

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT SKILLS IN THE WORKPLACE – HOW TO UNDERSTAND AND TO MANAGE A CONFLICT

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Abstract: The study of the conflict management is an increasing domain in the human resources management analyze, as it contributes to a better understanding of individual and group behavior within an organization. Anyone who is working in an organization probably noticed the existence of conflicts. The more people involved in the communication process, the risk and the expectance that the information be changed or wrong interpreted is more ample, so the communication barriers that are or not aware of, are creating the conflicts. Therefore, this study examines the conflict, the sources of its appearance, the typology of the conflict, emotional intelligence, behavioral states, conflict strategies and its solutions. Conflict is resolved through negotiation of interests, seeking equitable solutions and not through renouncing and giving up relationships. What can we improve? We shouldn't try to be better than our predecessors or our contemporaries, but we should be better than us.

JEL classification: M12, M14, M51

Key words: conflict, interests, behavior, communications, conflicts of interests, transactional analysis.

1. INTRODUCTION

In general, the conflict appears as a form of human interaction in which two or more members of a community that are at odds with each other.

In other words, the conflict is an intentional interference of an individual or group, in efforts to achieve the goals of another group. Since the goals of both parties are often incompatible, goal achievement by one of the parties makes it impossible to achieve by the other party.

The social behavior is the interaction effect of the social factors and of the surrounding forces, and our response to them. The conflict is a state of opposition, disagreement or incompatibility between two or more persons, or group of people, which is sometimes characterized by physical violence (Ionescu A., 2008, p.30).

The conflict is a reality of our lives (Goodwin C. and others, 2007, p.3), is widespread in communication and in relations between people. Words have become weapons in verbal attacks and many people still have not learned effective meaning of constructive communication, to avoid conflicts. Therefore, the ability to manage a conflict is often seen more as an art, than as a skill.

In many cases, the conflict can be positive or negative. The conflict between team members can be a bad thing, when it is custom, but can be a good thing, when it is

a conflict of opinions. A conflict may appear as a positive indicator, which signals the opportunities for change and development. The conflict occurs in situations such cooperation, in which two or more parties have consistent goals, because the way in which one party tries to reach their goal can still undermine the other. This situation justifies the need for a strategy to develop the organization's ability to manage effectively and creatively exploit human resources (Şchiopoi A., 2008,p.7).

The best methods for resolving conflicts are generally those that focus on collaborative problem solving and intersecting the interests and the needs of both parties (Goodwin C. and others, 2007, p.8).

Human resources are active, creative production (Nistorescu T., Constantinescu D., 2009, p.33). So, the views and the interests are different: the key isn't to understand the party's point of view, but why it expresses that point of view, in other words to know what's his expectations regarding cooperation.

Personal progress law: progress is a natural process in this case ... we are every day to the next level ... and now we know why comparisons are dangerous. There are no shortcuts ... and for that, as we improve we must start from where we are.

2. OBJECTIVES

This paper assumes that any organization that what to adapt to the external environment and especially to the progress, must accept the conflicts and must respond to them in a responsible and rapid way.

The approach of this paper is divided on two distinct levels of analysis. The first level is a theoretically one, which aims the presenting of the main elements in organizational conflict theory. The second level is represented by a case study conducted on an economic organization, based on the situations of the conflict.

This paper, relying on numerous examples, proposed various theoretical, rational, methodological and practical approaches, knowledge that describes the need for the analysis, the identification, the application and the management of the conflicts.

3. METHODOLOGY

The conflicts seem to be inherent in the structure of organizations, this situation involving a large number of interdependencies, which inevitably generate interpersonal conflicts. Although conflicts are not always destructive, being an expression of organizational dynamics and sometimes a factor of progress, in most cases they are an important obstacle in achieving the objectives, because the parties in conflict will spend more time and effort actions to sabotage each other. In these circumstances we conclude that the ability to control and/ or conflict resolution are crucial for the success of the organization.

The research has revealed that disagreement is blocking decision, while consensus is an effective facilitator. In addition, disagreement creates tension, conflict, and a negative mood group.

The art of reconciliation represents the balance between what is a good result for me with what is a good result for you.

Another paradigm of cultural systems approach is the one of differentiation and of the multiple meanings. It is based on the idea of dissension of the organizational units and subunits and the consensus of the subculture. This perspective is argued by the existence of different cultures, which are, moreover, the source of the organizational change and conflict.

Our interpersonal relations must reach a level of common interest based on understanding – if their presence is recognized; they will recognize you in turn. Any blockage or conflict should not be translated into a closed or permanent situation.

4. ANALYSES

4.1. The description of the conflict

If we're in the same boat, why some are rowing and some others hole so that the water goes in?

Micro-organizational behavior is concerned about motivation, communication, learning, perception, competence, attitudes and behavior, group dynamics, leadership and conflict dynamics. The profile of the risks is a characteristic for each organization and takes into account its strengths and its weaknesses (Constantinescu D. and others, 2008, p.159).

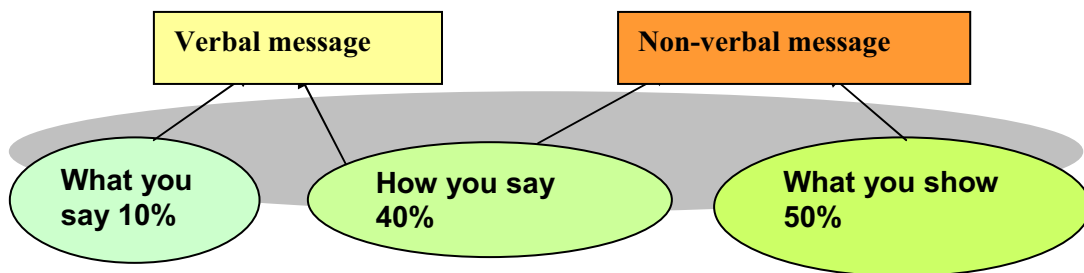
The rapid technological changes and widespread use of computer conquest justifies the need for a strategy to develop the organization's ability to efficiently manage and capitalize on creative human resources (Șchiopoiu A., 2008, p.7).

Strategic decisions regard the attracting of the resources, the structural transformation, the solution of the major conflicts, etc., actions of which the development organization depends on.

The research has revealed that disagreement is blocking decision, while consensus is an effective facilitator. In addition, disagreement creates tension, conflict, and a negative mood group.

Tensions and conflicts produced from different views are damaging.

The signals of the loss of the control: greenness in working with people, perfectionist tendencies, does not encourage team, overestimation of personal input in collective activity, do not want to invest in time or in goodwill; characterized by: tension, stress, no confidence, fear, refusing to make the team feel better etc.



Source: Stăncescu A, 2007, p.23

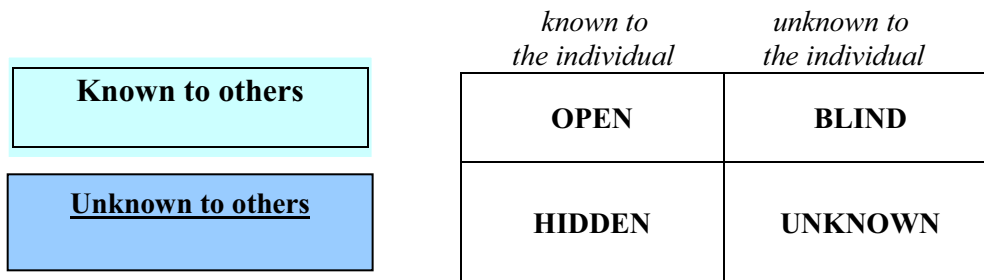
Figure no.1. Conflict communication – the plurality of the languages

The more people involved in the communication process, the risk and the likelihood that information is altered or misinterpreted is major; barriers to communication are or aren't aware of the situation, but they exist anyway, as a result of: the difference in power, language - barriers of jargon, slang or specialized language

(eg. technical), differences in culture and interests, as well as position or another frame of reference (perceptions, theories); defense - springs into action as soon as one of the interlocutors feels attacked; evaluative communication - the criticism that labels the other party: good, bad, hardworking, lazy; unilateral communication (dogmatic) - narrow views of people unable to accept the view of the others; tendency to turn the discussion into confrontation, change "lines", not arguments; these people always start from the premise that they are right; manipulated communication - trying to influence someone, hidden reasons, typically leads to reverse side; amount of information: the maximum or minimum (poisoning statistics); misunderstanding of roles; selective listening, no response, no real feedback, other psycho-social rules.

To make a rational decision, our emotions must inform our intellect, and the intellect must moderate the temperament and must be not guided by emotions. A balance between emotion and intellect must be achieved.

Johari's Window is a model that allows us to understand the complexity of the interpersonal communication and of the behavior, following the flow of information between two people. Johari's Window divides the information about a person into 4 zones, depending on the degree of self-knowledge and other information about the individual.



Source: Stăncescu A, 2007, p.17

Figure no.2. Johari's Window

These areas interact and can modify the dimensions in the communication process, we'll analyze various types of interactions:

1. best communication is between the open areas of the partners, effective communication requires that the interlocutors have bigger open areas, which require proper understanding of the message and achieve optimal exposure to the message;
2. unintentional communication is taking place between the blind zone of a person and the open one of the other; it represents the action of receiving messages that the person does not want or do not realize that they communicate;
3. intentional communication (auto exposure) is between the hidden zone of a person and open zone to the other; it consists in conscious disclosure issues, that are typically hidden; this type of communication is based on confidence;
4. communication between the unknown areas of interlocutors takes place at an emotional level, affecting a person's feelings and behavior of the other, without necessarily being aware of this process, eg.: deep anxiety or nervous tension can be transmitted interlocutor, even though the issuer is aware of them.

“We all want to make a good impression on others, but the most effective way is to show how much we are impressed on others!”

Approaching people definitely depends on what we think they are; no other approach would be smart; our feelings to others depend on our ideas and the extent to which we know them (Stăncescu A., 2007, p.12).

The more we believe that our peers are simple and determined physical systems - robots, machines, brains - the approach will be more soulless and more selfish; on the other hand, the more we recognize their mental existence, as having an unique character, as being more original and more creative than a simple space-time-table, with or without accelerators vectors, will be much more interested in their personality and we'll have tendency to respect and to acknowledge their views and their feelings.

Our interpersonal relations must reach a level of common interest based on understanding – if their presence is recognized; they will recognize you in turn. Any blockage or conflict should not be translated into a closed or permanent situation.

Emotional intelligence is a concept which is applicable maximum in the peer influence; emotion is contagious and represents a system of signals that are transmitted without using words, even with greater impact; social attitudes, which are all based on the communication process can be transcribed in some basic skills, all subscribed to the same concept: empathy.

Conflict - identifies the sources of conflict and the potential conflict situations and transforms them in good opportunities to share both point of views, encourages debates transformed in solutions (Weiss A., 2003, p.56).

Organizational conflict management is based on understanding the causes of the conflict and the recognition of the needs for negotiation.

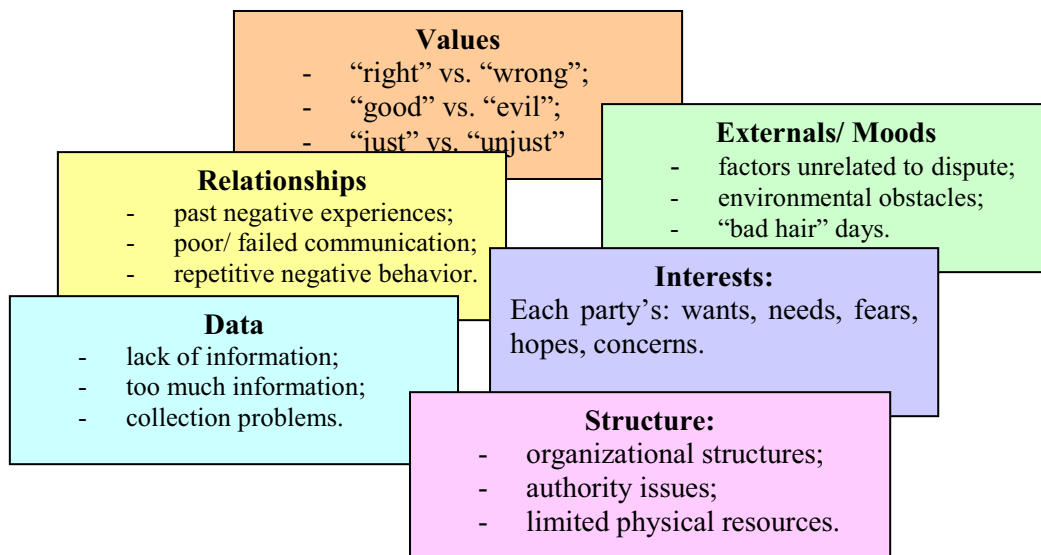


Figure no.3. Elements for the understanding of the conflict

“One of the golden rules of the motivation is that you can not force a need, you just work with it”

In principle it is difficult to identify the needs of each individual, but teams are made up of performing individuals. Each team will work without tension if no one is considered more important, it is preferable to remove the symbols that distinguish an individual as more important than another (not to be confused with better professional than the other). In planning decisions and solving difficult situations, all members should be included.

The conflict is usually resolved by the giving up of the both sides in order to find a middle way; this strategy gives the impression of fairness, but may not be sufficient as each side fights for something more. Compromise disadvantage is that, in general, a party may seem more "generous" by giving the other party feeling of defeat.

Conflicts can also be prevented through the separation of the problem from the person:

- the recognition and the acceptance of the differences between individuals and groups in relation to their values, perceptions and needs;
- we all make mistakes and we all have right, equally;
- the avoid of the selective listening;
- the encouraging of the both positive and negative feelings;
- we all learn from the solutions of the conflicts.

What affects in a good way the people at work, making it possible to reduce the tensions and the conflicts?

- motivating factors: opportunities for personal development, appreciation, recognition right work, the opportunity to be creative, "freedom to fail";
- hygiene factors: safety; facilities; working conditions; colleagues personality; organizational structure; additional benefits.

The motivation is a result of the relationship between the individual and the environment where he works. This relationship can be defined according to the psychological contract between the two parties.

The conflict is resolved by the negotiating of the interests, by the seeking of the solutions and not by waiver or failure of the human relationships; the waiver is deferred and the broke of the relationship is the supplier of the conflict (Schmid A., 2004, p.183).

The resolving of the conflict in a fair way for all parties involved can be checked by the Pareto principle - no party could not obtain a better result than the obtained one, and can be confirmed after achieving Pareto efficiency - a party can not get more than expense of other parties (to affect the balance).

- "Soft" conflict resolution, with gentleness: amicably; the reconciliation is needed, gentle with the people and with the problems; total trust; the change of the position easily; the saying of the truth; hanging on peace, surrender to loss, avoid confrontation wills; the yield under pressure;

- "Hard" conflict resolution, by coercive measures: adversity; victory with all costs included; the imposition of the concessions; strict with the people; strict with the problems; query; only one side will win the "unilateral right" threats; seeking answers accepted; strengthening only one of the positions; trying to win the battle of wills; pressure;

- Conflict resolution in principle: solutions to problems; wise results; small and wise concessions; the separation of the problem from the person; tough issues; soft on

people; focus on the interests, not on the positions; creating new options; objectives, results based on pre-agreed standards; yielding to the principles, not because of pressure.

But, by approaching the conflicts, the attitude is very important: we address to people's problems and not their personality; the attack of the person is the first obstacle in resolving tensions.

Each people tries to defend self-esteem, falls on the defensive and becomes even more aggressive and more stubborn than was originally stated position, if he's attacked; he doesn't respond emotionally - wait until the striker restored rationally (... after the steams came ...) (Schermerborn J. and others, 2002, p.113).

Would be easier to accept our personal or professional conflicts or the conflicts of others? For sure, if we understand that:

- the conflict is a continuous process which appears in any relationship at one time;
- the conflict has a situational feature;
- the conflict has a history – the present is the effect;
- the conflict is giving reasons (do not stop to apologize), such as: different reasons, other perception, selective memory, emotion parties.

What can we improve? We don't have to try to be better than our contemporaries, we have to try to be better than us!

4.2. Case study

To obtain reliable data, we turned to a research on a sample composed of 152 subjects working in SMEs in Romania. Of the 152 subjects, 50 are managers / directors and the rest are employed. Asked people are aged between 20 and 50 years, 65% of them are women and 35% are men.

The research undertaken concerns: the extent to which managers and employees are willing to accept the existence of conflicts, the interest of the company management level, related to their solution, by the method attempts to improve matters and to what extent employees and take part in this.

Research hypotheses:

- a. There are expectations of managers to employees, but also of the employees to the managers;
- b. The company management pays attention to what is extending the concept of conflicts, caused by the difference of labor;
- c. What is being done to resolve these conflicts.

In order to form an objective view, was necessary to investigate the views of the managers and of the employees, and for this we applied a total of five questionnaires, which we thought would be representative. Questionnaires aimed at issues facing the organization, which factors generate conflict, what factors determine their occurrence, how they influence organizational culture and the ways of settlement. Thus, following the interpretation of the results from these questionnaires, revealed the following:

- 100% of those asked confirmed that have work conflicts. The most significant cause actual underlying these conflicts is considered the difference between thinking in terms of labor. While employees, or most of them, are used to "Balkan" working style, the manager expects punctuality, accuracy, but sometimes it is found that the manager is not

interested in the problems, difficulties of the employees that they encounter when trying to reach his expectations. This fact marks in the most serious way the relationship.



Figure no.1. The situation regarding the existence of the conflicts

- regarding the expectations of the managers to employees, only 19% of those asked say, 54% denied and 27% did not agree, that they are too lenient, not strictly require certain standards and are trying to close and to communicate their expectations to the employees, in the end to reach an agreement. Regarding expectations of employees to employers, 15% are convinced that they face of these expectations, 5% are not convinced at all of this, and 80% believe that do not cope, in all respects, because the expectations and the requirements are not explained fully and in detail, believing that there is a lack of communication in this regard. But all those asked believe in a greater or lesser extent that "meet expectations" really means to obey the rules imposed by the manager entirely. These rules are quite rigid, personal initiatives (however good it would be) are not taken into account or are not encouraged. Clearly, emotional expression was a crucial element of not only the conflict and its escalation, but also its resolution.

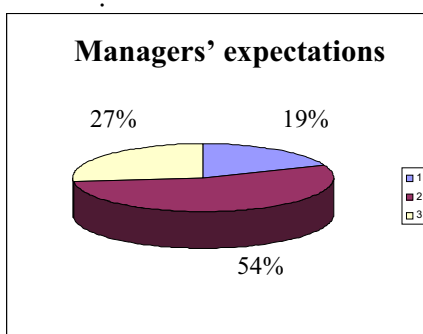


Figure no.2. Managers' expectations

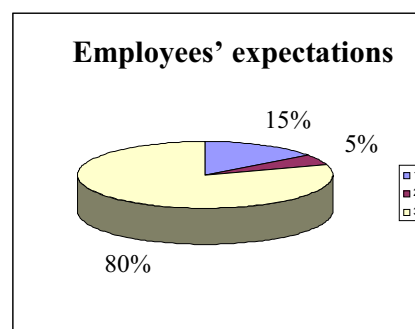


Figure no.3. Employees' expectations

- all persons agree that there is no lack of communication from top to bottom (any new requirement, new rule, or waiting is immediately communicated); 85% say they lack of the information caused conflicts because not all necessary information reach everyone, or get a little distorted, and about feedback, 95% believe that this still does not exist, because expectations are not taken into account and the manager consider that these conflicts are not addressed in any way, because they have been taken to scale, and 5% believe that the fixes were made only on the surface and the conflict is not resolved.

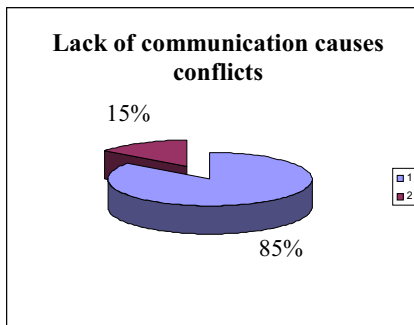


Figure no.4. Lack of communication

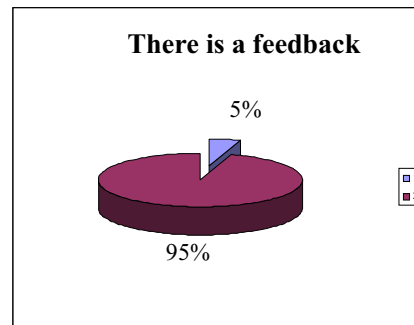


Figure no.5. Feedback

- regarding the extent to which the employer is involved in conflict resolution, 41% believe that the managers don't involve, 24% believe that they are not much involved and 35% believe that they are involved, the managers' word on the decision, regardless the results of any negotiations.

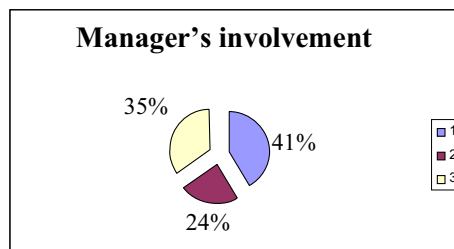


Figure no.6. The situation regarding the manager's involvement

- regarding the evolution of the conflict in the organizations, it was found that over a period of five years the trend was decreased. This fact is based on the attitude of the people. If at the beginning of the interaction of the people, of the knowledge of each personality in the frame of the organizational culture, things are more difficult and generate conflict, along this process some issues are changing. The attitude is changing, especially in a good way, because the people start to know each other and hostile issues disappear in time. Of course, this situation is also argued by the change of the personnel, who is not done so often, so people learn about the others.



Figure no.7. The five years evolution of the conflicts

5. CONCLUSIONS

The most important six words: .. *“I admit I made a mistake”*

The most important five words: ... *“I am proud of you”*

The most important four words: ... *“What is your opinion?”*

The most important three words: ... *“If you wish”*

The most important two words: ... *“Thank you”*

The most important word: ... *“We”*

The least important word: ... *“I/me”*

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