Methods of Conflict Resolution:

Regardless of the level of conflict, there are differing approaches to deal with the Incompatibilities that exist. Conflict can result in destructive outcomes or creative ones depending on the approach that is taken. If we can manage conflict creatively, we can often find new solutions that are mutually satisfactory to both parties. Given interdependence, three general strategies have been identified that the parties may take toward dealing with their conflict; win-lose, lose-lose, and win-win (Blake, Shepard & Mouton, 1964).

The **win-lose approach:** This is very common. People learn this type of behaviours - destructive conflict early in life. It entails – competition, dominance, aggression and defence which is found in many of our social relationships from the family to the school playground. The is based on the wrong notion that what one party gains, the other loses. The strategy is thus to force the other side to capitulate. Sometimes, this is done through socially acceptable mechanisms such as majority vote, the authority of the leader, or the determination of a judge. Sometimes, it involves secret strategies, threat, innuendo – whatever works is acceptable, i.e., the ends justify the means. The major goal of this type of resolution is to have a victor who is superior, and a vanquished who withdraws in shame, but who prepares very carefully for the next round. In the long run, everyone loses.

The **lose-lose strategy** is characterised by smoothing over conflict or by reaching the simplest of compromises. This strategy believes that disagreement is inevitable. There is need to settle the difference or smooth over difficulties in as painless a way as possible? Sometimes, this is indeed the reality of the situation, and the costs are less than in the win-lose approach, at least for the loser. At the end of the day, each party gets some of what it wants, and resigns itself to partial satisfaction. Neither side is aware that by confronting the conflict fully and cooperatively they might have created a more satisfying solution. Or the parties may realistically use this approach to divide limited resources or to forestall a win-lose escalation and outcome.

The **win-win approach** entails a conscious and systematic attempt to maximize the goals of both parties through collaborative problem solving approach. The underlining principle is that conflict is seen as a problem to be solved rather than a war to be won. The important distinction is we (both parties) versus the problem, rather than we (one party) versus they (the other party). This method focuses on the needs and constraints of both parties rather than emphasizing strategies designed to conquer. Full problem definition and analysis and development of alternatives precede consensus decisions on mutually agreeable solutions. The parties work toward common goals, i.e., ones that can only be attained by both parties pulling together. There is an emphasis on the quality of the long term relationships between the parties, rather than short term accommodations. Communication is open and direct rather than secretive and calculating.

Threat and coercion are prohibited/barred. Build up of trust and acceptance is encourages rather than an increase in suspicion and hostility. The win-win approach requires a very high degree of patience and skill in human relations and problem solving.

Conclusion:

Conflict is an inevitable fact of human existence. If we work to understand and manage it effectively, we can improve both the satisfaction and productivity of our social relationships.

Selection, features and use of some group techniques

Small Group Techniques (adapted from: http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/reports/pittd/ smlgroup.htm)

What characterises small group exercises?
1. active participation and interaction;
2. run by a group leader or facilitator;
3. a task, theme, or goal;
4. help reach consensus or develop priorities;
5. help gather a range of ideas, opinions, and concerns;
6. applied to either planning or project development;
7. In a breakout group, a small group task reflects the larger group agenda; and
8. Breakout groups report back to the larger group.

Why use them?
1.   Small group techniques foster interaction between participants.

 In most small group techniques participants are encouraged to speak frankly and openly. There are ground rules, such as allowing only one person to speak at a time, ensuring a fair play between all participants. An open and unbiased meeting processes promote adequate interaction with some element of trust.

2.   They make a larger meeting more efficient and productive.

Breakout groups use various techniques to address a specific issue. It allows series of ideas to be brought up in the small groups which could be useful in a larger setting. It helps enriched the larger setting when ideas are collated, reported and incorporated into the issue at hand.

3.   Small group techniques foster dissemination of information

The information gathered is brought back and used by a larger community. Representatives meet in small sessions, cover issues, and report back to their constituents. Talking/teaching others about your ideas clarifies issues and help make issues more clearer.

4.   Techniques make meetings more interesting.

The interactive nature of small group activities makes them highly interesting and the experience could be real fun. People are interested normally and willing to attend and participate when they know the session will be highly productive and of less stress.

4.   Small group techniques offer a strategy for achieving a meeting goal.
Techniques helps keep conversation on track or establish a step-by-step process for handling discussion. They help develop consensus or an action plan.