

Social Conflict

I. Introduction

Any society is composed of different institutions and groups of people. These groups constituting the society have their own distinct identity. Besides, these groups have their own agenda to pursue. Further no nation or society has resources to meet the demands of all groups and stay in harmony. Consequently, these groups while pursuing their goals often find themselves at logger heads to exploit scarce resources and maximize their gains or outcomes. Thus, a social situation develops where different groups constituting the society are opposing each other to promote their own interest at the cost of others. Social conflict is also evident when one social group compares its gains and feels that it is being marginalized by other groups or when it perceives that it is being deprived of what is duly available to other groups in the society.

II. Nature of Social Conflict

- Social conflict or group conflict occurs when two or more actors oppose each one another in social interaction, reciprocally exerting social power in an effort to attain scarce or incompatible goals and prevent the opponent from attaining them.
- Group conflict or social conflict is a social relationship wherein the action is oriented intentionally for carrying out the actor's own will against the resistance of other party or parties.
- Social conflict revolves around social power. In almost all kinds of social conflict struggle to get hold of power is central. Access to power or hold over power ensures a groups success in attaining its goal. Consequently, the powerful group wins and the weaker one loses the competition.

III. Forms of Social Conflict

A social conflict may take different forms and manifest itself in different manners. However, psychologists have identified three different forms of social conflict which as follow:

- 1. Overt Conflict:** In this form social conflict is open and explicit. Competition between both the parties is fierce and direct. For example, negotiation between management representatives and labor union or war between two countries. A simpler example of it is debate, in which one speaker emphasizes and justifies his own point while questioning the validity of opponent's point of view. The explicit aim is to defeat the opponent and ensure one's victory
- 2. Objective Conflict:** Objective conflict occurs when one group tries to gain advantage over another group or groups. Thus, by objective social conflict we mean a social situation inherently benefits some while causing loss to others. For example, it is often seen that when government takes some welfare steps, some people are more benefitted but some others receive less than expected benefits and still some others are at loss. This gives rise to a kind of social conflict known as objective social conflict.
- 3. Subjective Conflict:** When a person identifies or perceives a situation involving struggle it is known as subjective conflict. Sometimes a person remains in a state of subjective struggle without bringing it to overt level.

IV. Types of Social Conflict

Although a number or criteria can be used for generating a typology of conflicts, such as, conflicts based on interests, based on whether gradual change or immediate radical change is desired, or conflict in terms of time span, or in terms of the scope of conflicts. Here we shall talk of four major

kinds of conflicts. These are conflicts which are seen to occur in almost all societies. We shall discuss briefly the following:

1. *Class conflicts* which are based on the system of stratification existing in a society.
2. *Political conflicts* which are based on the acquisition of, and competition for political power.
3. *Communal/ethnic conflicts*, which are mainly based on considerations of maintenance of the group.
4. *Factional conflicts*—which occur among small group, claiming position of power within small communities

V. **Blake and Mouton strategies**

Blake & Mouton on the basis of their research stated that people adopt one of the following five strategies for reduction of conflict and struggle which are given below:

Withdrawing: In this the person resolves the problem by stepping back from the situation of struggle (lose-lose approach).

Smoothing: This comprises of putting emphasis on points of common interests and avoiding discussion on matters of debate or controversy. Thus, this approach tries to minimize differences between the two warring factions (lose-lose approach).

Compromising: This strategy seeks to decrease differences through discussion (lose-lose approach).

Forcing: This approach is an all or none approach in that it takes a competitive stand. It is this way or that way approach (win-lose approach).

Confrontation and problem solving: Both parties openly discuss all matters and the best mutually acceptable solution is accepted (win-win approach).