

Conflict management

Definition of conflict:

Conflict simply means clash, fight, battle, or struggle. Conflict is an unsettling condition that causes a clash of ideas about what is expected or established.

Conflict can be defined as "the internal or external discord that results from differences in ideas, values, or feelings between two or more people". Conflict can be friendly or hostile. Conflict, which is closely related to power and political issues, is inevitable and can be constructive or destructive.

Whenever there is an opportunity of disagreement, there is a potential source of conflict. The common sources of conflict are disputes over resource allocation or availability, personality differences, differences in values, threats from inside or outside an organization, cultural differences and competition. In recent years, organizational, professional, and unit goals have served as a major source of conflict. In most of the organizations, nurses frequently see financial goals and patient care goals as being in direct conflict with one another.

Sources of conflict in personal arenas include differences in values, threats to security or well-being. Financial problems, and cultural problems.

However, in providing better health care it has become increasingly important for leaders / managers to confront and manage conflict appropriately. Understanding and dealing with conflict appropriately is one of the characteristics of a good leader or manager.

Types of conflict: There are three broad types of conflict-

- 1. Intrapersonal** - occurs within the individual.
- 2. Interpersonal** -- between two people or between groups or work teams.
- 3. Organizational** - between two or more groups of people, departments or organizations.

Conflict can also be categorized as -

- Intrasender -- originates in the sender who gives conflicting instruction.
- Intersender -- an individual receives conflicting messages from two or more sources.
- Interrole -- when an individual belongs to more than one group.
- Person-role -- results from disparity between internal and external role.
- Interperson -- between people whose positions require interaction with other people who play various roles in the same organization.
- Intragroup -- conflict inside the group.
- Intergroup -- in between two or more groups,
- Role ambiguity -- individuals do not know what is expected from them.
- Role overload -- individuals cannot meet the expectations placed on them.

Nevertheless, structurally based conflict is either vertical or horizontal.

The conflict process - Conflict may be divided into five progressive stages (Figure-1): latent, perceived, felt, manifest, and aftermath.

- **Latent conflict**—is the first stage in the conflict process, implies the existence of antecedent conditions, such as short staffing and rapid change.

- **Perceived conflict**—if the conflict progresses, it may develop into the second stage. Perceived or substantive conflict is intellectualized and often involves issues and roles. It is recognized logically and impersonally by the person as occurring. Sometimes conflict can be resolved at this stage before it is internalized or felt.

- **Felt conflict**—occurs when the conflict is emotionalized. Felt emotions include hostility, fear, mistrust, and anger. It is also referred to as affective conflict. It is possible to perceive conflict and not feel it. A person also can feel the conflict but not perceive. The problem, that means he / she is unable to identify the cause of conflict.

- **Manifest conflict**—also called overt conflict, action is taken. This is resulting from the latent, perceived, and felt conflict. It can be either constructive or destructive to problem solving. The action may be to withdraw, compete, debate, or seek conflict resolution.

- **Conflict aftermath**—this aftermath may be more significant than the original conflict if the conflict has not been handled constructively. There is always conflict aftermath, positive or negative.

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Approaches to managing conflict -

The optimal goal in resolving conflict is creating win solution for all involved. This is not possible in every situation, and often the leaders /manager's goal is to manage the conflict in a manner that lessens the perceptual differences that exist between the involved parties. There are essentially seven methods or strategies of conflict resolution:

- Compromising
- Avoiding
- Accommodating
- Competing
- Negotiating
- Confronting
- Collaborating

Compromising: Each party gives up something it wants and also gains something. In this method, no one should win or lose but both should gain something. However, it may cause a return to the conflict if what is given up appears more important than the original goal.

Avoiding: ignoring the conflict, in the avoiding approach the parties involved are aware of a conflict but do not attempt to resolve it. In this conflict can become bigger than anticipated.

Accommodating: Soothing or co-operating. One side is more concerned with an issue. One side holds more power and can force the other side to give in. the importance of the stakes are not as apparent to one side as the other. It can lead to parties feeling "used" if they are always pressured to give in.

Competing: The competing approach is used when one party pressures what it wants at the expense of the others. Because only one party wins, it produces a loser, and leaves anger and resentment on losing side.

Negotiating: High level discussion that seeks agreement but not necessarily consensus. Strategies for conflict resolution (see attached table at the end of this lesson plan)

Confronting: Immediate and obvious movement to stop conflict at the very start. It is very powerful, and does not allow conflict to take root. Nevertheless, it may leave impression that conflict is not tolerated, and may make something big out of nothing.

Collaborating: It is an assertive and co-operative means of conflict resolution that results in win-win solution. Although it takes a lot of time is considered the best solution for the conflict and encompasses all important goals to each side. Learning Activities Lecture and discussion

In collaboration, problem solving is a joint effort with no superior/ subordinate, order giving/order taking relationships. True collaboration requires mutual respect, open and honest communication, and equitable, shared decision making powers.

Leadership roles and management functions:

Nurse leaders and managers need to understand each type of conflict first and then decide to solve the conflict with appropriate techniques.

Leadership roles:

1. A leader is self-aware and conscientiously works to resolve intrapersonal conflict.
2. S/he addresses conflict as soon as it is perceived and before it becomes felt or manifest.
3. S/he seeks a win-win solution to conflict whenever feasible.
4. S/he lessens the perceptual differences that exist between conflicting parties and broadens the parties understanding about the problems.
5. S/he assists subordinates in identifying an alternative resolution of conflict.

6. S/he recognizes and accepts the individual differences of staff.
7. S/he uses assertive communication skills in increase persuasiveness and foster open communication.
8. S/he acts as a role model, and collaborative negotiator.

Management Functions:

1. A manager creates' a work environment that minimizes the antecedent conditions for conflict.
2. S/he uses legitimate authority appropriately in a competing approach when a quick or unpopular decision needs to be made.
3. When appropriate, s/he formally facilitates conflict resolution involving subordinates.
4. S/he accepts mutual responsibilities for reaching predetermined supra ordinate goals.
5. S/he obtains needed unit resources through effective negotiation approaches.
6. S/he compromises unit needs only when the need is not critical to unit functioning and when higher management gives up something of equal value.
7. S/he is adequately prepared to negotiate for unit resources, including the advance determination of a bottom line and possible trade-offs.
8. S/he addresses the need for closure and follow-up to negotiation.

In conclusion, conflict itself is not bad. Conflict is healthy. It like change, allows for creativity, innovation, new ideas, and new ways of doing things. It allows for the healthy discussion of different views and values, and add an important dimension to the provision of quality patient care.