

## LESSON-35

### Misunderstandings In Communication

#### What is misunderstanding?

Misunderstanding means mistake, error, misapprehension, misinterpretation, misconstruction, misconception, and misjudgment of words, views, perception and expressions.

Misunderstanding among people can wreck their careers, and in business it can be worse than frustrating. It can also retard productivity and adversely reflect on all involved. It can even lead to irreparable losses in relationships of the individuals and the organizations and thereby tarnish their image and reputation. As it is said, "Prevention is better than cure," the best way to deal with a misunderstanding is to prevent it before it happens.

The main causes of misunderstanding can be verbal, nonverbal, interpersonal, organizational and cultural.

Some ways to deal with the causes of misunderstanding are given below:

1. *Verbal-To eliminate a verbal problem that could cause a misunderstanding:*

- Avoid loose talk.
- Avoid poor pronunciation and careless articulation.
- Be aware of your knowledge level and that of your listeners.
- Do not use poor or inaccurate grammar and take utmost care to improve and enhance the stock of your vocabulary.
- Do not use slang, jargon and euphemisms.
- Be exact in your choice of words and minimize abstractions. Abstractions refer to anything that cannot be touched, tasted, seen, smelled or heard.

2. *The source of a misunderstanding may be a nonverbal. Make sure you:*

- Eliminate conflicting and inappropriate signals.
- Control your emotional involvement.
- Avoid distractions.
- Use skills of good listening.

3. *Interpersonal*

- Do not stereotype your audience.
- Do not let role-playing define your communications.
- Do not assume that your audience shares or agrees with your point of view.

#### *4. Organizational*

The structure of your organization may cause misunderstandings by creating such barriers to communications as: job specialization, hierarchical structures, information hoarding or information bottlenecks. There are two basic things you can do to deal with these barriers:

- Be patient, play by the rules, and be as clear as you can be within those rules. If you break the rules, your communication will be completely disregarded.
- Avoid being influenced by cliques and in- groups. Do not be blind to the fact that information from these groups is always slanted.

#### *5. Cultural*

With regards to male-female relationships, cultural differences provide a minefield of potential misunderstandings.

#### **Sources of Conflict**

Before we discuss the influence of conflict on the communication, it is desirable to first understand what is a conflict and what are the types of conflicts, which you can come across in your interaction with people in your day- to-day life

**Conflict:** In one way conflict may be defined as a direct and conscious struggle between individuals or groups for achieving the same goal. Defeat of the opponent is seen as essential for achieving that goal. In conflict, unlike competition, opponents are primarily oriented toward each other rather than toward the object they seek. In fact, because of the development of strong feelings of hostility, the achievement of the goal may at times be considered secondary to the opponent's defeat. In addition, conflict is intermittent rather than continuous.

**Culture Conflict:** This conflict refers to the mental conflict within an individual or a group of individuals between two cultures, both of which are partially accepted and which provide certain contradictory standards and opposing loyalties. The term is not usually used to refer specifically to conflict between groups.

**Mental conflict:** This conflict refers to the social -psychological state of frustration and indecision resulting from the inability of an individual to act in a situation because he feels he cannot act without precipitating unpleasant consequences. Mental conflict is to some degree inherent in human life. However, a major portion of mental conflict is the result of rapid social change, social mobility culture conflict as well as of complex social organisation and the ordinary experiences in the process of socialization. No human society can eliminate mental conflict, but the constant individual and collective effort to eliminate or reduce mental conflict is a crucial, dynamic factor in the social, cultural and psychological processes.

Role conflict: This conflict refers to the incompatibility between two or more roles that an individual is expected to perform in a given situation. The performance of one role interferes with or is antagonistic to the other. The state of conflict may last only a short time and the conflicting demands may be met without much difficulty or it may be a persistent problem facing someone all of his life. The analysis of role conflict and its resolution has been given due weight and utmost importance in the study of values, social processes and social structure in general.

When you deal with people, occurrence of conflicts is a natural corollary and phenomenon. Much as you wish to avoid it, conflicts still come up because these are peculiar to the circumstances in which they occur. If you know these characteristics you can sharpen your ability to identify the conflicts and situations, which have a high potential for conflict. Some sources of conflict which you should be aware of are:

- Win-lose situations,
- Differing sub-unit goals and perceptions,
- Cultural diversity within the organization, and
- The political nature of the organization.

1. *Win-Lose Situations*. This is a typical situation. Two persons or groups may find themselves in a tough situation where they realise that the ultimate goal cannot be attained simultaneously by both of them. This implies that only one of the two will win and the other will, undoubtedly lose. This is known as a win-lose conflict.

2. *Differing Subunit Goals and Perceptions*. The organisations have general goals by way of a mission statement and specific goals (or sub goals) by way of avowed objectives. The members of an organization can usually agree about the organization's general mission to satisfy customers and make a fair profit, but they often disagree about more specific goals.

3. *Cultural Diversity within the Organization*. Individuals who are culturally similar to one another communicate with one another more frequently naturally and form more cohesive groups without any hesitation and inhibition. On the other hand, diversity in personal backgrounds cultural identities makes conflict more likely to appear. In organizations having persons from different national cultures, conflicts can arise through an abundance of differences in perceptions, values, attitudes and habits. In countries like United States, Canada and New Zealand, the employees value individualism, their own success and career advancement more than the group or common goals. Whereas persons from Greece, India, Japan and Singapore tend to value collectivism and are more likely to put organizational goals above their own legitimate goals. From this, it follows that the cultural

diversity multiplies the chances for the emergence of conflict in organizations.

4. *The Political Nature of Organizations.* Politics in organizations involves the use of power and other resources by individuals or groups to obtain the outcomes they prefer. Most experienced observers, generally, agree that all organizations are political to some degree in the sense that they indulge, more or less, in the power-and-peck politics or are influenced by it. However, the frequency and intensity of political behavior definitely differs from organization to organization.

### **Effects of Conflicts**

Conflict can have positive effects, negative effects, or both. Interestingly, some people find that the conflict motivates and arouses enthusiasm in them, whereas others may feel that the conflict constitutes a threat.

| Positive effects of conflict                 | Negative effects of conflict                                   |
|--|--|
| Stimulates creative thinking.                | Feeling of defeat and embarrassment.                           |
| Inspires people to try new approaches.       | Reduces contact between people.                                |
| Dealing with long-standing problems possible | Increases distrust and suspicion.                              |
| Clarity of viewpoints.                       | People pursue self-interests instead of extending cooperation. |
| Heightens interest in the task at hand.      | Increased turmoil compels people to leave the organization.    |

### **Intra Group Effects**

Whenever a conflict occurs within the groups, its effects are immediately and apparently visible. Such effects include the following:

1. *Cohesiveness increases-Faced* with a common enemy, group members tend to become more organized, watchful and tightly knit.
2. *Members become more task-oriented-When* the members are more oriented and driven to their tasks, in-group rivalries take a back seat, the members become more formal and less playful, the group settles down to meet the challenge posed by the other group.
3. *Leadership becomes more autocratic-Sensing* the group to be in danger members tolerate or even demand more controlling, less democratic leadership. Leaders tend not to encourage group decision-making.

4. *Group structure becomes more formal*-Member's duties and responsibilities become more clearly defined. Activities are governed more and more by rules and procedures.

5. *Group norms become stronger*-Conformity increases. Members are expected to clearly demonstrate their loyalty to the group and its values.

### **Inter Group Effects**

When groups engage themselves conflict, relationships among them also tend to change along the following lines:

1. *Each group's perception of the other becomes negative.* The groups see one another rather as enemies than as a rational group of human beings and neutral entities. They indulge in passing derogatory remarks at each other. Bickering members of each group tend to use a language, which leaves, bad impressions and creates negative attitudes in the listeners towards such foul-mouthing members and organizations.

2. *Perceptual distortions occur.* Members understand their own group as being right at the cost of the opposing group whom they regard as being wrong. Selective perception develops negative facts about one's own group are discounted; whereas positive aspects of the opponent are will fully ignored.

3. *Hostility increases and communication decreases.* A decrease in interaction between the two groups reduces their opportunity to correct their perceptual distortions.

### ***Effects of Winning or Losing a Conflict***

*Winning group:* Winning gives a sense of elation, joy and excitement to the members of the winning groups. In such groups cohesiveness tends to remain high. Sometimes, it becomes even more cohesive since their victory gives members another reason to be attracted to the group. Winning groups tend to relax and to release tension. Members become content, feeling that their victory confirms their positive self-image as well as their negative stereotype of the other group and leaves them no reason to rethink and re-examine their perceptions whatsoever.

*Losing groups:* Members commonly distort or deny the reality of losing, offering excuses such as "we didn't understand the rules of the game" or "luck was against us". Losing groups tend to disintegrate.. Old internal conflicts reappear as members seek' a scapegoat for their defeat. Members of losing groups feel the need to work harder, to discover what the group did correctly and incorrectly and what their opponent's real strengths and weaknesses are. Since the losers are not only unwilling to accept defeat but also have heightened task orientation and concern for performance. But, still

in certain cases, the members of the losing group take the failure as an opportunity to rework and reinvent their strategy in terms of content and style and then strive for achieving the former eluding success at the next available opportunity.

### **Positive Effects of Conflict**

Conflict can produce very positive effects as well as negative consequences. Open and violent aggressive tendency is almost certain to spoil organizational harmony and activity; low or moderate levels of conflict can improve individual and group performance. Some-times, conflict can improve decision-making quality by causing ideas, particularly ones that are unusual or held by a minority, to be given due weight in important decisions. Conflict within a group can enable people to recognize that their perception or information is inaccurate and can give them new perspective on an issue. It keeps a group from passively endorsing weak decisions. Other positive outcomes of conflict within or between groups can include:

- Better ideas and a search for new approaches.
- Surfacing and resolution of long-standing problems.
- Clarification of individual's views and increased interest and creativity.

### **Destructive Effects of Conflict**

Apart from the benefits, the conflicts can also have serious negative effects, damaging relationships and channelling energy away from goal attainment. Conflict that threatens personal goals and beliefs can produce tension, fear, anxiety and resentment, while conflict that persists may make it impossible to maintain the supportive, trusting relationships among the group members. Increased stress resulting conflict can badly distort the perceptions of people, affect the patterns of their behaviour and make their thought and thinking progress rigid. In addition to this, their task of motivation declines, and conflict can shatter or dwindle the spirit of cooperation.

### **Approaches to Managing Conflict Communication**

You can never" imagine a situation in which conflict never occurs. Differences between people's personalities, their job specialities, their group affiliations and their ideas are sure to produce conflict to a considerable extent. The management of the organization after examining the causes of the conflicts must strive to resolve the conflicts as far as possible.

### **Resolving and Reactions to Conflict**

If you are unable to resolve a conflict amicably, you can apply the other available options. These are: avoiding, smoothing, forcing, compromising and collaborating.

*Avoiding:* The easiest way of dealing with conflict is simply to withdraw from it. Some groups have the knack of avoiding disagreements. Avoidance can be a useful technique for cooling off dissenting parties or for preventing disputes about unimportant matters. But, avoidance should not result in postponing the inevitable. Avoidance can work when the conflict is on trivial issues.

*Smoothing:* Another method often used when the parties have a strong aversion to open conflict, is smoothing, whereby a discussion on the matter can bring around the parties to a favourable position to agree. In effect, the parties agreeably ignore the conflict by sweeping it under the carpet. In the short run, such mutual appreciation meetings may be uplifting for all concerned. Smoothing is, sometimes, employed in conflicts between superiors and subordinates.

*Forcing:* Forcing occurs when one rival or competitor defeats another simply by having more power in the organization, when the parties refer their dispute to a mutually agreed superior for a decision, or when some other arbitrator decides the matter. The problem with forcing is that it can evoke bitterness in the losing party and it can be habit-forming for the parties to resort to the arbitrary use of power to resolve their disagreements in future conflicts also.

*Compromising:* Compromise is a process of give- and-take. Each side moves from its original position to one that is somewhere in between where reciprocity occurs. An example of compromise is the bargaining that occurs in labour-management contract negotiations. Another is the trading that takes place in a stiff, competitive and political setting.

*Collaborating:* In collaboration, the parties in conflict work to reach a solution that finally satisfies the concerns of each. They first share all relevant facts and feelings, thereby admitting and clarifying their previously held differences. Two kinds of behaviour are essential to this sharing: expressing one's own position as clearly as possible and listening fully to the other side's point of view. Having shared their views, the parties consider a full range of alternatives in the search for a mutually advantageous outcome and commonly acceptable resolution.