

CONFLICT – THE SOURCE OF PROGRESS OR REGRESS IN MODERN ORGANIZATIONS?

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Abstract:

Within an organization, the system of relations is based on collaboration, but also on conflict. While cooperation conditions the existence of the organization as a system, conflict ensures the dynamics of the system, but it can also be a source of progress.

Conflict management within an organization is a current issue, primarily in the practical activity, but also on a theoretical level, with a view to finding solutions.

Research has shown that managers spend between 20 and 50 % of their time trying to handle conflicts within the organization.

In an organization there are people and groups that compete for influence and resources, there are differences of opinion, different interests and values, there are conflicts of priorities and goals. Thus, the concern is in what way does the conflict have positive effects and if the competition that it generates is a favourable element or not.

The acceptance from the part of the manager of the reality according to which conflict is an inevitable presence in any organization represents an essential premise for its settlement, even for its transformation in a potential source for the development of the business.

Key words: conflict, organization, progress, modern environment

1. Introduction

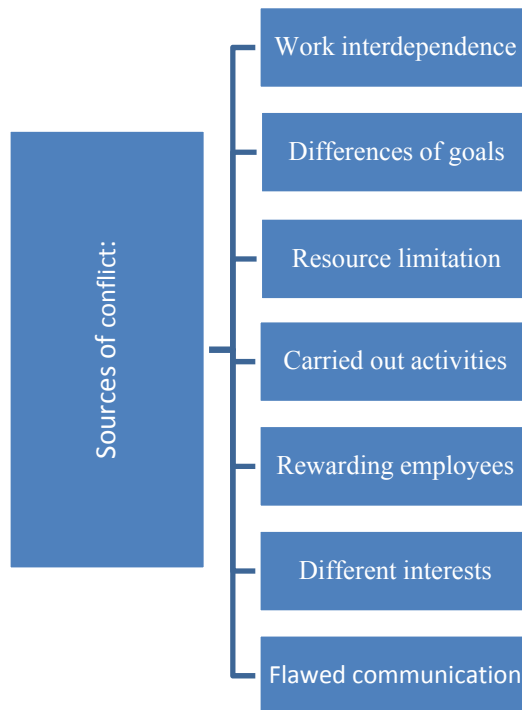
Within an organization, decisions are made by those who have the power to do so and, consequently, it is almost normal for those who are led to want to seize a part of that power or at least to influence managers, to join them or, on the contrary, to destroy the dominant coalition. Subordinates tend to make sure that their interests and values coincide with those expressed and pursued by managers. Given these conditions, managers from different levels are inevitably involved in the settlement of certain conflicts, reaching compromises, reconciling differences and accepting what is possible, not what would be ideal. Therefore, a perfect organization does not exist, only organizations where people search for solutions.

2. The Main Sources of Conflict within Commercial Organizations

Conflicts may appear and evolve due to a variety of sources, within an organization. Conflicts derive most frequently from the manner of resource allocation, from work

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interdependencies, differences of interests between managers and employees, differences between employees regarding attitudes, values, beliefs, needs, goals, different views¹.



In order to understand and deepen the knowledge of the elements which generate conflict, some specifications should be made, but also certain recommendations to oppose the negative effects of these factors. All these aspects are presented in the following table.

The source of conflict	Solutions for the mitigation of negative effects
■ Work interdependence means that a group or more groups depend on each other in order to carry out their tasks. The more complex the organization, the more probable becomes the occurrence of conflicts, which makes harder the managers' task, because the interdependencies increase.	● A clear establishment of the cooperation between different groups from the organization; ● The correct, timely and honest transmission of the results to the group with which the interaction takes place; ● Promoting an elastic, flexible, non bureaucratic organizational structure.
■ Differences of goals can occur between persons and/or groups and appear as the specialization in the respective organization increases, developing different interests. In these conditions, conflict may appear when	● Determining different groups to adhere to the organization's objectives through debating them in an open manner; ● Establishing certain clear procedures regarding the achievement of the

¹M. Drăgușin, in *Tratat de management comercial*, coordinator D. Patriche, Ed. Universitară, București, p. 272

the respective groups interact and have different approaches on certain tasks (for example, while the marketing department wants an increase of the promotion budget, the financial department has as a goal the minimisation of expenditures).	organization's goals, by taking responsibilities.
■ The limited character of resources emphasizes, in the process of their allocation, the dependencies and differences between the goals of the groups. As a result, the allocation of resources in an organization (work spaces, human resources in departments, financial resources, modernization of the IT based resources etc.) between the organizational components may generate competitions of the gain-loss type, which can transform rapidly into dysfunctional conflicts.	● The judicious allocation of resources; ● Establishing the necessary of resources for each group, with a certain deadline, in advance and respecting it; ● Establishing priorities, in accordance with certain objective criteria.
■ The nature of activities, their number and structure, their distribution over the employees may also lead to conflicts.	● The correct and impartial establishment of work tasks and avoidance of overloading and overlapping.
■ The system of evaluating and rewarding the company's employees (differentiated on categories of personnel) represents inevitably and invariably a source of conflict. Not respecting the theory of equity together with the different perceptions of the employees concerning the fairness of the evaluations and the level of the given rewards generate tensions and even strong conflicts.	● Transparency regarding the system of rewards; ● Public acknowledgement of the employees' merits; ● Discussing regularly the system of rewards; ● Establishing some principles concerning the rewards and respecting them accordingly.
■ Different interests between the leading system (managers) and the one being led (subordinates) bring with them numerous conflicts. While the former wishes efficiency, economy of resources, productivity, the subordinates' compliance with their authority, the latter is usually attracted by high salaries and freedom of action.	● Balance between the interests of managers and those of subordinates/employees; ● Adopting a stimulative salary system; ● Ensuring a certain freedom of movement for subordinates, with a view to accomplishing work tasks.
■ Flawed communication, the misunderstanding of goals or methods proposed for their achievement represents frequent causes for conflict. The lack of proper skills of communication, both on the vertical and horizontal hierarchy, favours message distortion, which brings negative effects on a decisional level, but also regarding the action plan, often generating conflicts.	● Implementing an efficient communication system, preferably a computerised one; ● Regularly discussing objectives and their adjustment, in relation to the evolution of the respective organization.

3. The Stages of Conflict

Knowing the issues of the origin and evolution of conflicts allows the manager to modulate adequately the managerial process. Studies have shown a certain sequencing in the evolution of a conflict: latent conflict, acknowledged conflict, ongoing conflict, consequences of the conflict.



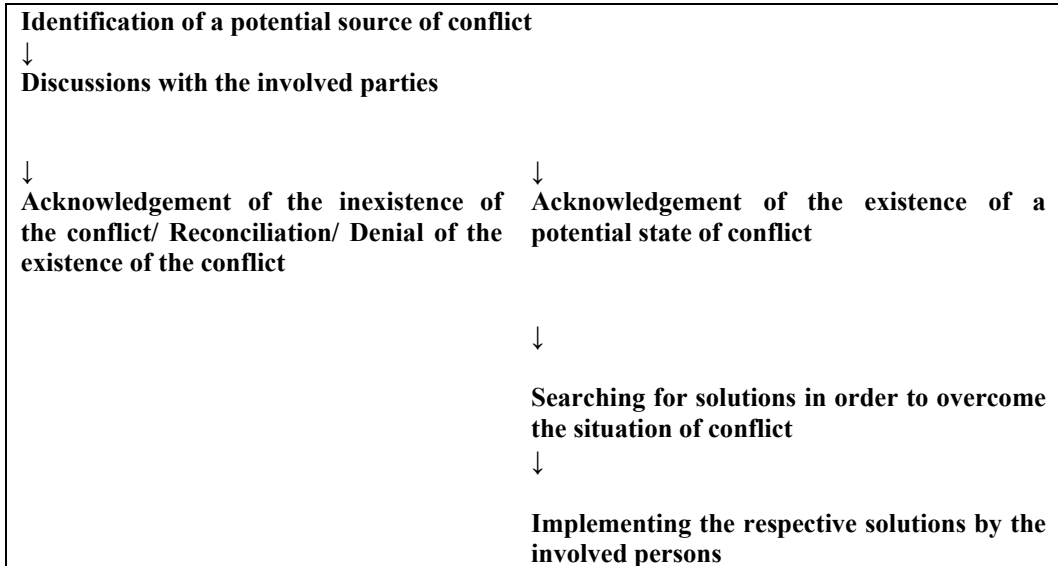
Fig. No. 1 The stages of conflict

- a) In the *first stage*, the conflict is latent, hard to perceive and the potential for conflict appears as a result of the differences within the organization.
- b) The acknowledgement of the potential conflict by one or more than one involved parties marks the transition to the *second stage*. It is the stage in which an emotional reaction is experienced and it can take the form of disappointment, hostility, frustration, tension or pain.
- c) In the *third stage*, the conflict passes from the cognitive state to the action state. In this state, the conflict becomes open and the parties involved take action either to find a solution or escalate the conflict. Coming up with a solution implies that all the parties involved in the respective conflict have an open attitude towards the mutual communication of their needs and concerns.
- d) The *fourth stage* of the conflict materializes the effect or the consequence. The actions from the previous stage augment directly the functionality and dysfunctionality of the effect.

Functional consequences include: a better understanding of the roots of the conflict, an enhancement of the quality of the decisions, a greater focus on creativity, innovation, which encourages positive approaches to problems. Dysfunctional consequences include: polarizations of the organization members, destruction of the team spirit, resorting to defence strategies and blockage.

4. The Procedural Approach to Conflict

In order to mitigate the negative effects of conflicts, a procedural approach is recommended in this sense, which can have a preventive role and this will lead to saving the time dedicated to the development and reconciliation of the conflict, but also to saving resources. Modern organizations must establish procedures of risk identification of internal conflicts, as well as of finding solutions for them. Within an organization, conflicts are overseen by the resort manager, in others by the superior manager and in big organizations there are organizational structures which handle these issues, as well as ethics commissions, integrity commissions, arbitration panels etc.



5. Conclusions

The **strategies** to find a solution to conflicts are of 5 distinct types: the types of conflict management through **avoidance and adaptation** (considered *no confrontational strategies*), the type of **competition** (associated with *control strategies*) and the types of **collaboration and compromise** management (*strategies oriented towards finding solutions*).

Communication is an important instrument of preventing and dealing with conflicts, which can be used by the manager. The correct presentation of one's own image, knowing the subordinates and showing respect for them, as well as acknowledging one's own mistakes and active listening can reduce the conflictual potential.

Approaching objections, reproaches, criticism, as potential preceding stages of major conflicts implies the usage of some tactics: of reformulation, redefinition, collaboration, solution solicitation, metaphorical, retaliatory and discussion interruption.

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