

# Communication/conflict/ negotiation

Communication



(perception of) conflict → negotiation



Communication

# Conflicts : can we live without them?

- Can we do without it? Can we live our lives without getting into conflicts?

# Conflict

- No...
- And is this good or bad?

# Conflicts are unavoidable and widespread

- The pervasiveness of conflicts and its constancy in time allows us to state
  - The source of conflict is not, in general, a problem of individuals but a systemic issue, it is embedded in organizational life
    - however must note our perception errors : attribution theory – our tendency to “blame “ individuals

# Conflicts are unavoidable but...we tend to avoid them

- Conflict is viewed as a negative thing, it is dysfunctional , should be avoided, leads to malfunctioning etc..
- Why?
  - Because we are educated that way
  - We do not learn competencies to deal with them
- Hence,
  - most people fear/avoid conflicts (source of stress, waste of time and energy)
  - And do not want to be involved or link its image to conflicts [seen as detrimental to career]
    - Knowing that people rather than the context are blamed –perception error

# Conflicts are unavoidable and widespread, hence we must deal with them

- Running away from conflict may bring about greater problems
- Often just through conflict long time difficulties , latent but never confronted (lack of assertiveness) , are identified
- **That is why**
  - we must learn how to deal with it and make it play to our side (rather than being just an obstacle we should be able to use them in our advantage )
- a well managed conflict can bring compensations and improve uneasy/difficult situations, as well as bring about creativity and solutions to problems

# A definition of conflict

- “a dispute among **at least two interdependent parties** that **perceive** the existence of incompatible objectives, scarce resources and the **interference of the other part in the accomplishment of its objectives**”

(Hocker e Wilmot in Essentials, p. 14)

# Another definition of conflict

- “a **perceived divergence of interests** , or the belief that present aspirations of both parts cannot be reached simultaneously “
  - Webster 1966 (in Pruitt e Rubin 1986 p. 4)



# Perceived divergence of interests as the cause of conflicts

- Interests are people feelings about what is basically desirable
- Interests tend to be central to pople thinking and action , forming the core of many of their attitudes and intentions (Raven and Rubin, 1983)
- Some interests are universal – need for security, identity, social approval, happiness, clarity about the nature of one’s one world and some level of physical well being ; other are more specific (p. 10)

# Sources of conflicts: communication

- Communication is increasing its complexity
  - Wrong use of ever more channels
  - Perception errors in its root
  - Non communication or wrong style of communication (non assertive, aggressive or manipulation)
- To overcome most conflicts assertive communication is needed
  - The position of each part in the conflict , the objectives each wishes to attain have to be communicated openly and honestly–
- But...
  - communication with true shared meaning in not easy –especially not in situations of perceived conflict – as it implies personal and social skills that most of us are lacking

# Organisational conflicts

- They are structural – part of the system
- In O's **ideally** all the parts should work in coordinated manner to reach common goals with the resources they own (financial, human, technical...)

# Causes of conflicts in organisations

- Division of work (horizontal and vertical) in the organisation
- IN O's all subdivisions should work in coordination to achieve common goals with the available resources, but...
  - Different departments have different deadlines, levels of uncertainty , power
  - individuals within them have different qualifications/age/ seniority etc , and different levels of power and status,
  - The more interdependent and the more ambiguous their tasks the greater the unpredictability linked to adaptation to the market → the greater the potential for conflict ;
- **So, in organisations there a great number of different and conflicting interests at the horizontal level**

# Causes of conflicts in organisations: hierarchical differentiation

- Higher hierarchical levels have greater power , greater participation in decision making , autonomy, salary, status...
- Lower hierarchical levels wish to acquire a greater slice of autonomy, of decision making, of financial rewards, of status /recognition ...
- Both groups have necessarily different objectives, visions, obey to different sets of rules ..
- Those who have less resources or less access to them want more
- **So, in organisations there a great number of different and conflicting interests at the vertical level**

# Causes of conflicts in organisations: hierarchical differentiation

- Higher hierarchical levels try to control subordinates and these try to evade/resist such control
- Acceptance area : it is the area where it exists legitimacy in the exercise of authority (Barnard)
  - Subordinate perceives conflict when the superior oversteps the acceptance area
    - EX: too short deadline, work on week-ends
  - Superior perceives conflict when the subordinate resists

# Causes of conflicts in organisations: hierarchical differentiation

- Usual reaction of superior to the resistance of subordinate :
  - More rules
  - Exercise of power in a more controlling/authoritarian way - giving away less freedom/autonomy
- Objective: greater predictability of subordinate behaviors → uncertainty reduction
- **Effect** : MORE CONFLICT ! AND ALSO LESS CAPACITY OF CHANGE AND ADAPTATION OF THE ORGANISATION

# Causes of conflicts in organisations: resource scarcity

- No one in an O' has all the resources (= money, staff, autonomy, etc) needed to accomplish his/her tasks
  - or if it does, usually wants more , or thinks deserves more (this links to self – image, identity , status )

To overcome conflicts over resources:

- Increase resources (difficult)
- Reallocate resources (maybe sensitive , usually done step by step as an administrative matter to avoid increasing conflicts)



# Types of conflicts

task/procedural and relational/  
personal

# Types of conflicts: task/procedure related vs personal /relational

- There is a recurrent division in studies about conflict :
  - Task/professional /cognitive/goals related
  - Relational/interpersonal /emotional /affection related

# Task related conflicts

- Related to the **tasks and its objectives** :
  - Controversies on the type of task/projects the group(department /O') should be committed to and the priority given to it
- Related to the **means** how to achieve tasks
  - How to proceed; who is responsible for what ; how work is divided etc
  - Disagreements on what resources are needed for the task , on what team should be doing the task
  - Differences of views/opinions and on decisions made
  - Conflicts linked to resources – offices, equipment , extra payments/prizes

# Task related conflict can become personal related conflicts

- The existence of a task conflict does not always imply the existence of a personal conflict – it is possible not to personalize the conflict and keep it within the margin of task related issues
- However
  - conflicts can start with disagreements pertaining to tasks' accomplishment (who, how, when ...) which may lead to criticisms which open the way to hostility, bitterness →
    - there is a very thin line between professional and personal conflicts
- The Personalization of conflict is the mechanism that causes the most dysfunctions (very typical in Portugal!)

# Task related conflict can become personal related conflicts

- Conflict is often personalized because:
  - There are extra work tensions that are released in the workplace
  - Work related conflicts may generate , or reveal, relational conflicts
  - There are demands by the O's that are inconsistent with the personal development of individuals and their good performance

And remember : Due to **systematic errors of perceptio (theory of attribution)** we tend to explain other's action and faults base on **internal factors** personality /incompetence (they are doing it on purpose to attack me/hurt me, etc)

# Relational/interpersonal conflicts – very difficult to handle

- Personal conflicts usually involve questions of identity , protection of public image , protection of “territory” (autonomy ) status
- Emotional and physical reactions to these type of conflicts tend to be intense (overtly or covertly)
  - **Feelings** : jealousy, rage, discomfort, tensions, irritation , frustration, fury , remorse , despise, etc
  - **Behaviours**: screaming, crying, physical violence, distancing, interrupting communication, banging doors or others, etc

# Relational/interpersonal conflicts

- These are usually disguised as task related because we tend not to assume openly relational difficulties (which may have deeper explanations linked to identity, self image )
  - We avoid to expose publicly those deeper personal issues, especially in the professional context →we try to give away a good image

# Personal conflicts are dysfunctional

- Task related conflict may lead to personal related conflict and impede the resolution of the task related conflict ( even if it is of simple resolution)
- Rather than framing the issue rationally it becomes framed emotionally
  - Personalization and emotions affect judgement



Consequences of conflicts

**POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE**

# Some negative consequences of conflicts – usually linked to personal

- Excessive and negative emotions (lack of control)
- Reduction (or abandonment ) of communication (with those in disagreement)
- Distorted perceptions → give rise to negative stereotyping
- The main reason for conflict loses importance and secondary issues gain importance (often the real reason for conflict is lost)
- Greater emphasis on competition → issues framed into winning vs losing rather than cooperation)
- Holding rigidly to a position
- Distance among people may lead to conflict escalate – similarities lose value , and differences gain value
- Rupture among people and potential destruction of the group

( Essentials p.15)

# Continuum of conflict intensity



# Some negative consequences of personal conflicts

There is a negative association between relational conflicts and productivity and satisfaction in groups

- Individuals spend more time and energy in interpersonal issues rather than in technical/substantive issues and decision making
- Oversimplification of issues at stake when emotions take charge (the good guys vs the bad guys)

# task related conflict can be positive

- Conflict is an opportunity to bring to open discussion old problems and solve them
- They can stimulate the discussion of varied ideas
- It improves the quality of decision
- It allows to defy the status quo and change / innovate
- They can improve productivity
- Reinforces intra-groups relations and improves personal development

# In sum

- Conflict in moderate levels can be functional, especially in groups with creative tasks
- **Too little conflict** may lead to apathy, incapacity of change, innovation , no self criticism
- **Too much conflict** -task accomplishment becomes at stake
- A group or O' can become so involved in controversy that is unable to cope with basic external demands ;
- there is a fine line between too little and too much conflict (Pruitt and rubbin , 1983 p. 21/22
- Solution : balance /moderation

# An organisation is successful when

- it overcomes its embedded conflicts, by putting in place adequate mechanisms to deal with them and create the necessary conditions for sharing resources , knowledge , mutual help, cooperation
  - Well performing O's successfully overcome conflict and concentrate effort on the task at hands – O's goals
- Leadership has a crucial role there
  - it can rule to divide or rule to unite ; must be capable of listening and deciding with fairness

# Overcoming Conflict

- Conflict can be managed
  - Assertive communication and negotiation are required to manage them
    - We will speak of this in the theme of negotiation



Conflict as a process :

FROM A LATENT CONFLICT TO OVERT  
CONFLICT

# Conflict as a process

- Conflict can be described as a sequence of episodes
  - From its perception by both parts to open crisis/ hostile behaviors
- But not all conflicts get to this point
  - Conflict may not even be perceived
  - If perceived it may be solved before open hostility

# Conflict as a process

- The process of conflict is dynamic (and as it is an interpersonal phenomena one never knows how will it end- unpredictability):
  - The perceptions of each other changes in the process
  - The position of each part may get adjusted / or reinforce maladjustment
  - The intensity and the energy vary
  - Allies are searched – may increase intensity

# Phases in the dynamic of conflict

- Some authors speak of 5 phases (ex: Thomas 92; Pondy 67)
- Here we will simplify these in 3 stages
  - 1) **latent conflict** – there is a potential for Development of tensions , but may not be perceive
  - 2) **crisis or open conflict** – conflict is perceived , felt or manifest and action is taken to deal with the conflict
  - 3) **closures or outcomes** -
    - Closures by reconciliation or overcoming conflict
    - Rupture
    - Suppression of conflict
    - conflict escalate

# Stage 1 – latent conflict

- As we have seen there is always a latent conflict within organizations - which bring about tensions that may vary in its intensity
  - Resource scarcity, vertical and horizontal differentiation

And these may be relational or professional related but usually they are **interlinked**

# Stage 1 – latent conflict

- Latent conflict may or may not be perceived
  - When there is Perception of conflict but conflict does not exist
    - → **must improve communication**
- When there is latent conflict but there is no perception of it, it may mean that
- conflict is being suppressed – individuals are ignoring it , and only a threatening conflict is recognized → may have perverse effects \_\_>
- Attention focus mechanisms - there are always too many conflicts to deal with – energy and time must be focused
  - More probable to focus only on routine , easy to solve conflicts with short term solutions – others are ignored /not dealt with → or must be dealt with separately, by a special unit
- Conflicts can accumulate silently – due to non assertive communication, suppression of conflict, limited attention focus

# Stage 2 : crisis

- This is the stage in which conflict becomes visible → there is some sort of crisis happening
- A crisis can be triggered due in result of unimportant issues , which may hide deeper and more important ones ( role, values, personal conflicts)
- When new condition arise a crisis can explode
  - Example of new conditions: financial shortages; new person coming in and changing the organisation, stress due to excessive work , firm's bad results
- A crisis gives visibility to the conflict
  - Behaviours implied include aggression ( verbal or physical) , sabotage , apathy, discontinuing communication, employees strictly abiding by the rule ...

# Stage 2 : crisis

- A crisis may release tensions and express publicly what has been hidden – it may be better than disguised hostility, which ruins the organisation
- But it can also trigger an escalation of conflict which with excessive behaviours and feelings and unpredictable consequences
  - Ex: depressive states of individuals; physical aggression ; court processes
- Conflict **must be managed** in order to overcome crisis – a solution must be searched in which the goals of each part must be replaced by common /shared goals
  - Conflict management- we will speak about in negotiation



# Stage 3 : outcome

- The outcome may be functional or dysfunctional
- **Functional**
  - If both parties make an effort to solve long endured latent conflicts
  - If the conflict is genuinely solved with positive solutions for both parties , i.e. if they found a cooperative solution and there is reconciliation
- **Dysfunctional**
  - **Neutralization** – temporary suspension of conflict given a temporary/provisory agreement
  - **Suppression** – conflict is suppressed but not solved , and the latent conflict condition are maintained
  - **Rupture** – non reconciliation of the parties involved and separation
  - Critical outcome : **conflict escalation**

# Critical outcome: conflict escalation

Any conflict is capable of intensification and escalate. Conflicts are said to escalate when :

- Heavier contentious tactics are employed
- Issues proliferate
- Increased resources are devoted to the struggle
- Issues become more general
- Relationships deteriorate
- A goal of hurting the other party develops
- Additional participants enter the struggle

# Intervention of 3rd parties

- Mediators, arbitrators , intermediaries can help solve conflict escalation
  - More when we will speak of negotiation

**FIGURE 1.2** Conflict Diagnostic Model

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Viewpoint Continuum</i>	
	<i>Difficult to Resolve</i>	<i>Easy to Resolve</i>
Issue in question	Matter of "principle"—values, ethics, or precedent a key part of the issue	Divisible issue—issue can be easily divide into small parts, pieces, units
Size of stakes—magnitude of what can be won or lost	Large—big consequences	Small—little, insignificant consequences
Interdependence of the parties—degree to which one's outcomes determine the other's outcomes	Zero sum—what one wins, the other loses	Positive sum—both believe that <i>both</i> can d better than simply distributing current outcomes
Continuity of interaction—will they be working together in the future?	Single transaction—no past or future	Long-term relationship—expected interaction in the future
Structure of the parties—how cohesive, organized they are as a group	Disorganized—uncohesive, weak leadership	Organized—cohesive, strong leadership
Involvement of third parties—can others get involved to help resolve the dispute?	No neutral third party available	Trusted, powerful, prestigious third party available
Perceived progress of the conflict—balanced (equal gains and equal harm) or unbalanced (unequal gain, unequal harm)?	Unbalanced—one party feels more harm and will want revenge and retribution whereas stronger party wants to maintain control	Balanced—both parties suffer equal harm and equal gain; both may be more willing to call it a "draw"

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# Describe a conflict (DONE)

- Describe a “professional” (work, school, association, church, sports, scouts, etc) related conflict:
- Who was involved and what was the relation among them?
- What was in the root of the conflict?
- What was at stake?
- How did you solve this conflict (if it was solved , if not why not)?

# Analysing a conflict of a colleague

- Characterizing the conflict and what triggered it
  - professional matter – linked to the division of work (horizontal level) and/or to the hierarchy?
  - Professional and /or personal matter – did the professional conflict have a personal/relational component?
  - Communication difficulties
  - Scarcity of resources to conduct the task
- Is the conflict functional or dysfunctional ? Did the conflict have a positive effect in the narrator and /or in the group organisation ?
- How could the conflict situation be overcome? Or it is already solved was it well solved? Would you solve it differently? How?

# Analysing the conflict of a colleague

- Hand in printed format- max 2 pages
- Class 28th april

# 1st part of final essay – conflict analysis

- Brief history of the case; what is the case about
- Where and when does it take place
- Who are the key actors – individuals and their Countries/organisations- of this process and what is their role in it?



# 1st part of final essay – conflict analysis

- Characterize the conflict
  - What is at stake? What triggered it ? What are the interest of each side which interfere negatively in the achievement of both sides goals?
  - What is the role of communication in this conflict ? Does communication cause the conflict? Is communication used for its resolution?

# 1st part of final essay – conflict analysis

- Characterize the conflict
  - Does this professional/institutional conflict has a personal/emotional component? How did it affect the conflict development? (explain)
  - Is this professional/institutional conflict related to the goals of both parties or to the means to reach those goals? (explain)
  - Was there an escalation of the conflict? (Explain)
- **Outcomes**
  - Was the conflict functional or dysfunctional ? (explain) Which effect did it have in the person, organisation, countries involved?

# 1st part of final essay – conflict analysis

- The arguments and statements in the essay must be consistent and well justified/supported
- It is expected that the information is well documented by verifiable sources
  - It is useful to use citation by the intervening actors in order to illustrate the role of participants in this conflict
- Your sources must be correctly cited (see a document on how to cite web information sources – in Aquila )

# 1st part of final essay – conflict analysis: paper delivery +oral presentation

- Deadline : 28th April – hand in printed - 7-10 pages max
- Oral presentation by ONE member of teh group – 5 min – 28th april



# Analysing a conflict of a colleague

- What is in the root of conflict?
  - Hierarchy ?
  - horizontal division of tasks?
  - Resource scarcity?
- Type of conflict :
  - Personal vs task – did the profesional conflict have a personal/relational component ?
- Conflict management
  - How did your colleague solve the conflict according to the conflict management styles?
  - What are the advantages and disadvantages in this way of solving the conflict ?
- Was the Conflict functional/dysfunctional ? Were/are there any positive or negative consequences of this conflict?
- Did/does the conflict have a positive/negative effect on the person in questions (the narrator or group or organization)?
  - How can this conflict situation be overcome ? or if the situation was solved , do you think it has been solved in the best way ? why?

# Conflict as a process

