. We spoke about the Concept of conflict; the Types of conflict; the Transitions in conflict thought; Functional and Dysfunctional conflict; we also spoke about Relationship conflict, Task conflict and Process conflict. And we discussed intra-individual conflict where we talked about frustration, role conflict and goal conflict, and then I gave a brief introduction about interactive conflict, that any kind of conflict that takes place between people or between groups and in the organization is what we refer to as interactive conflict. So, that is where we had stopped. Now, in this particular, you know, session today, we will be discussing the Conflict process, where we will be speaking about how does interactive conflict take place. In the previous lecture, I had mentioned that when conflict takes place between two people or between the groups, or you know, in the organization, it is all about interpersonal conflict, and that kind of a conflict, we refer to as interactive conflict. That is what I had discussed with you know yesterday, and to carry that forward we will now speak about the conflict process in a little bit of a detail. So, in this particular session, we will be discussing the Conflict process in detail.

(Refer Slide Time: 02:36)

So, let us begin with the lecture. So, the subject matter of today's discussion is Conflict process.

(Refer Slide Time: 02:42)
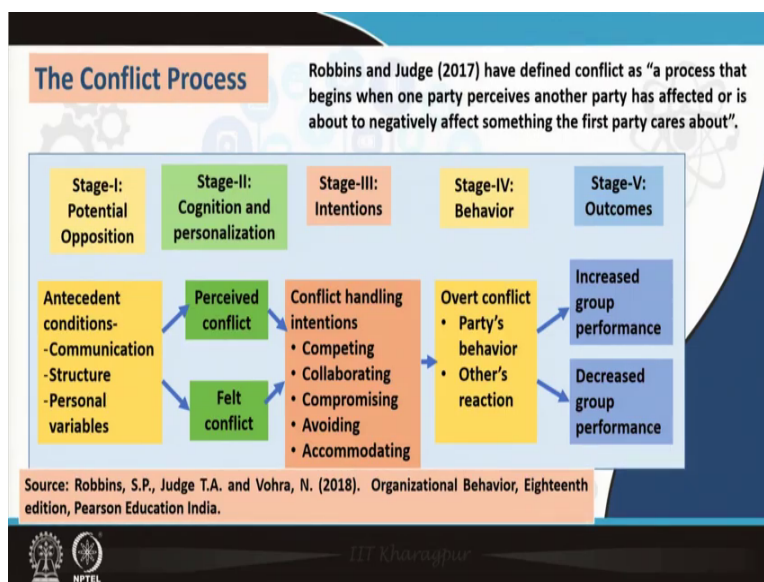
Now, when we talk about the Conflict process, I will be explaining to you the process through a model, which has been proposed by Robbins and Judge. And the entire session today, will be based on the manner in which the conflict process has been described and defined by Robbins and Judge, 2017. Now, Robbins and Judge have defined conflict as a process that begins when one party perceives that another party has affected or is about to negatively affect something that the first party cares about.

So, they have defined conflict as a process which starts when one party perceives that another party has affected or is about to negatively affect, something that the first party cares about. So, if you look at the definition, what we find here is that one party feels threatened from the other, and feels that something negative is going to happen or has already happened. And whatever has negatively happened, or is about to happen is something, which is going to affect the other party.

So, I feel that another person is about to negatively harm me; he is going to harm my interest, my personal interest, my organizational interest, and just because I feel that way, I feel threatened from the other person, and there is a potential to a conflict. Now, if I feel that other person, is about to affect me or has affected me, there is always a potential for a conflict, and that is when a conflict arises. Now, when we speak about the process of conflict, Robbins and Judge explained the conflict, process through five stages; the first stage being potential opposition; the second stage being cognition and personalization; the third stage is intentions; the fourth stage is behaviour; and the fifth stage is outcome. Now, this particular model has actually been taken from, you know, Robbins and Judge and Vohra's book of 2018, and I have presented the model here, where you can see the five stages, where there is potential opposition, followed by cognition and personalization, followed by intentions, followed by behaviour, and followed by outcomes.

Now, what do you mean by potential opposition? Potential opposition actually talks about the antecedent conditions to a conflict and the antecedent conditions to a conflict could be communication, could be structure, could be personal variables. So, all of these comprise antecedent conditions to a conflict, and they are actually a part of the first stage which is potential opposition.

Taking it forward we have Stage II, which is cognition and personalization which has two components - the perceived conflict and the felt conflict which we shall be discussing subsequently in our lecture. Then the conflict moves to Stage III which is intentions to conflict handling, and these intentions to conflict handling can actually be defined or described through five, you know, strategies. It could be competing; it could be collaborating; it could be compromising; it could be avoiding; and it could be accommodating; and then we have Stage IV,

which is behaviour, which actually comprises the overt conflict. It is when the conflict becomes visible, and there is one person's behaviour, and another person's reaction. So, the two parties to the conflict on the one hand, there is the party's behaviour, and on the other hand there is the other's reaction; And then we have Stage V which actually is the outcomes, and the outcomes here actually comprise, dysfunctional outcomes or functional outcomes. So, when there is a decreased group performance, it is a dysfunctional outcome, and where it is an increased group performance, it is a functional outcome. So, when the conflict is dysfunctional, there is a decreased group performance, and the outcome is negative. On the other hand, when the conflict is functional, it is an increased group performance, and the outcome is positive. So, these are the different stages of the conflict process. Now, I will be explaining each of these stages to you one by one, and we will start now with the potential opposition and the antecedent conditions to conflict.

Now, when we talk about the potential opposition, and antecedent conditions, we are actually talking of an incompatibility. So, there is an incompatibility, and this stage includes the antecedents to the conflict, and the antecedents of the conflict can be categorized under three heads - communication, structure and personal variables. Now, what is communication here? Communication as we discussed in the in the last week, too much of communication, too little of communication has a potential for conflict. Use of words that are difficult to understand again, a potential to conflict; semantics, again a potential to conflict; noise, whether it is physical noise or physiological noise or it is psychological noise, again makes communication ineffective and there is a potential to conflict. Poor feedback again, there is a potential to conflict, and if we talk about perceptual errors and distortions which occur during the stage of decoding, and on the part of the receiver again there is a potential to conflict. So, information overload, information under-load, use of words that are difficult to understand, semantics, noise, proper feedback, perceptual errors and distortions-all of these are a potential to conflict, and they are a part of communication as to how communication can actually be an antecedent to conflict. The second point which we have to discuss here is structure. Now, what do we mean by structure? Structure in an organization also can be an antecedent to conflict. It can actually be an antecedent condition to conflict. Group size, extent of specialization and interdependence of tasks, whether this interdependence is sequential interdependence or reciprocal interdependence, role clarity,

member-goal compatibility, leadership styles, reward and appraisal policy - these are all a part of the structure which have a potential to conflict. Like for example, you know, matters with respect to interdependence, task interdependence. We have something called a reciprocal task interdependence, and sequential task interdependence. What is that? When people are working together, and I do something and hand it over to another person, and the other person does some work and then gives it back to me to move further, and then I do something, we are reciprocally working on an assignment or a task, and we are hugely dependent on each other. In this case there could be a potential for a conflict. Similarly, when we are working sequentially, 3-4 of us are working on a project, and one person hands over his deliverable to another person, another person hands over to another person, so the Person A hands over his deliverable to B, and B hands deliverable to C, and C hands over the deliverable to D to work upon, in that case there is some sequential interdependence between A, B, C and D, and this kind of an interdependence can also be a potential to conflict. Because people realize that they have to work with each other, and to do the tasks together, whether it is reciprocal interdependence or sequential and if it is negative it has a potential for a conflict. So, task interdependence can be a potential to conflict. Role clarity - if roles are not clear; Leadership styles - if leadership styles are not suited to the situation and to the environment; that can be a potential to conflict.

Like for example, leadership; leadership styles can be participative and democratic, or it could be authoritative and dictatorship. Any of these styles of leadership can be effective but that would depend upon the situation, that would depend upon the followers. So, if a particular style of leadership is followed which does not suit the situation or does not suit the followership, so there can be a problem there as well. It can lead to conflict. So, all of this; even reward and appraisal policy for example; if the reward and appraisal policy is not clearly stipulated, and there is vagueness or there is ambiguity; so, again there will be some kind of an anxiety, some kind of a worry, some kind of an insecurity, between people because of the non-clarity and weakness of the reward and appraisal policy and that again can lead to a conflict.

So, these are all reasons wherein conflict may occur, and finally you have, personal variables which comprise values, emotions, attitudes, personality traits, and characteristics, socio- cultural backgrounds. So, these all of these have a potential to conflict because as we discussed earlier,

each one of us differs with respect to our values, emotions, attitudes, personality traits, characteristics, socio-cultural backgrounds, perceptions, attitudes; So, so we tend to be very different from each other, and because of this difference, you know, because of these differences, our thoughts, our behaviours, you know, could differ and that also has a potential to conflict. So, antecedent conditions to conflict relate to communication structure and personal variables.
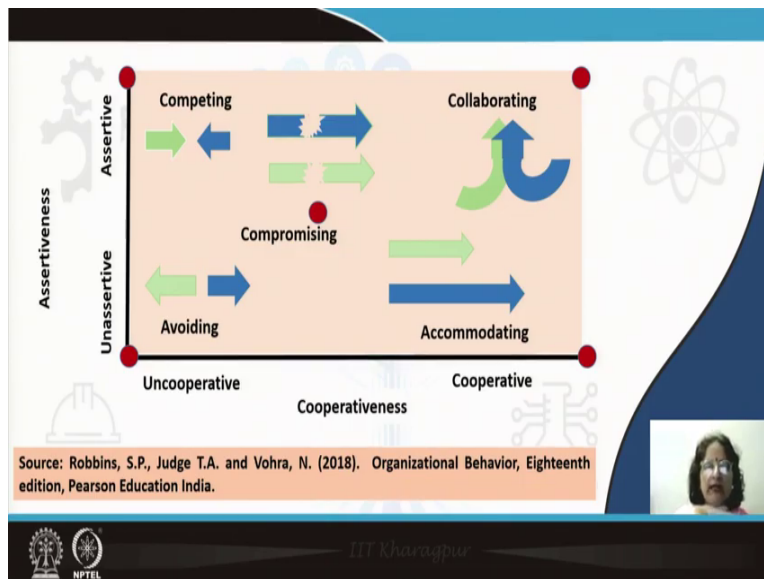
The second stage which we talk of is cognition and personalization. When we talk about cognition and personalization, we are actually talking about the fact that there is either a perceived conflict or a felt conflict. Now, conflict actually happens when a person feels that, you know, the very fact that another person is about to negatively affect him. And so, once you have the antecedent's condition, and if a person feels that another person is about to negatively affect him or her, you know, the perceived conflict happens, and when the actual conflict happens, it is a felt conflict. So, a person must be aware of the antecedent conditions or the background factors which lead to a conflict and a perceived conflict, here does not mean that the conflict is personalized. It gets personalized only and only when it is a felt conflict. It is in the felt conflict that the person gets emotionally aroused and it leads to anxiety, it leads to frustration, it leads to hostility with the other party. So, during the stage of cognition and personalization, a person begins to feel and perceive that the other person is about to affect him, but at that stage it is a perceived conflict, and the conflict has not been personalized. It gets personalized only when it becomes a felt conflict; when the person actually feels the conflict, and when he feels the conflict, that the conflict has actually started or happened, at that particular stage, the affected party gets emotionally aroused; it leads to anxiety; it leads to frustration; it leads to a lot of hostility between the two parties; and it is in this stage, you know, of cognition and personalization, that the subject or matter of conflict, or the reasons of the conflict, get defined, and the conflict becomes explicit, and the reasons also become explicit So, it is in this stage that the subject of conflict or the reasons of the conflict becomes apparent; they get defined, and the reasons become explicit.

Now, this leads to Stage III, which is intentions. Now, a person's or a group's perceptions and emotions, and their explicit behaviour is actually mediated by intentions, you know, and based on two dimensions like assertiveness and cooperativeness, five conflict handling intentions can

be identified. These five intentions are competing, collaborating, avoiding, accommodating and compromising.

So, a person or a group's perceptions and emotions, and their explicit behaviour gets mediated by intentions. What we are trying to say that a person if he is in conflict with another person, or a group if it is in conflict with another group, or a team if it is in conflict with another team, the perceptions and emotions and their explicit behaviour is mediated by intention. So, whether a conflict is interpersonal or intergroup, the perceptions and emotions, and the explicit behaviour, gets mediated by these intentions and based on two dimensions, assertiveness and cooperativeness, five conflict handling intentions have been identified. I will just, you know, quickly go through the few slides, which I have already explained to you. I will give you a two seconds on each slide so that you can see, and then I will move to the slide, which depicts these conflict handling intentions.

(Refer Slide Time: 16:43)

Source: Robbins, S.P., Judge T.A. and Vohra, N. (2018). Organizational Behavior, Eighteenth edition, Pearson Education India.

Yes, so, you can see here, that on the x-axis, you have cooperativeness; on the y-axis, you have assertiveness; and based on, you know, the two dimensions of cooperativeness and assertiveness, you have these five conflict handling intentions. So, you have 'competing', where you know, both the parties are uncooperative and assertive. So, that is competing. So, they could compete with each other, and decide to be assertive and non-cooperative with each other. Then you have 'accommodating', where you know, the parties are unassertive, and they decide to cooperate with

each other. So, it is, accommodating, you know, and accommodating each other's interests. Then you have 'avoiding'; avoiding means you are being uncooperative and unassertive. So, the parties decide to avoid each other. And then you have 'compromise', which is a middle path between assertiveness and cooperativeness; you are neither being assertive nor being cooperative. So, you are being both in a way. So, you are compromising with each other. And there is 'collaborating' where, you have, you are being high on both, you know, assertiveness and cooperativeness, and so, you are collaborating with each other. So, you have cooperativeness and assertiveness as two dimensions and based on the two dimensions, you have these five conflict handling intentions.
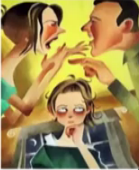
I am repeating you have, 'avoiding', which is being non-cooperative and unassertive. So, both the parties decide to be unassertive; they decide to be non-cooperative or uncooperative with each other and so, this intention is called avoiding. When the parties decide to be non-cooperative and uncooperative to each other, but they are assertive, and they decide to put forth their interests it is 'competing'. So, both the parties compete with each other. When they are both high on assertiveness and cooperativeness, and they decide to work together, it is 'collaborating'. When the parties are unassertive but cooperative with each other, it is 'accommodating'. And a middle path between being both cooperative and assertive is what we refer to as 'compromising'. So, both the parties could actually adopt any one of these conflict handling intentions. So, I will go back to the slide on the process so that I can explain to you the process pictorially.

(Refer Slide Time: 19:24)

Stage II: Cognition and Personalization

- In case the antecedents in the first stage affect another person/group negatively, it leads to stage II.

- A person/group must be aware of the antecedent conditions or the background factors leading to the conflict.

- A perceived conflict does not mean that the conflict is personalized; it gets personalized only when it is a felt conflict.

- In a felt conflict, the person/group gets emotionally aroused. This leads to anxiety, frustration, and hostility.

- It is in this stage that the subject of conflict and/or the reasons for conflict get defined and the reasons become explicit.

So, once the intentions are clear, you know, with respect to competing, collaborating compromising, avoiding and accommodating, the Stage IV happens, which is behaviour. Now, I think I will give you a few more minutes on discussing the conflict handling intentions. So, in the case of 'competing', both the parties or both the persons involved in the conflict, they aim to satisfy their own interests irrespective of what the impact would be on the other party. So, what we see is that they are actually competing with each other; they are being assertive and non-cooperative. So, the persons or the parties involved in the conflict, they aim to satisfy their own interests, irrespective of what the impact would be on the other party and. So, they are being uncooperative, and assertive as you see here. On the other hand, you have the next one which is 'collaborating'. So, the persons, two persons, in the conflict or the parties involved in the conflict, they aim to satisfy fully the interests of the other parties or the other person. The focus is on solving the conflict by identifying problems, by clarifying dissimilarities, rather than accommodating. So, it leads to a win-win situation for both, as they both decide to be assertive and cooperative with each other. And then there is 'avoiding', where the two persons or the two parties in the conflict, they either withdraw from the conflict, or they subdue a conflict; in other words they ignore the other party or the other person; and so, they are uncooperative and unassertive. And in the case of 'accommodating', the two persons in the conflict or the two parties involved in the conflict, happily decide to place the other person or the other party's interest above their own. So, they are being cooperative and unassertive, and this is accommodating. And then finally you have 'compromising', where each person or each party to

the conflict agrees to sacrifice something. So, no one wins, no one loses, and there is an incomplete satisfaction for both the persons or both the parties. So, you have a situation of avoiding, competing, collaborating, accommodating and compromising. These are all conflict handling situations or conflict handling intentions rather, and based on these intentions, the behaviour of the two parties gets exhibited as we see in the model which leads to Stage IV.

So, Stage IV is the behaviour where, you know, the conflict becomes overt; it becomes visible and what we see here, is the party's behaviour and the other party's reaction. So, one party's behaviour, and the other party's reaction. Now, this stage is a manifestation of the intentions, and includes words, statements, bodily reactions made by the two parties or the two persons. So, it is a dynamic process, and it is two-way where one party acts, and the other party reacts, and so on. So, the reactions can range somewhere along a scale from mild to severe in this way.

(Refer Slide Time: 22:41)
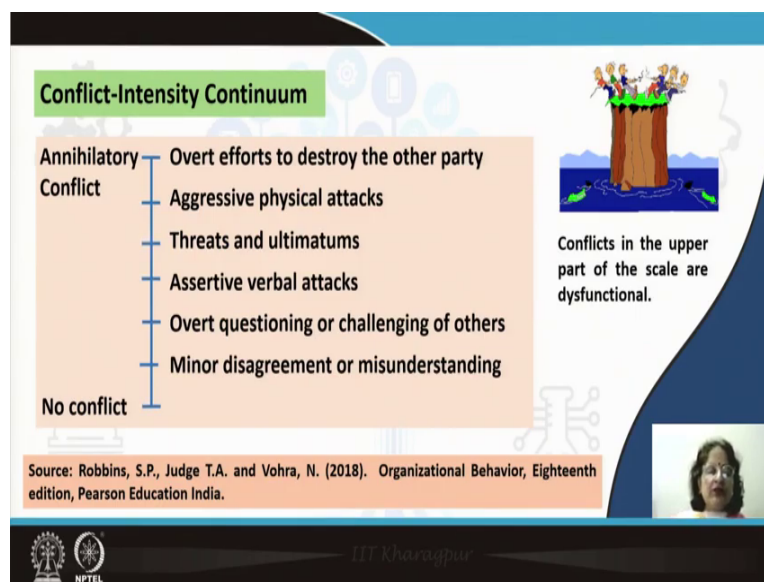
So, you have a situation, where there is no conflict. And then there is a minor disagreement or a misunderstanding; then an overt questioning or challenging of others; or assertive verbal attacks; threats and ultimatums; aggressive physical attacks; and overt efforts to destroy the other party. So, you can actually place the behaviour on a scale from low intensity to high intensity, from low to moderate to severe.

So, low intensity to high intensity or low conflict to moderate conflict, to severe and very you

know, strong conflict, and so on one stage, you have no conflict, and the other end of the scale or the continuum is annihilatory conflict. So, you start with this, you know, a situation where there is just a minor disagreement or a misunderstanding; then there is an overt questioning or challenging of others; assertive, verbal attacks by the parties; threats and ultimatums; so it gets more severe. As threats and ultimatums happen, it can go further to physical attacks, and then it can also go to another stage of efforts to destroy the other party. So, if you see here, the conflicts in the upper part of the scale are dysfunctional for the organization; you know, when it comes to threats, when it comes to ultimatums, when it comes to physical attacks, when it comes to destroying the other party, organizational conflict or conflict becomes dysfunctional. So, that is dysfunctional to the organization. It is negative for the organization. It affects performance, productivity. It affects people's interpersonal relationships, and it can be really harmful for the organization. So, you know, as you move from verbal attacks, and threats and ultimatums to physical attacks, and overt efforts to destroy the other party, the conflict becomes highly dysfunctional and has to be avoided at all costs.

Now, this again, figure has been taken from Robbins, Judge and Vohra from their book on Organizational Behaviour, 18th edition, 2018. Then we come to the Stage V which is, outcomes. As I just said, the outcomes of a conflict can be functional and dysfunctional. When it is increased group performance it is functional for the organization; it is positive. When it is decreased group performance, it is dysfunctional for the organization, and it is negative. So, this behaviour, you know, leads to outcomes. So, the behavioural outcome of the conflicting parties or the conflicting persons leads to outcomes, which can be both functional and dysfunctional. Functional outcomes improve the person's performance, the party's performance, the group's performance, and dysfunctional hinders it. So, conflict is functional, when it stimulates creativity and innovation; it improves decision making; encourages healthy competition among members; and moderate levels of task and process conflict actually are functional. If you remember, we spoke about it in the previous session as well. And conflict is dysfunctional when there is an infighting and weakening of group cohesiveness and dominance of vested interests of the group. So, that is when conflict becomes dysfunctional, and it hinders organizational performance and productivity, and all forms of relationship conflict are dysfunctional in nature.

So, this is what the conflict process is all about. We start with potential opposition which is Stage I; we move to cognition and personalization which is Stage II; we move to intentions which is Stage III; then we move to behaviour which is Stage IV; and we move to outcomes which is Stage V. So, Stage I is antecedents to conflict; Stage II is when the conflict is perceived and felt; Stage III is when, you know, you have the five conflict handling intentions.

I explained intentions to you in greater detail. We shall also be talking about these intentions in a subsequent lecture on conflict management and then I will not be elaborating on it. That is the reason, I explained the conflict handling intentions in greater depth to you. And in fact, I initially thought, that I will be brief and move to Stage IV but then I went back to explain Stage III intentions again, Stage III or the intention again, because I thought let me explain to you in depth now, rather than coming back in the subsequent lecture. So, be careful about understanding, you know, the intentions. We will be talking about the intentions again later, and then I will not be explaining them. So, when you have to study conflict handling intentions you will have to rely on this particular lecture. And then you move to Stage IV, which is behaviour where we talk about the party's behaviour and the others reaction; And then there is the outcomes which is Stage V which actually, you know, could be positive for the organization in the form of a functional conflict, or it could be negative for the organization in the form of a dysfunctional conflict.

(Refer Slide Time: 28:00)

REFERENCES

- Aswathappa, K. (2014). Organisational Behaviour: Text, Cases, Games. Himalaya Publishing House, Mumbai.
- Greenberg, J. (2013), Behavior in Organizations, Tenth Edition, Prentice Hall of India, Delhi.
- Luthans, F. (2011). Organizational Behavior: An Evidence-based Approach, Published by McGraw-Hill/Irwin, Twelfth edition, New York.
- Prasad, L.M. (2020), Principles and Practice of Management, Sultan Chand & Sons, Delhi.
- Robbins, S.P. and Judge T.A. (2017). Organizational Behavior, Seventeenth edition, Pearson Education UK.
- Robbins, S.P., Judge T.A. and Vohra, N. (2018). Organizational Behavior, Eighteenth edition, Pearson Education India.

(Refer Slide Time: 28:052)

So, with this, I come to an end of this lecture. These are the references. We shall continue with the topic in the next lecture. Thank you.