Organizational Design Change and Transformation
Prof. Sangeeta Sahney
Vinod Gupta School of Management
Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur

Module - 06
Lecture - 26
Managing Conflict, Power, and Politics

[FL]. Today we will be beginning with module 6 or week 6 of our course on Organizational Design, Change and Transformation.

(Refer Slide Time: 00:30)

This module is will deal with will deal with you know conflict, power in politics in organizations and in this particular module we will be talking of the concept of conflict. The transitions in conflict thought, functional and dysfunctional conflict, relationship task and

process conflict, types of conflict, conflict process, conflict management, negotiation, the concept of power, the definition of power.
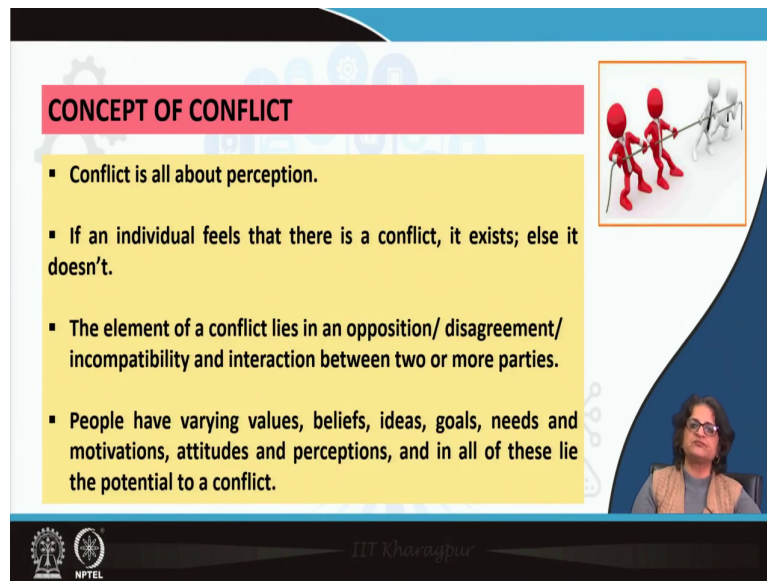
We will contrast leadership and power, we will talk about the basis of power, the power tactics, political behaviour, factors leading to political behaviour, outcomes of political behaviour and employees.

(Refer Slide Time: 01:23)

We will also be speaking about political strategies for power acquisition and then finally, we will be concluding with a discussion on impression management. In today's lecture we will be speaking about the concept of conflict, transitions in the conflict thought, functional and dysfunctional conflict, relationship task and process conflict, the types of conflict and the conflict process.

So, let us first start with the concept of conflict. Now, what is conflict? Conflict is all about perception. You know if a person feels that there is a conflict it exists. If a person feels there is no conflict it does not exist. So, this element of a conflict lies in our interactions with others, it lies in an opposition or a disagreement or an incompatibility as and when we interact with two or more parties and people have a varying values, beliefs, goals, needs, interests, motivations, attitudes, perceptions and all of these have a in and all of these can lead to conflict in all of these lie the potential to conflict.

(Refer Slide Time: 02:10)

So, conflict happens when there occurs any kind of an incompatibility of goals, there are scarce resources, there is poor communication, people have varied perspectives and orientations and whenever conflict happens, you know it can be it can it can be either a moderate or you know conflict or it can be very severe conflict.

In in other words, in different levels you know on which you can actually you know place the intensity of the conflict and it could be; it could be light, it could be moderate, it could be very severe and any and every form of conflict in organizations can be both useful for the organization as well as damaging to the organization which we will see subsequently.

(Refer Slide Time: 02:51)

But before we do that let us come into the transitions in conflict thought. Now, conflict you know in organizations has been well researched and they have been you know certain different orientations to conflict and to conflict management. You know we have you know an evolution from the traditional view to the human relations view to the interactionist view of conflict.
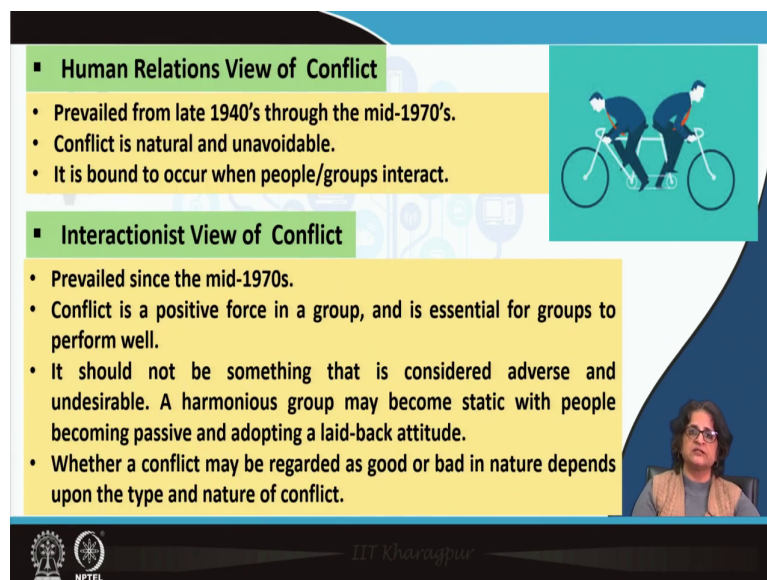
According to the traditional view of conflict we prevailed in the 1930s and 1940s a conflict was regarded as something which is damaging which is undesirable and it should be avoided at all costs. It was seen as something which is dysfunctional for the organization.

I spoke about dysfunctional conflict in my previous class as well and we will be elaborating on that. A conflict is dysfunctional when it actually has negative consequences for the

organization for the performance of people, for the efficiency of the organization and for overall effectiveness of the organization.

So, in according to the traditional view conflict was seen as something which is damaging and dysfunctional and it occurs because of poor communication, lack of trust between employees and because managers are non-responsive to the needs and wants and to the interests of these of their employees.

(Refer Slide Time: 04:02)

The second is the human relations view of conflict which prevailed from the late 40s to the middle of the 1970s, where it was in a way it was believed that conflict is something which is very natural. It is absolutely unavoidable. It is inevitable and it is bound to occur when people work together, when people interact with each other and this of course, can be traced to the

human relations movement which began in 1930s and where it was realized that effective man management can have very positive you know outcomes for the organization.

So, according to this view conflict is something which is inevitable, it is bound to occur and it will happen when two or more people interact. The third view is the interactionist view which prevailed which is prevailed since the 1970s, wherein it is said that conflict is a positive force and it is essential for groups to perform well.

In fact, it is said that conflict is not some not to be seen as something adverse or undesirable. It should not be something that is considered adverse and undesirable. In fact, a harmonious group may become very static and people may become very passive. So, you know so, conflict is something which is good and whether a conflict can be considered good or bad in nature will depend upon the nature of conflict.

So, according to the interactionist view as and when people interact, as and when people work together a conflict will happen and it is a positive force in a group. In fact, it is something which is not which is should not be considered as should not be considered as adverse or undesirable and in fact, if there is total harmony in the group the performance will become very static, people may become very passive and whether conflict is good or bad would depend upon the nature of conflict.

(Refer Slide Time: 05:51)

So, this brings us to functional and dysfunctional conflict. Now, any kind of conflict which supports the goals of the individual or of the group or of the organization and helps improve organizational performance, helps improves organizational you know productivity and helps improve the overall organization is regarded as a functional conflict. So, it is so, any kind of conflict which helps achieve organizational goals is regarded to be a functional conflict.

It is constructive in nature it is which has a positive impact and helps the organization achieve its objectives. On the other hand, any kind of conflict that hampers individual performance or group performance or organizational performance is perceived as a dysfunctional conflict ok.

So, any kind of conflict which is damaging to the organizational interest it helps you know prevent it hampers the organization from achieving its goals, it hampers individual

performance or group performance or organizational performance is regarded as a dysfunctional conflict.

So, it is something which is destructive and as a negative impact and will prevent an organization from achieving its objectives. So, conflict can be functional and dysfunctional. Any conflict which helps achieve organizational goals and is positive in nature, is constructive in nature and is a positive impact and will help an organization move towards goal achievement is regarded as a functional conflict.

(Refer Slide Time: 07:37)
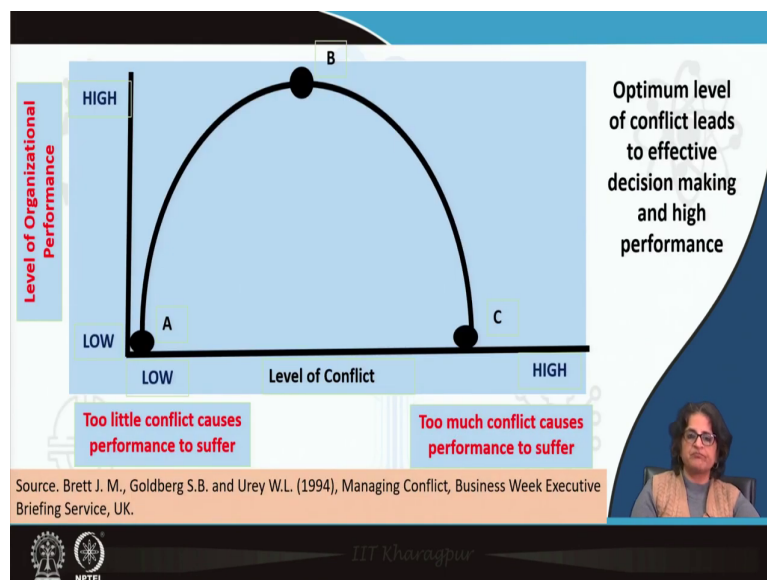
On the other hand, any kind of conflict which hampers you know group individual or group performance and restrains and organizations from achieving its objectives is negative, has a is destructive and is referred to as a dysfunctional conflict. So, two little conflict causes

performance to suffer too much of conflict causes performance to suffer and when conflict is moderate you know it has a positive effect you know on organizational performance.

So, we have Brett Goldberg and Urey who have proposed that optimum level of conflict leads to effective decision making and high performance. If you see here when the level of conflict is low performance suffers. So, two little conflict causes performance to suffer.

On the other hand, when level of conflict is high which is too much of conflict again causes performance to suffer the levels of performance will be low when there is too little conflict it will be low when it is too you know when the conflict is too high, but when there are moderate levels or optimum levels of conflict you know it actually leads to high level of organizational performance.
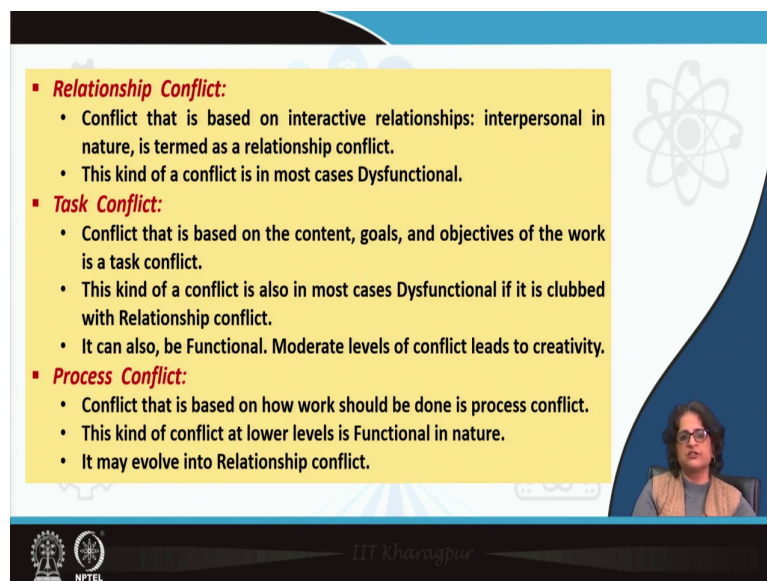
(Refer Slide Time: 08:31)
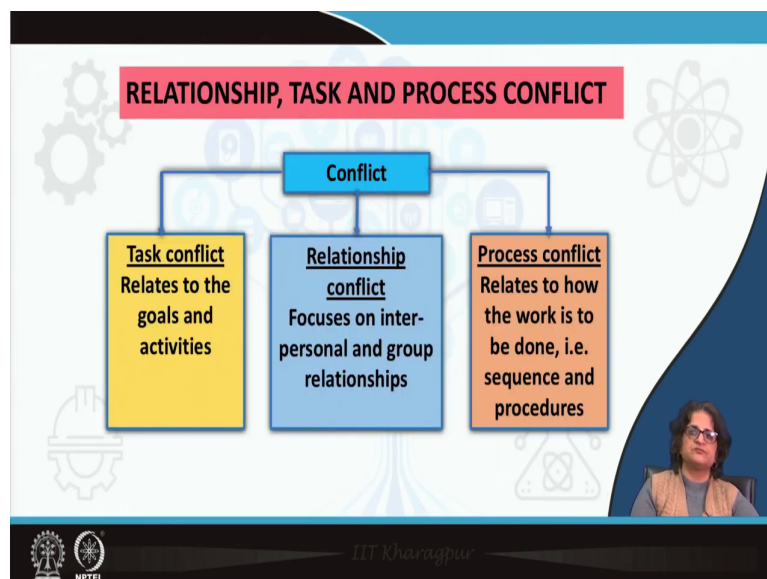
Now, we come to task conflict relationship conflict and process conflict. Now, task conflict relates to the goals and activities of the organization. Relationship conflict focuses on inter-individual interpersonal and you know inter-group relationships and process conflict relates to relates to how the work is to be done that is the sequence and procedures. So, task conflict relates to the goals and activities of the organization.

You know a relationship conflict pertains to interpersonal or inter-individual and inter-group relationships or group relationships and process conflict relates to how the work is to be done that is the sequence and processes or the sequence and procedures you know to be adopted to accomplish a task.

(Refer Slide Time: 09:25)

So, relationship conflict is based on interactive relationships it is inter-personally nature and this kind of a conflict in most cases is dysfunctional. So, conflict that is based on inter

interactive relationships you know and is interactive in nature is termed as a relationship conflict. This kind of a conflict in most cases is dysfunctional. When the conflict pertains to the content to the goals and the objectives of the work it is called a task conflict.

So, conflict that is based on content goals and objectives of the work you know is termed as a task conflict. This kind of a conflict also is in most cases dysfunctional particularly if it is combined with a relationship conflict ok. It can also be functional moderate levels of conflict lead to creativity and so, when task conflict is moderate it can be functional for the organization.

Conflict which is based on how work should be done is process conflict. So, this kind of a conflict at lower levels is a functional in nature and it may of course, evolve into a relationship conflict. If it evolves into a relationship conflict then of course, it is either moderately functional or it is dysfunctional.

So, when we talk of conflict we say that task conflict you know when talk of conflict we say that relationship conflict focuses on interpersonal and group relationships it is based on interactive relationships, it is interactive in nature and this case kind of conflict is in most cases dysfunctional.

And task conflict relates to the goals and activities it pertains to the goals to the activities to the content and objectives of the work which in most cases is dysfunctional particularly if it is clubbed with relationship conflict, it can be if it is in a moderate level then of course, it can be functional.

And then you have the process conflict which is based on how work is to be done and you know this kind of conflict at lower levels or moderate levels is functional in nature of course, it may evolve to relationship conflict.

(Refer Slide Time: 11:43)

 Now, we come to the types of conflict. While conflict is generally believed to be between people and groups it can also be intra individual. So, intra individual conflict happens within a person in the form of a goal conflict or in the form of a role conflict or in the form of frustration.

When it happens between two or few people, it is interpersonal conflict when it happens between two or more groups, it is inter group conflict and when it happens in the organization it is organizational conflict.
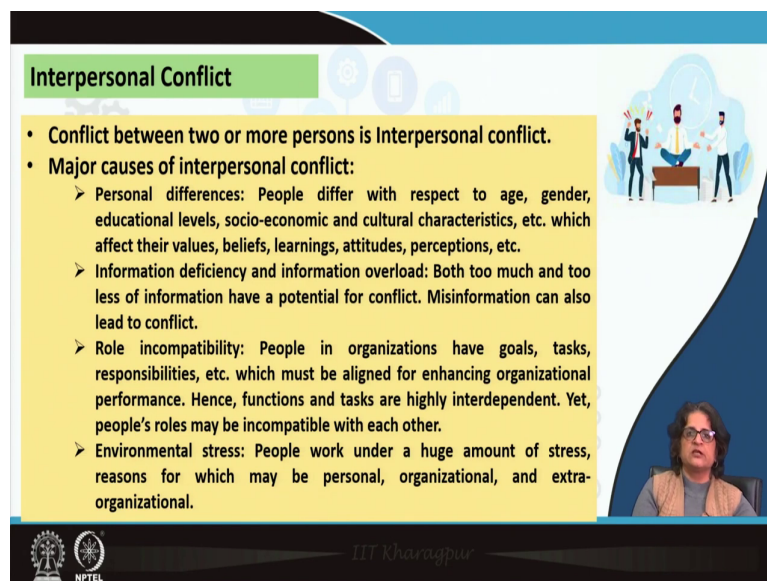
(Refer Slide Time: 12:11)

Now, interactive conflict occurs between individuals and groups you know and we will in our module we will be emphasizing more upon the interactive conflict which happens between individuals and groups. And Robbins and Judge have defined conflict as a process which begins when one party perceives that another party has affected or is about to negatively affect something that the first party cares about. So, we will be discussing interpersonal conflict, intragroup conflict and intergroup conflict.

Interpersonal conflict is conflict which happens between two or few people a you know if it is between two people we also call it a dyadic conflict. Intragroup conflict is which happens within the members of a group or a team and intergroup conflict is that conflict which occurs between members of two groups or two teams.

So, as I said conflict is something which can be intra individual, inter personal, inter group or organizational in our module we will be focusing majorly on interactive conflict which is either interpersonal or intragroup or intergroup. And interpersonal is when it happens between two or few people if it is between two people it is called a dyadic conflict, if it is a between a members of a group or members of a team it is intragroup conflict and if it happens between two or more groups it is called intergroup a conflict.

(Refer Slide Time: 13:38)

So, this is so let us have let us discuss interpersonal conflict you know and you know as the next in let us discuss interpersonal conflict. Now, and thereafter we will discuss intergroup conflict and organizational conflict. So, interpersonal conflict when conflict occurs between two or more people two or more persons it is called you know interpersonal conflict and

major causes of interpersonal conflict can be personal differences, information deficiency and information overload, role in compatibility and environmental stress.
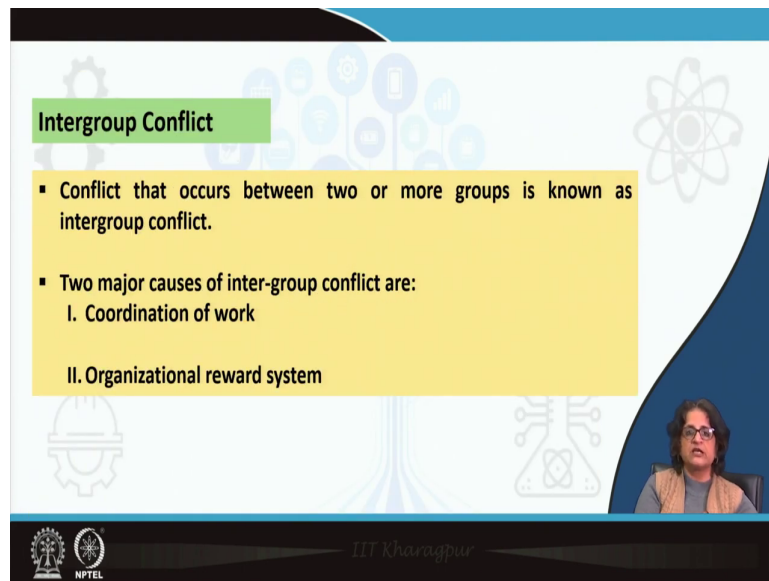
So, coming to personal differences people differ from each other with respect to age, gender, literacy levels, educational levels, socioeconomic, cultural characteristics and all of this have has an impact on their values, beliefs, motivations, learnings, attitudes, perceptions, etcetera.

So, the so, these such kind of differences can be a source of interpersonal conflict. Information deficiency and information load overload which means that both too much of information and too little of information have a potential for conflict. Misinformation also can lead to conflict, role in compatibility people in organizations have goals, they have their tasks, they have their roles, they have their responsibilities and all of this must be and aligned for enhancing the overall performance of the organization for enhancing overall effectiveness.

Hence functions and tasks have to be highly interdependent yet in yet people's roles may be incompatible with each other and this role incompatibility can also lead to conflict. Either you know we you know within people in either as within people as a small group or as a larger group, a people also work under huge amount of stress reasons for which may be personal or organizational and extra organizational and environmental stress also can lead to interpersonal conflict.
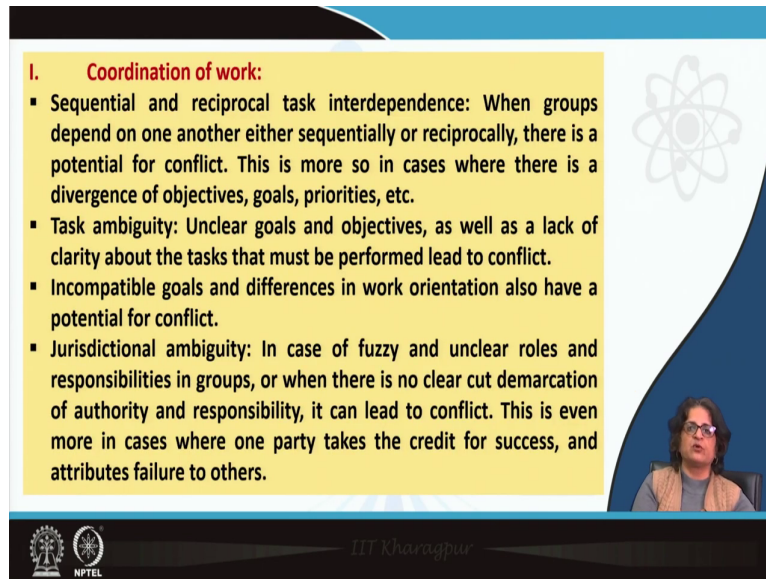
(Refer Slide Time: 15:38)

The second is intergroup conflict. Conflict that occurs between two or more groups is known as in intergroup conflict. So, in intergroup conflict, this is conflict which happens between two or more groups and two major causes of intergroup conflict are coordination of work and organizational reward system.
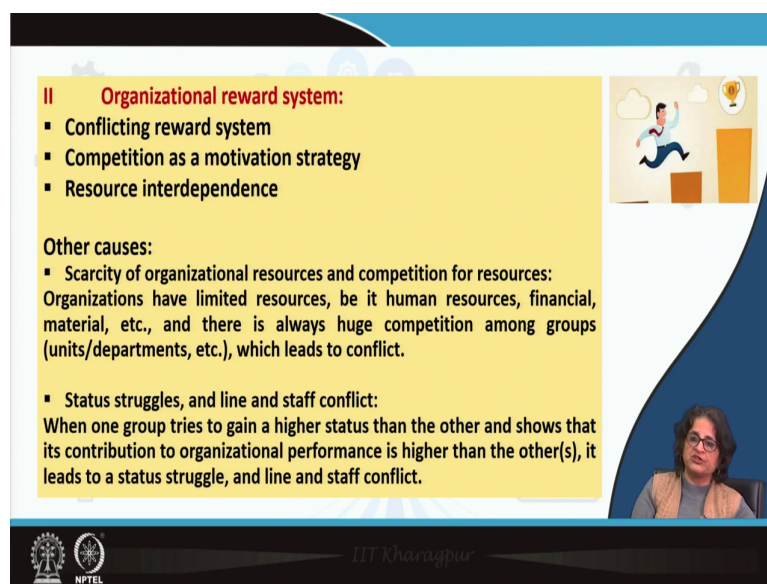
(Refer Slide Time: 15:58)

When in an organization different departments have to work together, different teams have to work together, different groups have to work together for accomplishment of objectives and they often depend on each other either sequentially or reciprocally. Both sequential and reciprocal task interdependence have a potential for conflict.

When groups depend on one another either sequentially or reciprocally, there is a potential for conflict and this is more in case in this is seen more when there is a divergence of objectives of goals of priorities. The second factor pertaining to work which can lead to conflict in groups is task ambiguity. Unclear roles unclear goals and objectives as well as lack of clarity about the tasks which must be performed leads to conflict. Incompatible goals and differences in work orientation also can lead to conflict.

Also we know a jurisdictional ambiguity is another factor which can lead to conflict amongst groups. In case of fuzzy and unclear roles and responsibilities in groups or when there is a lack of clear you know authority responsibility relationship there is always a potential for conflict.

This is seen more in cases when where you know one party takes the credit for success and attributes failure to other parties. So, in case of fuzzy and unclear roles and responsibilities in groups or when there is no clear cut demarcation of authority responsibility there is always a potential for conflict.

(Refer Slide Time: 17:32)

The second broad set of factors which effects which can lead to a group which can lead to intergroup conflict is organizational a reward system. When you talk of rewards in an organization are always scarce and limited and you know a conflicting reward system
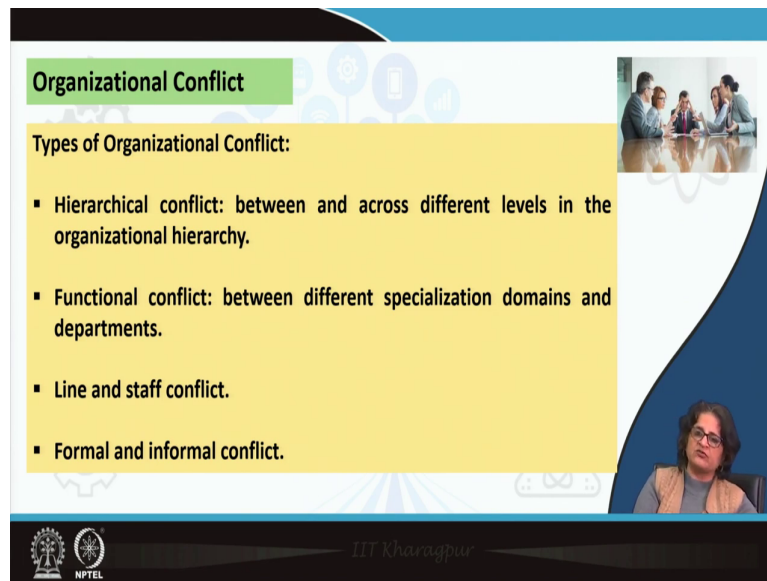
competition as a motivation strategy and resource interdependence can also you know lead to can lead to intergroup conflict.

Other causes could be scarcity of organizational resources and competition for resources organizations have a limited resources be the human resources or financial resources or material and there is always a huge competition amongst groups whether units or departments for these scarce resources which leads to conflict.

Status struggles and line and staff conflict are again you know have the potential for intergroup conflict you know when one group tries to gain a higher status than the other and shows that its contribution to organizational performance is higher than the other group or in the other groups, it leads to a status struggle and line and staff conflict. And so, you know both status struggles and line and staff conflict you know can be damaging to the organization.

So, the organizational reward system which manifests as conflicting reward systems or competition as a motivation strategy or resource interdependence along with scarcity of organizational resources and competition for resources as well as status struggles can all of the can be potential for intergroup conflict.

(Refer Slide Time: 19:13)

Then we come to organizational conflict, organizational conflict can be hierarchical conflict which is which occurs between and across levels in the organizational hierarchy it could be functional conflict which occurs between departments or between different specialization domains it could be a line and staff conflict or it could be formal and informal conflict.

(Refer Slide Time: 19:33)

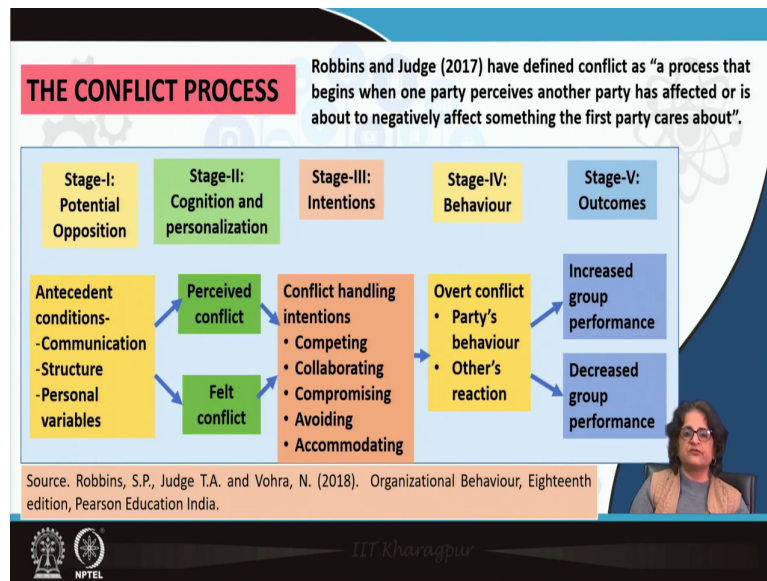And the causes of organizational conflict could relate to unrealistic targets incompatible goals between and across levels of hierarchy, improper resource allocation and differences in work orientations, differences in perceptions and varied work orientations.

(Refer Slide Time: 19:52)

Now, we come to the conflict process. Robbins and Judge have defined conflict as a process which begins when one party perceives that the other party has negatively affected or is about to negatively affect something which the first party cares about and this is when conflict occurs. According to Robbins and Judge there are five stages of in the conflict process stage-1 is potential opposition, stage -2 is cognition and personalization, stage -3 is intention stage -4 is behaviour and stage-5 is outcomes.

So, let us first you know discuss stage -1 which is potential opposition. Now, potential opposition or incompatibility you know relates to the antecedent conditions of conflict and these antecedents can be actually categorized into three communication, structure and personal variables.

Communication overload and under load as I just said both information overload and under load the use you know you can lead to conflict the use of words that are difficult to understand, the semantics, the noise, the poor feedback perceptual errors and distortions all of these pertain to communication and can act as antecedent conditions to conflict.

So, when we talk of communication we are talking of information overload and under load use of words you know and which are you know which are difficult to understand, semantics, use of jargons, noise, poor feedback perceptual errors and distortions you know all of these act as you know antecedent conditions to conflict and the all of these pertain to communication.

The second is with respect to structure. So, the size of the group the extent of specialization, the level of interdependence task interdependence with the sequential or a reciprocal, role clarity, member goal you know compatibility, leadership styles as well as a reward structure, appraisal policy you know evaluation systems also you know have a potential to also act as antecedents to conflict they relate to the structure as an antecedent and can cause conflict.

Finally, we have personal variables which could be emotions, attitudes you know personalities, personality traits and characteristics social, cultural backgrounds. So, these are personal factors or personal variables which have a potential for conflict. Stage-2 is cognition and personalization and includes perceived conflict and felt conflict. In this stage you know in you know in case the antecedents and the first stage affect another person or another group it leads to the second stage which is cognition and personalization and includes perceived conflict and felt conflict.
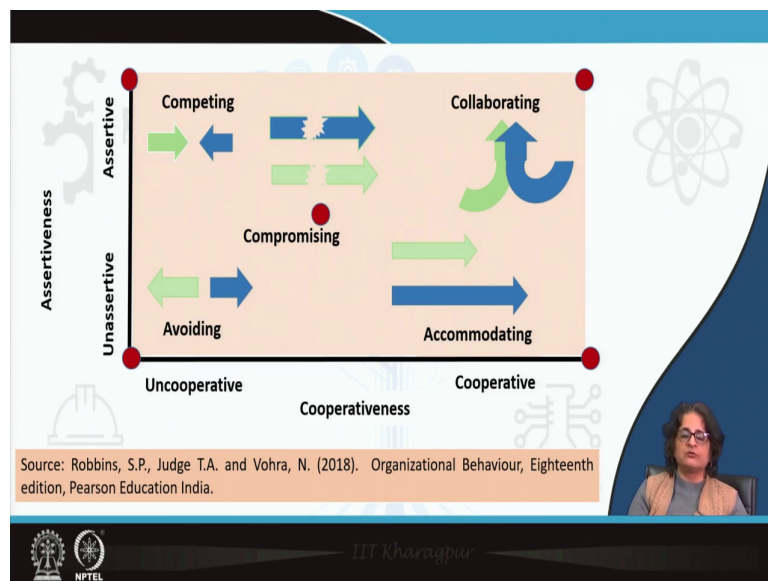
So, you know a person or a group must be aware of the antecedent conditions or must be aware of the background leading to conflict and a perceived conflict does not mean that the conflict is personalized a perceived conflict you know here you know it happens when a person just begins to assume that there is a problem there is a conflict it gets personalized only when it is a felt conflict. In felt conflict the person or the person or the group or the party under conflict gets emotionally aroused.

And this leads to a lot of anxiety, this leads to frustration and this also leads to hostility between the two people or between the two groups or between the two parties it is in this stage that this that the you know parties in conflict or the subject of conflict, you know the reasons of conflict you know it is in this stage that the reasons of the conflict get defined the subject of the conflict gets defined and the reasons of the conflict become very very explicit.

Once this happens we move to stage 3 of conflict which is intentions and based on the level of assertiveness and based on the level of cooperativeness you know we have 5 different conflict handling intentions. So, based on two dimensions which is assertiveness and cooperativeness we have 5 conflict handling intentions of competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding and accommodating ok.
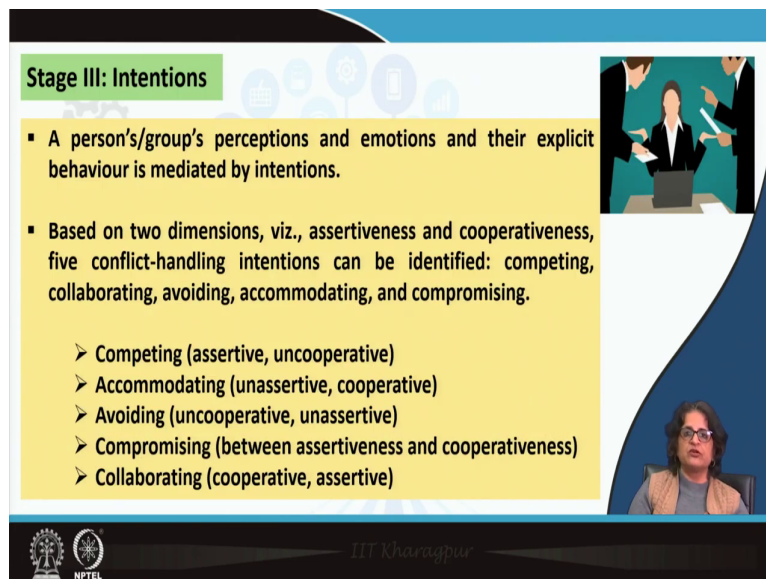
(Refer Slide Time: 24:32)

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

So, I will move to you know to a diagram, a figure here and you can see that if you know the level of assertiveness is low and the level of cooperativeness is also low it is avoiding. If it if the level of assertiveness is low, but there is cooperativeness people are cooperative the parties in conflict are cooperative with each other or if the 2 individuals or the 2 groups cooperate with each other it is accommodating.

If the level of assertiveness is high ok, but the two part individuals or the 2 parties or the 2 groups are non cooperative it is competing. If the level of assertiveness is high, but the two parties are cooperating with each other it is collaborating and a middle point is compromising ok.

(Refer Slide Time: 25:21)

So, if we look at this in stage-3 based on the level of assertiveness and based on the level of cooperate cooperation we have these 5five conflict handling intentions. So, in competing the

person or the 2 parties which are involved in the conflict aim you know at satisfying each other's interest irrespective of what the impact would be on the other party.

So, in competing the parties involved in the conflict aim at satisfying their own interest, their own interests irrespective of what impact it would have on the other party. So, they are basically into competing with each other and this this happens when the level of you know assertiveness is high and the level of cooperativeness is low. And the second stage which is collaborating the level of assertiveness is high and the level of cooperativeness is also high.

In this state the person or the party is involved aim to satisfy fully the interests of the other party or the other persons. The focus is on solving the conflict by clarifying dissimilarities rather than accommodating and it can lead to a win-win situation for both parties where both parties collaborate and end of the day they win it is a win-win situation for both. The third stage is avoiding where the parties or the people involved are low on assertiveness and they are also low on cooperativeness.

So, in this particular stage because they are low on both cooperativeness and low on assertiveness they avoid each other and the two part two individuals or the 2 persons or the 2 parties or groups in conflict they ignore each other they withdraw from or subdue the conflict. In other words, they ignore the other person or the other party.

In the fourth intention pertains to you know accommodating where we see that the parties are low on assertiveness and high on cooperative cooperation and when this happens you know each party the party is involved in the conflict happily place the other parties interest above their own. So, this is when they are accommodating and a middle path is the compromising where each party or each person in the conflict is agreeable to sacrificing something or the other.

So, no one wins no one loses and there is an incomplete satisfaction for both the parties. So, or both the persons. So, these are the 5 conflict handling intentions. Stage 4 is the behaviour which is the overt conflict and this stage is the manifestation of the intentions and includes

words or statements or bodily behaviour made by the person or by the persons or by the group members.

(Refer Slide Time: 28:32)

So, it is a very dynamic process and a 2 way process where one party acts and the other party reacts and again the reactions can range on a continuum from you know a very mild conflict as a minor disagreement or misunderstanding to another level which is an extreme level which could be overt efforts to destroy the other party. So, it could be a minor disagreement or it could be overt questioning or challenging or it could be assertive verbal attacks or it could be threats or it could be aggressive physical attacks and in in extreme end it could be overt efforts to destroy the other party.

Finally, we have the 5th stage which is outcomes which could be the behavioural outcome of the conflict you know a behavioural outcome of the conflict between 2 people or between 2

parties and this outcome leads to you know maybe functional for the organization or maybe dash functional for the organization.

If the outcome is such that it leads to increased group performance it is functional for the organization, it stimulates creativity, innovation, improves decision making, encourages healthy competition amongst people. On the other hand, if the outcome or the behavioural outcome of the conflict between two people or between the 2 parties leads to decreased group decreased group performance it is dash functional in nature there is infighting and weakening of group cohesiveness and there is always a dominance of vested interest of one party over the other party.

So, this is this could be damaging for the organization this is this dash functional conflict. So, outcome could be an increased group performance which is functional conflict or it could be decreased group performance which is dash functional conflict. Moderate levels of task and process a conflict lead to increased group performance. So, moderate levels of task and process conflict leads to increased group performance.

On the other hand, all kinds of relationship conflict will reduce group performance will decrease group performance and this will be dash functional in nature this would be dash functional conflict.

(Refer Slide Time: 30:34)

So, we have here the different stages of conflict where we have communication and you know structure and personal variables as antecedents to conflict and then we have cognition and personalization as felt conflict and perceived conflict.
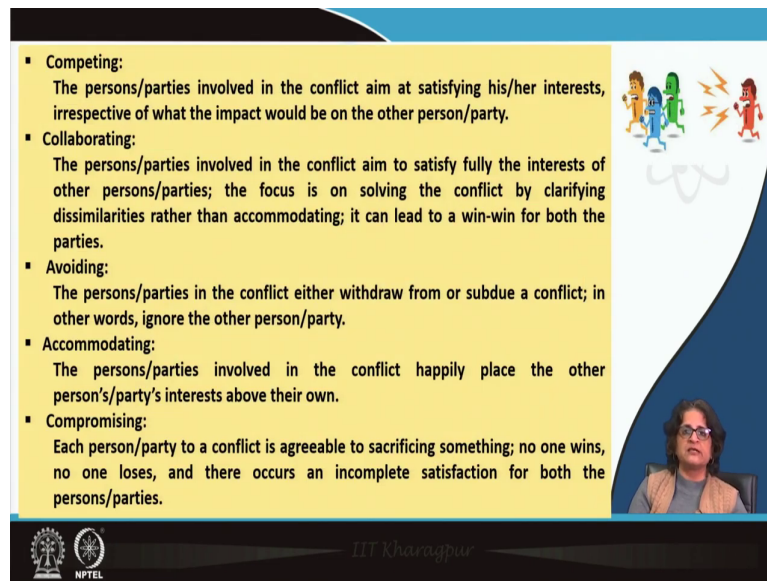
(Refer Slide Time: 30:44)

And then we have the 5 intentions where you see you know the where the strategies where the conflict handling intentions could be competing, collaborating, avoiding, accommodating and compromising.

And when it is competing that parties in the conflict aim to satisfy their own interest irrespective of what the impact could be on the other party and so, in such case they are you know they are very a low on cooperativeness and very high on assertiveness. In collaborating they are high on cooperativeness and also high on assertiveness where both the parties aim to satisfy fully the interest of the others and it is a win-win situation for both in avoiding it is low on cooperativeness and low on assertiveness.

And so, the person or the parties they withdraw from the conflict in accommodating they are a low on assertiveness, but high on cooperativeness. And so, they happily place in other parties interest above their own and in compromising it is a middle path both parties or both you know individuals or both groups you know agree to give up something no one wins totally no one loses totally and it is an incomplete satisfaction for both the parties.
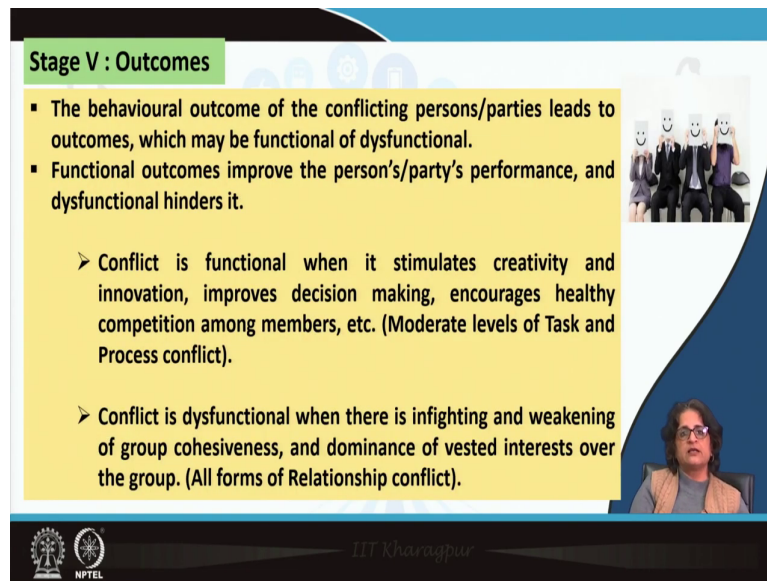
(Refer Slide Time: 32:05)

The behaviour which either is said could be you know words or statements and bodily reactions and could range from minor disagreements to overt efforts on the part of you know on part of one you know conflicting party to destroy the other party.
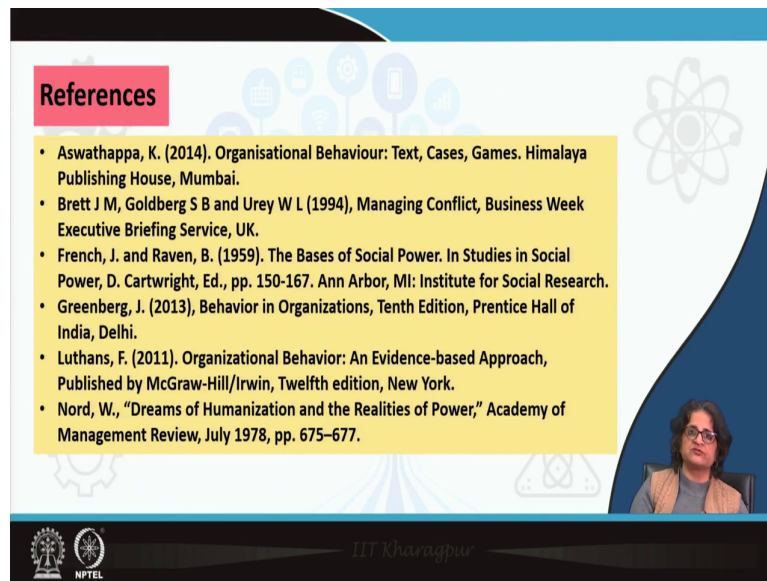
(Refer Slide Time: 32:24)

And the outcomes could be functional or dysfunctional, a functional outcomes improve the person's performance or the group's performance and dysfunctional hinder it. When conflict is functional it would be; it would increase you know organizational performance it would be positive for the organization it would stimulate creativity and innovation and encourage healthy competition amongst members improve decision making and moderate forms of task and process conflict are functional.

On the other hand, conflict can be dysfunctional when there is infighting and weakening of group cohesiveness and any and all forms of relationship conflict are dysfunctional.

(Refer Slide Time: 33:02)

References

- Aswathappa, K. (2014). Organisational Behaviour: Text, Cases, Games. Himalaya Publishing House, Mumbai.
- Brett J M, Goldberg S B and Urey W L (1994), Managing Conflict, Business Week Executive Briefing Service, UK.
- French, J. and Raven, B. (1959). The Bases of Social Power. In Studies in Social Power, D. Cartwright, Ed., pp. 150-167. Ann Arbor, MI: Institute for Social Research.
- 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.
- Nord, W., "Dreams of Humanization and the Realities of Power," Academy of Management Review, July 1978, pp. 675–677.

With this I come to an end of this lecture.

(Refer Slide Time: 33:07)

- Pfeffer, J., Managing with Power, Harvard Business School Press, Boston, 1992, p. 30.
- 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.
- Weber, M., The Theory of Social and Economic Organization, A. M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons (trans. and Ed.), Free Press, New York, 1947, p. 152.
- Whetten, D.A. and Cameron, K.S. Developing Management Skills, 2nd ed., HarperCollins, New York, 1991, pp. 397–399.

These are the references.

(Refer Slide Time: 33:09)

We shall be continuing with the topic in the next lecture.

Thank you.