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Conflict Management, a new challenge

Oachesu Madalina[a]*

[a] Valahia University of Targoviste, Doctoral School of Economics and Humanities, 130105 Targoviste, Romania.

Abstract

"The art of communication is the language of leadership" James Humes. In a world of multiple interdependencies, the relationship between individuals and between the individual and his environment proves that life occupies a central role. One of the important aspects of social life takes into account all kinds of interactions between individuals. Besides establishing and maintaining functional human relationships, life within a group leads to situations of conflict. Given that the main group component in an average daily life is manifested most strongly on the job, this paper aims to examine issues related to the management of conflict in the work environment. The management of conflicts are multiple, depending on the nature of the causes that led to the conflict, this paper focuses on highlighting the role of communication in the conflict management process, specifically, the role of communication which is regarded as the common denominator of all organizational arrangements for managing conflicts. Conflicts are endemic to society as a whole. They are directly related to the scarcity of resources, division of functions and tasks, power of relations, differentiation and organization roles in society. Any organization, regardless of its type (public institution, state-owned commercial organization or private non-profit organization, etc.), face daily conflicts that are based on different causes of internal and external organization. Organizations are living systems, which consist of units that interact, each having their own defined roles, interdependent and are expected to operate in a structured environment with clearly defined resources, if the context is such, conflict becomes inevitable.

Keywords: communication, managing conflict, challenge

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* Oachesu Madalina. Tel.+0040.765.328.243
   E-mail address: maditzza@yahoo.com

1. Introduction

When people work as a group, conflict is one of the most predictable outcomes. Most managers spend a lot of their working time dealing with conflicts or fallouts from people-related problems.

Mismanagement of conflicts leads to a diverse distribution of incorrect energy towards the workforce, wrong direction communication errors that must be corrected, ultimately leading to missed opportunities. It is difficult to calculate the losses related to organizational conflict. The aim of this study is to provide methods for diagnosing and managing conflict effectively. Conflict is complex, because at minimum it involves the interaction of cognitive, psychological, physiological, and contextual dynamics. Most conflict theories take only a psychological and/or an economic approach to understanding and managing conflict. The purpose of the following theories is to reduce or resolve a conflict between individuals and groups

In all relationships, communication plays a crucial role - establish and maintain relationships between employees. The feed-back reveals opportunities for improvement individually as well as the overall performance of the organization. A underlying motivation process identifies communication, knowledge and proper use of various categories of needs and incentives to guide employee behavior in order to increase performance and satisfaction. Communication contributes to the establishment of fair and efficient relations, mutual understanding and acceptance between bosses and subordinates, colleagues, people inside and outside the organization.

Referring to organizational communication line manager, Gary Johns says that theoretically, the lines of authority can be found along the lines of the establishment as well as reporting relationships. It would be a great shame not to report today that communication between people spends most of his time in the organizational framework.

1.1. Conflict Definition

Conflict refers to some form of friction, disagreement, or discord arising between individuals or within a group when the beliefs or actions of one or more members of the group are either resisted by or unacceptable to one or more members of another group. Conflict pertains to the opposing ideas and actions of different entities, thus resulting in an antagonistic state. (Tschannen-Moran,2001).

1.2. Types of conflict

Because of the diverse and varied definitions of conflict, attitudes towards it and images of its role are also varied. Conflict in schools takes different forms; for example teachers seem reluctant to obey the principals, they do not seem to follow rules or accept extra work, they do not easily get along with their principals. Principals too adopt an authoritative approach, for example they pressure teachers to work uninterrupted during school activities. It therefore, becomes common that conflict between teachers and the school principal occur frequently at any time in the school. In institutions, conflict occurs between various individuals because of their frequent interaction with each other. Conflict is an expression of hostility, antagonism and an understanding between the staff members (Axley Stephner R. Communication at Work) Bearing all in mind, conflict is classified into the following four types:

• **Interpersonal conflict** refers to a conflict between two individuals. This occurs typically due to how people are different from one another.

• **Intrapersonal conflict** occurs within an individual. The experience takes place in the person's mind. Hence, it is a type of conflict that is psychological involving the individual's thoughts, values, principles and emotions.

• **Intra-group conflict** is a type of conflict that happens among individuals within a team. The incompatibilities and misunderstandings among these individuals lead to an intra-group conflict

• **Inter-group conflict** takes place when a misunderstanding arises among different teams within an organization. In addition, competition also contributes to the rise of intergroup conflict. There are other factors which fuel this type of conflict, some of these factors may include a rivalry in resources or the boundaries set by a group to others which establishes their own identity as a team (Denohue, and Kott.1992). In addition to this category(Jehn and Mannix 2001) have proposed the division of conflicts into three types: relationship, task, and process. Relationship conflict stems from interpersonal incompatibilities; task conflict is related to disagreements of viewpoints and opinion about a particular task, and process conflict refers to disagreement over the group's approach to the task, its

methods, and the group process. Even though the relationship conflict and process conflict are harmful, task conflict is found to be beneficial since it encourages diversity of opinions, care should be taken so it does not develop into process or relationship conflict (Denohue, and Kott, 1992).

Amason and Sapienza (1997) differentiate between affective and cognitive conflict, where cognitive conflict is task-oriented and arises from differences in perspective or judgment, and affective conflict is emotional and arises from personal differences and disputes.

2. Science and "Art" – diagnosing conflict

Everyone practices conflict every day, however, diagnosing conflict is not only a science; it is an "art." A common assumption is that we understand the reasons for conflict and therefore its resolution. However, many conflicts may not be understandable and therefore are not resolvable. There are no secret formulas that will resolve all conflicts. The aim of every conflict resolution practice (similar to the practice of medicine, law, engineering, etc.) is to first diagnose the cause of the conflict and then resolve the problems it creates. Conflict theories guide one's diagnoses and, the diagnosis informs us of solutions and remedies. However, theories alone are inadequate for an effective diagnosis (Schellenberg, James, 1996). In general, theoretical knowledge functions as a framework, but application of those theories requires specific knowledge, experience associated with that knowledge, and tools that match solving specific problems. You cannot fix all problems with one tool, or one theory, this misconception arises from the fact that everyone has a limited point of view. In a sense, everyone is correct, truthful, and honest in his or her point of view yet, everyone is equally incomplete and limited in their ability to understand. Strong feelings often interfere with human reason and objectivity, remember that 85% of all conflict has nothing to do with the people involved in the conflict. As a general rule, most conflict is the result of the system, depersonalizing conflict is hard work, however it is the starting point for a conflict to be effectively managed.

To understand the interrelationship between communication and conflict Krauss Robert and Morsella Ezequiel based on the idea that the management of organizational conflicts involving diagnosis and intervention in conflicts are at an affective level interpersonal, intra-group or intergroup addressing styles (strategies) differ from their management.

Diagnosis should highlight where intervention is needed and what kind of intervention is appropriate.

Usually an intervention aims to:

• Maintain a constructive moderate state of conflicts;

• Reduce emotional conflicts of any kind and at any level;

• Organization allows for members to select and use appropriate strategies for managing conflicts of certain enabling situations.

Knowledge development, organization and efficiency can be achieved through proper diagnosis and appropriate intervention of the conflict. Although some believe that conflicts are sometimes beneficial to the organization, most of the recommendations related to organizational conflicts are part of the spectrum reducing or resolving them.

3. Conflict resolution premise of evolution

The conflict cannot be resolved if you do not first understand the causes of conflict. Only when a diagnosis develops into concrete terms, you will be able to propose alternate solutions. The following methods and skills will improve one's understanding about how to manage conflict.

In a chronological approach, the first approaches to conflict management process was based on the premise that all conflicts are potentially destructive and counterproductive to the objectives of the organization. Therefore, conflict management was synonymous with conflict avoidance. This particular way of treating people involved in conflict leaves us with one scenario: beat the winner. In this situation, whoever was defeated became frustrated and felt the need to fuel new conflicts. Therefore, most managers saw the conflict as a problem to be removed from their organization. This approach of avoidance was predominant in the second half of the nineteenth century

Conflict management is planning measures to avoid conflict when possible, and taking rapid and effective measures when it is made.

3.1. Conflict management styles

Management specialists have proposed several ways of dealing with the process of conflict management. To explain the modalities of engagement in conflict we can propose Blake and Mouton's grid. The two authors establish the typical reactions of individuals in dealing with organizational conflicts. Figure 1 illustrates the behaviors provided by the two authors, behaviors that shape, in fact, the managers decision on how to approach and manage conflicts, namely the avoidance struggle, adaptation, collaboration or compromise (Baro, Robert 1992).
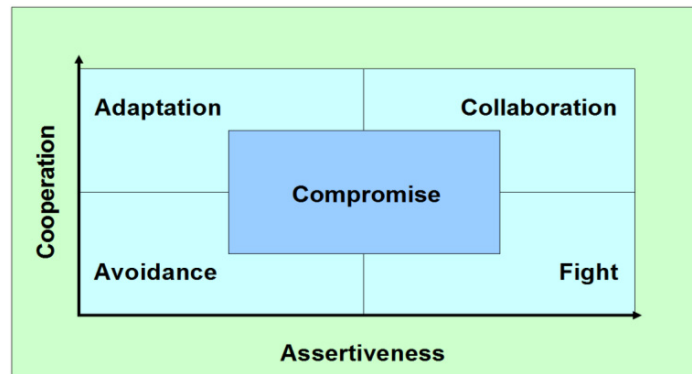

Figure 1 Conflict management methods

Each of these modes can be characterized in two axes, namely assertiveness and cooperation. Specialists say that the implementation of any of these models is wrong, there is only appropriate or inappropriate times to use each of them. In conclusion, it is important that managers know how to discern the appropriate type of conflict management means depending on its status and values and entities involved.

The fight is a conflict management model based on a high degree of assertiveness and a very low level of cooperation. It is recommended that the management of conflicts by fighting, is to be applied in situations requiring urgent action when necessary to adopt unpopular measures. In adopting such methods of conflict management it is necessary for the manager to have skills, such as: argumentation and debate, exploitation of rank or position, proper evaluation of options or feelings, keeping calm and clear expression of the position (Stoica-Constantin Ana, 2008). How to deal with conflict by **avoiding** assertiveness is characterized by both a low and a high degree of cooperation. In many cases, people tend to avoid conflict for fear of engaging in a tense situation or because they lack sufficient confidence in their ability to manage conflicts. This method of conflict management is appropriate when we are dealing with minor conflict situations in order to reduce tensions or to gain time, or when the person in the position to manage the conflict is in an inferior position in terms of hierarchy. Avoiding conflicts requires the ability to withdraw, the ability to avoid tensions and the sense of planning in terms of time (Donohue, & Kolt, 1992).

Adaptation involves low assertiveness and a high availability for cooperation. It is recommended to establish arrangements for managing conflicts by adapting when necessary the expression of reasonable attitudes, performance development, maintaining a state of good understanding and peace. Adaptation involves altruism, obedience to orders, sometimes bliss, in their own interests (Haridas, 2003).

The **compromise** involves a moderate level of assertiveness and cooperation. Some people define compromise as the "disposal of more than they're willing", while others believe that both sides benefit. How to handle conflict by accepting a compromise; it is suitable if important issues are at stake, moderate when people in the conflict have a similar hierarchical level or where there is a strong desire to resolve the issue. The compromise can also be used as a temporary solution, when there are time constraints. Skills necessary for conflict management are adopted by the negotiated compromise that the art of finding the middle way is the ability to assess situations and to make concessions (Baro, Robert 1992).

The management of conflicts through **collaboration** is characterized by high levels of assertiveness and cooperation. Collaboration can be defined as the joining of ideas in order to achieve the best solutions of a conflict. The best solution is defined as a creative resolution of the conflict, a solution that is not generated by a single person. Given this positive resolution of conflicts, one might consider that managing conflicts through cooperation is the best methof (Haridas, 2004).

Choosing the optimal strategy of conflict management the following factors should be considered:
•The seriousness of the conflict; (if needs to be addressed urgently or not);
•Considered appropriate outcome;
•Power enjoyed by the manager;
•Personal preferences.

4. The research methodology – Vertical conflicts in a public institution and the role of communication

The life within a public institution, as well as within any type of organization is likely to stimulate comparisons, competition and conflicts between departments and individuals. Communication problems, which in most cases trigger underlying conflicts are multiple, even when it comes to internal communication, which believe it or not, is somewhat neglected in public institutions in Romania. External communication regarding public institutions have laws that establish their responsibilities and obligations, such as Law no. 544/2001, I believe that we must not forget the less visible form of organizational communication, which is the internal one (http://www.monitoruloficial.ro/).

I considered the analysis of the types of conflict of interest in public institutions because they have been perceived as being worse in the past two years amid staff reduction and restructuring that occurred during the economic crisis.

In addition, amongst agglomeration duties, managers have spent time being less communicative with their staff, which has fueled tensions even further.

Given the conduct of this research and the participants involved, I will try to highlight the main conflicts that manifest vertically as well as the possible ways of managing these conflicts by addressing communication problems. Improving Organizational Communication should become one of the main objectives of the new public management.

4.1. Research Objectives

Research objectives pursued:
• Description and analysis of the main types of conflicts due to internal communication deficiencies manifested vertically in a public institution;
• Highlighting the role of communication in managing these conflicts.

4.2. The used method

I used participative observation, meaning "to take part - as the situation permits - consciously and work systematically towards the interests and feelings of the groups studied". It involves the study of man by man, differing from the observation of the natural sciences in that it is a conscious process between two people.

The observation method is characterized by the following attributes: the subject involved in the act of observation, based solely on perception is a selective and interpretative method (that involves a phenomenon dissolution of constitutive elements) which is very analytical. The focus on the "here and now", the daily life, and finally interpretative theories of issues.

4.3. Instruments: observation sheet

Description of the organization analyzed: The public institution is the subject of this case study, which includes a total of 80 employees, of which 20 were analyzed, all from the same department.
Place of work: public institution

Analysis Department: the human resources department (equipped with an office space consisting of separate offices for the director and department heads and a common space for managers or people with executive functions).

Participants: officials of the department and their supervisors: Director and Head of the Department.

The duration of observation: 15 working days (1 to 21 October 2015).

The study highlights mainly the communication between directors and officers, which are the most common and relevant reports to be drawn from observed facts.

4.4. Analysis and interpretation of results

We analyzed the types of conflicts vertically, and observed that they are most often manifested in the organization presented above. Following the behaviors observed on notes recorded, it was found that the most common type of conflict is about **difference of perception (40% of individuals observed)**, especially on how employees spend their time working towards professional competencies and the time required by the staff to perform a certain task or to learn a new activity

This type of conflict is sustained by reducing the number of employees of the Department analyzed (following the entry into the workforce of the law on the prohibition of overlapping salaries and pensions and the law on the impossibility of new employment in the public sector). In those circumstances the volume of each employee's tasks has multiplied significantly, while possibilities for positive motivation of the staff (bonuses, overtime paid compensation for overtime with time off) have been reduced.

So how, **employees use their time rather than how they should use it, and the time required to learn a new task** is the first aspect found in the conflict generated by the difference in perception between supervisor and subordinate (**20% of those observed**).

Another source of conflict identified as vertically between the department head and senior executives is **the managerial style (15% of those observed)**. Different perception of efficiency resulting from the application of the manager's leadership style is one of the most frequent barriers between employee and employer.

Moving the conflicts arising from differences of perception, we turned to the limits determined by **the individual transmitting / receiving messages (10% of those observed)**.

Another factor is the distortion caused **by the conflict messages / semantic problems (5% of people observed)**.

The wording of the message intentionally defective or not by the one who transmits the information constitutes another element that favors conflict between the department head and his subordinates (**10% of those observed**).
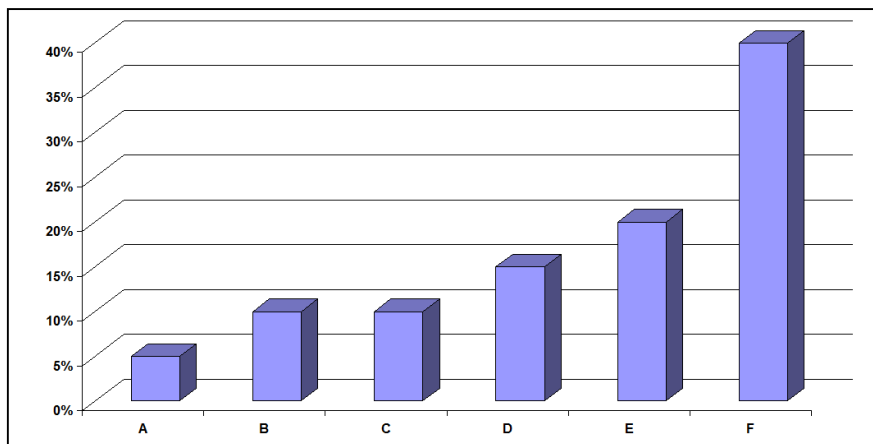

Figure 2 The types of conflicts vertically: A- conflict messages/semantic problems; B- use of time/learning period necessary; C- individual transmitting/receiving messages; D- the managerial style; E- employees use their time than it should do, and the time required to; F- difference of perception

5. Proposal of conflict management through effective communication

Based on the types of conflicts identified through the research conducted, communication shortcomings are possible and even unavoidable and can be achieved through the following mechanisms:

5.1. The feedback

In the process of improving performance communication, there is probably no skill more important than to receive precise and accurate feedback regarding the impact of their message on others. It is believed that when a message is sent but not received feedback information is achieved and not actually communicated. For example, in the case of managers who need to encourage receptor (employees) to express their reactions and at the same time they must ensure if the message was correctly perceived or not, asking questions, and listening to requests.

5.2. Organizational communication must cover both formal and informal communication

If manifested to an extent which does not exceed the boundary of common sense, informal communication may be an innovation for the formal one, especially during the restructuring of an organization. Flows are themselves bearing informal feedback. A manager who wants to be efficient should pay attention to the paramount aspect of communication, both formal and especially informal communication, maintain permanent contact with subordinates, by identifying the ways which are needed to be applied for this purpose, even though it is encouraged to apply methods involving the possibility of employees to express their suggestions and complaints anonymously.

5.3. Ensuring clear and concise communication

Using a simple direct language which is appropriate / adapted to that with which we communicate and experience, without too much detail, observing reality as it is transmitted. The information submitted must be meaningful to the context of communication.

5.4. Delivering messages as facts

The contradictions between words and deeds can profoundly affect the manager's attempts to win the trust of their employees. Communication is a continuous balancing act, clearing the contradictory needs. Therefore, communication is essential in any type of organizational conflict settlement.
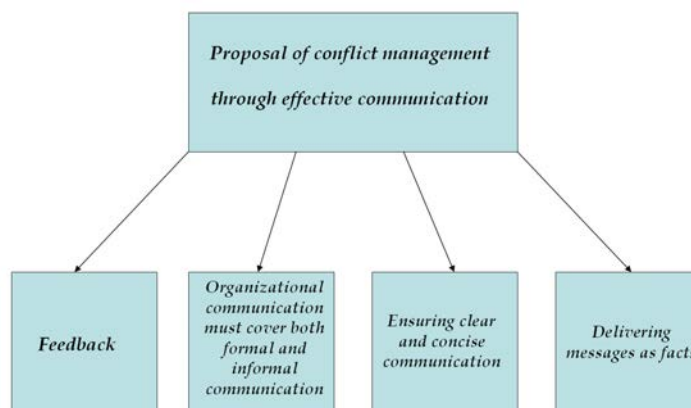

Figure 3 Communication shortcomings

6. Conclusions

Organizations as social entities are segmented hierarchically into departments and individuals are characterized by omnipresent conflicts that manifest within this hierarchy. Given that the conflicts could have beneficial consequences, but also disastrous, it is essential that managers identify their management arrangements. Effective management of organizational conflict is essential for the mission of the institution.

Conflict states which are "smoldering" for long periods of time, are deemed unnecessary by science managers who do not devote time and energy to deal with them and do not establish strategies for managing different types of conflicts. This situation seems to have worsened with the economic crisis and the restructuring measures adopted within public institutions (Vayrynen, Raimo (ed.), 1991).

The prospect of a long expected reform of management, is on that requires a change of directions and improvement in order to professionalize this area. Raising the awareness of managers about the importance of internal communication, both upward and downward, and the need of "listening and interpreting the pulse" of the institution. Only by creating a collaborative environment and by increasing organizational awareness and generating team spirit that shares common goals can ensure an effective performance (Tschannen-Moran, 2001).

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