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## CONFLICT - A PERMANENT COORDINATE OF EXISTENCE

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**Abstract:** *Conflict has existed everywhere, where there are people, where there are ideas, values, circumstances, styles and standards that may conflict, which means that anything can be the cause of a conflict: objectives, goals, aspirations, unconfirmed expectations, habits, prejudices, personalities and ideologies, competition, sensitivity and injury, aggression, and more. It is said that "there are more conflicts than grains of sand in the world and it may be true, as true as the fact that our society itself affects our values, principles and beliefs, behaviour and views on conflict. Nevertheless, transposed into specific organizational context, the basic idea is that for any manager, addressing conflict, which is an inherent element of group life, becomes as equally important for organization life as the other management functions.*

**Keywords:** *conflict, organization, organizational culture, conflict management, intrapersonal conflict, interpersonal conflict, intergroup conflict*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In the early approaches of conflict management - in the second half of the nineteenth century to the early decades of the twentieth century, the basic idea was that all conflicts are negative and counterproductive in organizational life, which has determined this process to become synonymous with avoiding conflict, leaving room for a single result, win-lose scenario; in this case, the natural consequence is that of perpetuating the scene of conflict - a situation that managerial vision needs to eliminate. Yet, avoiding conflict is not a performance strategy in the long run; instilling into people involved in the conflict the feeling

of being neglected and failing to reconcile differences, the primary source that generates the conflict keeps functioning, and although it can be kept under control for a certain period of time, unresolved tensions reappear, perhaps with more force.

The inter-relationist approach in conflict management has been intensely promoted during the period between the end of the fifth decade and the middle of the eighth decade of the 20th century; focusing on conflict as a natural and inevitable event in any organizational environment, that perspective proposed not the elimination of the conflict, but its acceptance and the exploitation of its results for the benefit of organizational life.

The 1970s brought to the fore a new perspective on the organizational conflict theory, the interactionist approach, in which, beyond acceptance, conflict is encouraged, starting from the premise that a harmonious organizational life, based on cooperation and without conflicts, manifests a tendency for stagnation, reacting inadequately to the changes and progress of market phenomena.

## **2. WHY IS IT IMPORTANT THE CONFLICT?**

In a tumultuous quantum era - torn apart by economic and financial crisis, characterized by an inevitable process of diminishing of resources, marked by the emergence and also by the disintegration of national state forms and of supranational organizations, confronted with the simultaneous focus and ambiguity of forums invested with position and authority taking over some others – the global human ideal remains that of a society where a culture of peace is prevailing, in which the futuristic projection of a non - conflicting world crosses over the imagination zone into the three-dimensional boundaries of reality; the appearance of this point of transformation is mostly and most consciously determined by the human factor and placed in the stage where the citizens of the planet “will understand global problems, will have the skills to resolve conflicts and to do justice through non-violence, will live according to human rights and equality standards, will appreciate cultural diversity and will have respect for the Earth and for the other fellows.”

From the different philosophical angle of pragmatism, conflict appears to be “an aspect of all natural phenomena, an indispensable part of life, of change, of creating new forms. Latent forms in stars or atoms are examples of physical prototypes in which conflict can cause enormous explosions and destruction. Forces

influence each other, and so do people, who are in turn also some forces; we are influenced by what we influence. Conflict will end only under the circumstances in which the universe itself achieves a state of perfect equilibrium, in which case we did not exist. Life itself, as representation is a means of maintaining the imbalance. In many cases, conflict is the generator of new solutions rather than the destabilizing form of balance.”

The term conflict (< lat. *conflictus*, fr. *conflit*), which is defined in the Romanian language dictionaries with the meanings, ”violent material or moral impact clash, clash of interests controversial situation, state of hostility, disagreement, misunderstanding, divergence, difference, dispute, fight, antagonism, argument, (violent) discussion” refers to the awareness of the incompatibilities usually resulted from some form of interference or opposition. Unlike crises that physically and symbolically affect the entire organization, dramatically putting into question its basic values, conflicts are events that affect the symbolic referential system of an organization, but they do not question its fundamental values (e.g. a dispute between the leaders of an organization, a protest of a group, a threat of strike).

When a conflict is looming, managerial perspective and handling are needed, provided that real awareness of its bases happens first. Once you have passed the threshold of recognition and action stages, approach and effective resolution of the conflict become more difficult and thus, the opportunity of obtaining the „optimum” level of conflict is lost.

The crucial role that a real organization manager now has in addressing conflict and crisis is illustrated by a scene of life in antiquity - the misleading polar relation between past and present is actually not an antagonistic one, basically set on exclusion, but one of a



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networking reform to which new meanings have been attached. Dissatisfied with the existing education system (as many other parents are nowadays), Philip of Macedonia brings the famous philosopher Aristotle as a private teacher for his son, a 11-year boy named Alexander – to whom mankind will later attach the phrase the Great; for a full year, Alexander had been taught by his master not only almost endless knowledge of mathematics, politics, history and philosophy, but also of leading people. One day, in the middle of his math lesson, Alexander asked, 'How much is one?' "And though Aristotle had in mind several answers 'It is a unit, a prime number, half of two, is formed of two halves', aware of his responsibility for teacher, he asked respite for a day to meditate on the answer. The next day, he taught young Alexander - the future warrior king who was to extend the Greek civilization in the world - a real lesson about what it is called today 'leadership': "In the arena of human relations and successful management one means a lot."

The message in the management field that emerges from the Aristotlian lesson is that during a conflict, and even more during a crisis facing the organization, policy makers should give clear evidence that the situation is seriously considered and managed in the spirit of respect for all the rights of the organization members.

However, based on sociological approach on conflict as opposition under the form of a struggle between individuals, groups of individuals, social classes, which results in

dysfunctions of social interaction, the managerial operationalization of the term *conflict* is usually in the shadowing characteristics of exaggerated competitiveness, of adversity, of aggression, of incompatibility with 'win-win' situations.

Thus, the maximum degree of conflict is defined in the literature as "a struggle between values and claims of status, power and resources "(L.A. Coser, 1967), "a relation in which each side perceives the goals, values, interests and conduct of the other as antithetical" (J. Burton, 1988), "a form of opposition centered on the opponent, based on incompatibility of goals, intentions and values of the opposing parties." (M. Vlăsceanu in S. Iosipescu).

Lowering the "conflict voltage" is visible in the definition of conflict as a "divergence of interests as it is perceived, or the belief that current aspirations of the parties cannot be simultaneously achieved." (J.Z. Rubin, D.G. Pruitt and S.H. Kim, 1994) or as a situation in which "individuals, obstructed or irritated by another individual or a group, inevitably react in a beneficial or costly manner." (E. Van Vliert, 1997).

The conflict in its conceptual complexity is considered as a three-dimensional psychosocial phenomenon, involving a cognitive component (thinking, perception of conflict), an affective component (feelings and emotions) and a behavioral component (action, including communication), "appearing when two or more parts / systems (individuals, groups, communities) in interdependence are, or they

only have the perception of being, different or even incompatible regarding the needs, goals, values, resources or personality traits, thus the difference or incompatibility produces a state of tension that is required to be discharged.” (B. Mayer, 2000)

In attempting a personal definition, conflict is the *processual sequential frame of system non-identification; frame* as it cut out of situational reality; *processual* because there is a gradation of conflict, starting with the moment of awareness up to its escalation phase; *sequential* refers to the temporal axis, as conflict can exist only for a determined period of time - even the Thirty Years’ War had periods of truce or peace; *non-identification* takes into account the totality of relationships between the conflict causes and types of manifestation: asymmetry, differences, incompatibility, opposition, antithesis, fight, regarding needs, goals, values, resources or personality traits; conflicts occur between the parties, between *systems*, a word which thus focuses both on the individual as a psychosocial system (intrapersonal conflict) and on social aggregate as a whole, including groups (interpersonal and intra-group conflict) and organizations as socio-economic-cultural identities (intergroup conflict).

### **3. CONFLICT - A CONSTANT PRESENCE IN DAILY LIFE**

Regardless of any perspectives, conflict is a “natural consequence of diversity”, it is an integrated part of human activity and it is inevitable because of the two key aspects of human behavior, cognition and social interaction. Human cognition is described in psychology as an activity of understanding and a way to understand the world we live in is solving problems or situations that need to be clarified, as a result of confusion or conflict.

Conflict between individuals or groups tends to be conducted in terms of their relative power.

Since all human relationships vary depending on the extent and type of power exercised by the systems involved, any type of relationship has a certain degree of potential for conflict. People can exercise their power by means of: resources they may have, charisma, status, their life and work experience or their ability of coercion on the others - or of any combination of these elements. Due to the complexity of human society and implicitly of social phenomena, due to the diversity and size of available power resources, balance is almost an exception. Power is continuously transferred from one individual or group to another. In other words, imbalance or incongruity are born in human interactions; the more social interactions people engage in, the greater number of opportunities for disagreement.

### **4. SOURCES OF CONFLICT**

Conflict has existed everywhere, where there are people, where there are ideas, values, circumstances, styles and standards that may conflict, which means that anything can be the cause of a conflict: objectives, goals, aspirations, unconfirmed expectations, habits, prejudices, personalities and ideologies, competition, sensitivity and injury, aggression, and more.

Essentially, there can be identified three major directions on which the perpetuation of conflict is structured:

- In a world becoming more and more diverse, different people want different things and there are few things that can please everyone

- Regardless of the place or the type of organization we work in, we have something in common with all the other employees, and that is working with people which mean that inevitably, we face conflict. Disagreements,



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incompatibilities, aspirations, offended egos are just some of the many reasons why collective activities generate conflicts.

- We live and work in a world that limits our resources; we rarely get exactly what we want, given the existing options and imposed limitations. From this point of view, there are many examples in which conflict is caused by limited resources and organizational constraints.

The most common sources of conflict are considered to be:

- Discrepancies in organizational culture, between systems of values and norms, between behavioral patterns, etc. that guides the behavior of members of an organization.

- Erroneous perceptions of the actual facts, due to prejudices, differences of intentions and interests, but also to the mental image about the opponent perceived as 'evil', 'immoral', 'ruthless', etc.. This image, shared in the "mirror" by the opposing group, can lead to the failure of any attempt at conciliation.

- Exacerbated competition, coupled with aggressiveness, especially in connection with the distribution of scarce resources necessary for the activities of the involved people or groups.

- Different criteria for defining performance; differences in environment or ambience

- Ambiguity in defining the areas of authority and responsibility

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

Concluding, we may say that it has become necessary for managers to create the appropriate framework for the outbreak of a small-scale conflict in order to maintain an optimal level of performance achievement in the organization; thus, conflict is conceptualized as a necessary element that conditions progress, both individually, and especially, organizationally and consequently, managers are encouraged to engage in conflict building and exploitation for a continual beneficial change.

Approaching conflict, seen from the perspective of the "nucleus of change", contributes to a more accurate understanding of the major change of the organizational dynamics as well as of its planning and handling. A complementary concept for conflict is education, which is also a fundamental coordinate of human existence and that is the reason why one of the most stringent change in the organizational life is creating a "learning organization" aware of the available options, barriers and ways of learning. The school institution is perhaps among the most representative parts, not only of the educational system, but also of the social one for the concept of the learning organization and for the implementation of managerial strategies of resolving conflict.

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