

# MANAGEMENT BY CONFLICT AS ONE OF THE METHODS OF MANAGEMENT IN AN ORGANIZATION

## ZARZĄDZANIE PRZEZ KONFLIKT JAKO JEDNA Z METOD ZARZĄDZANIA W ORGANIZACJI

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### ABSTRACT

Conflict situations occur in organizations, regardless of what management methods are practically implemented in the life of an organization. The main differences concern however the sources of conflict, their escalation, and ways to ease the conflict or to solve it. A particular situation in an organization takes place when there is initiation and/or conscious control of conflict situations, in order to obtain the assumed outcome (management by conflict). In this paper the above mentioned issues have been addressed, paying attention to the specific conditionings necessary in the process of management by conflict. Conflict situations affect all businesses operating in the market, thus they also occur in the activities of health care entities.

**KEYWORDS:** organization, conflict, management by conflict.

### STRESZCZENIE

Sytuacje konfliktowe występują w organizacjach niezależnie od tego, jakie metody zarządzania są praktycznie wdrażane w życie organizacyjne. Zasadnicze różnice dotyczą natomiast źródeł konfliktów, ich eskalacji i sposobów wyciszenia konfliktu lub jego rozwiązania. Szczególna sytuacja na gruncie organizacyjnym następuje wówczas, kiedy dochodzi do inicjowania i/lub świadomego sterowania sytuacją konfliktową celem uzyskania założonego rezultatu (zarządzanie przez konflikt). W niniejszym opracowaniu zostały poruszone powyższe kwestie; zwrócono uwagę na szczególne uwarunkowania niezbędne w procesie zarządzania przez konflikt. Sytuacje konfliktowe dotyczą wszystkich przedsiębiorstw funkcjonujących na rynku, zatem pojawiają się również w działalności podmiotów leczniczych.

**SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** organizacja, konflikt, zarządzanie przez konflikt.

### Introduction

Each organization is a team of employees, and where there are people who have different personalities, character, people who present different attitudes and values, equipped with different knowledge and experience, there may be disputable situations.

The traditional view concerning organizational conflicts assumed destructive power of conflicts. Therefore, the only and proper way to deal with them was to avoid them or to remove the essence of the conflict as soon as possible, in order to prevent their irreversible effects [1, p. 18; 2, p. 273; 3, p. 257]. Nowadays a view exists, which is referred to as interactive, which assumes the inevitability of this phenomenon, and its sources have a wide genesis and may relate to multiple factors directly or indirectly connected with the company functioning, also a medical entity. Conflicts situations occurring with varying intensity may become stimulators for increasing the efficiency of an organization (its optimal dimension requires a moderate level of conflict) or to contribute to the emergence and escalation of its destructive effects. That is why the main task of managerial staff is proper

conflict management, with the use of effective methods of solving it, to achieve the most satisfactory outcome for the organization leading to optimal efficiency [2, p. 273; 3, p. 257; 4, p. 126]. The process of aware control over a conflict situation to obtain particular organizational goals is referred to as management by conflicts [2, p. 273; 3, p. 257]. Occurring interactions force the dynamics of actions, reactions to changes, creativity, openness to innovations, thus preventing organizational languor [1, p. 18; 2, p. 257], the effects of which influence reducing the optimal use of resources, professional efficiency and effectiveness and quality work.

### Definitional approach to the conflict and its types

A review of literature discussing the issues of employees and their operating within the organization also provides the information on mutual relationships in conflict situations. There is quite a wide range of definitions that explain the concept of conflict. Undoubtedly, however, the two indispensable determinants common in all attempts to explain the term, is a person (employee) and

the factors or conditions that have led to the conflict situation. In order to explain the term more clearly a few chosen definitions developed by different authors have been presented.

The conflict relates to an individual or an organization and it is a "discrepancy regarding the distribution of scarce resources or the conflict of goals, values ..." [5, p. 614]. The conflict is "all forms of struggle and fight between people whose goal is not only to gain (or maintain) the possession of means of production, but also to attract, neutralize and even eliminate an actual or alleged enemy" [after: 4, p. 124]. According to Koźmiński, an organizational conflict occurs when there is "a situation in which at least two interdependent parties perceive that their values, goals, interests, tasks, behaviours, etc., are contradictory; it is a situation in which people adjust their behaviour to these beliefs, returning and exchanging emotional reactions, also in the form of aggression" [6, p. 586]. An organizational conflict occurs when there is "a disagreement between people or groups", and some of its reasons "result from the project of the organization" [7, p. 543, 545].

While analysing the literature concerning conflicts one can meet an ordered classification of this process. The most commonly classified types that may appear in organizations are: the internal conflict of an individual, conflict between at least two people, conflict between an individual and a group, conflict between groups and conflict between organizations [after: 4, p. 127; after: 2, p. 274]. When analysing conflict situations, it becomes important to recognise the circumstances that have led to it, as well as a thorough qualification of the subject of conflict. Penc [4, p. 135] shows the importance of certain groups of factors. Conflicts emerging in organizations have their origins in:

- Disproportion between competencies of managerial staff at different levels of management. This applies mainly to the specific character of work, range and the object of management.
- Improper co-operation between parts of the organization, which is very often connected with divergent objectives developed and implemented in different organizational units of the company.
- Lack of or inadequate compliance with legal regulations concerning work performance. This factor may be the reason of conflicts caused by both the employer and the employee, as it concerns the compliance with labour law, safety regulations and health, professional responsibility or discipline of work.
- Improper management of material resources connected with work. There are claims resul-

ting from improper allocation of financial motivators, the assignment of such a range of responsibilities that determines the pay rise or privileges for selected individuals or groups.

- A faulty system of employee's promotion. It is crucial to develop and comply with the constructive criteria of the career path within the organization.
- Power relationships existing in the company. Factors that may contribute to the occurrence of a conflict situation may be, on the one hand, the managers' attitudes towards employees (unreasonable and unrealistic expectations, lack of acceptance or deprivation of the right to co-deciding) and, on the other hand, the behaviour of staff. The examples of such actions are as follows: disrespectful attitude towards professional duties, excessive ambitions, character traits that hinder mutual cooperation and interpersonal relationships.
- Improper organization of work and organizational processes. Of particular importance is the equipment, conditions at work, proper distribution and adequate workload, coordination of activities and processes.
- Barriers existing in communication process. This process applies both to interpersonal communication between employees at the same level of management and between subordinates and managerial staff. A highly important fact, in order to avoid conflict situations, is to ensure the appropriate information channels within the company.
- The process of implementing organizational as well as technical and technological changes. Conflict situations can be connected with the concerns of employees about their capabilities, qualifications and knowledge at a modified workstation, as well as their future usefulness in the organization. A necessary condition for development of the company is implementation of changes. However, they should be implemented skillfully and staff should be previously equipped with the appropriate knowledge concerning the motives for changes, the process of their implementation and the expected results.
- Other conditions, such as personality traits, differences in interests, opinions, attitudes, values, discrepancies in the assessment of situations [4, p. 135–139].

## Two faces of conflicts

Bearing in mind the multitude of reasons that may cause a conflict, it is worth analysing what procedures will be adequate to a particular situation, and how this situation will affect further functioning of the organization. It is certain that a conflict situation should not be underestimated, because its escalation may lead to some unexpected consequences, and neither the manager nor the employees would like to be surprised with them. It should be however, taken into account, that following the modern approach to organizational conflicts, the consequences of a conflict situation may, apart from being destructive, be also constructive.

Among the main destructive consequences of conflicts are often mentioned those concerning both an individual and a task force, but also those having an impact on functioning of the organization as a whole. They are multidimensional. First of all, psychophysical workload of an employee and a team should be mentioned here. It is associated with stressful factors which accompany conflicts, with emotional tension, which can result in increased morbidity, and consequently may lead to sickness absence. It should not be forgotten that there are barriers in interpersonal communication emerging in such situations, which do not foster good social climate in the group or atmosphere at work. These factors may cause a split in the team, lack of motivation to take any actions, or even a hostile attitude towards various initiatives. All these factors result in a significant reduction in the efficiency, professional effectiveness and consequently, the quality of work and they call into question the rationality of further organizational actions [4, p. 127].

In order to mitigate the negative image of the effects of conflict situations, it becomes reasonable to present the other, positive and even going further – a constructive part of this phenomenon. This can be done by analysing the functions, which result from a conflict, whose basic assumption is a constructive solution. By activation, with the aim to improve the reality in which an employee, a group or an organization is, and critical analysis of their own actions, the first function is realised, it is the motivational function. After taking steps to establish priorities, there appears a need to implement changes, new and creative solutions, realisation of specified targets. Through such activities, the innovative function is actively implemented. The identity function is activated when it is noticeable how the conflict affected self-presentation and behaviour of individuals or employee teams. Then there is an in-depth analysis of their own strengths and weaknesses, own personality and conduct, as well as comprehensive integration of currently specified goals, assumptions and actions [4, p. 127–128; 2, p. 278].

These two extremes of conflict situations in the company and the consequences that they cause are also strong feedback. It is important to be able to properly judge it through the prism of reasons, the subject (sides) and the direction of conflict in order to take appropriate actions, which will enable to achieve the organizational goal.

## Management by conflict and the role of the manager in the process

As it has already been noticed, the contemporary view treats the conflict as a process that occurs in an organization in a natural way. The fact that it takes place in professional environment is perceived as something inevitable and is not always the result of faulty company management. The inevitability of conflict situations is included in professional functioning.

Leading employees, as one of the functions of management is the process of “directing and influencing the activities of group members or the entire organization, associated with the performance of duties” [5, p. 453, 623]. Three main factors are inextricably linked to this function, personality traits of a manager, maturity of employees and the circumstances of managing. This last factor is nothing more than organizational conditions in which the leader performs their duties [8, p. 41]. Competent, efficient process of their identification and evaluation is an element that is essential for taking actions (if in the opinion of the manager they are necessary, or can bring desired results) related, among others, to the process of management by conflict (conflict management). Such a method of management which is accompanied by an idea, a factor or a process is nothing new. After all, there are: management by objectives (as one of the most popular methods of management), but also management by the mission, by knowledge, by quality...

Management by conflict is the process of “aware and intentional use of conflict situations to manage the organization” [after: 2, p. 278], in order to the achieve specified organizational goals [2, p. 273].

Each manager should have this precious ability to properly assess a conflict situation and should be capable of prospective deduction concerning its effects, because on these factors will depend the reaction of the manager. Any such situation is characterised by individualism, each conflict is different and there are no universal means to solve it. Decision-making capabilities give the manager tools and methods, on the one hand to eliminate or mitigate the conflict and, on the other to efficiently and effectively control them. However, it should be kept in mind that none of the methods or techniques can be selected intuitively or accidentally. The manager holds a huge responsibility, and only

people equipped with knowledge, skills and experience can take this responsibility. In a conflict situation, an efficient analysis of the circumstances is required from the leader to effectively identify and control the optimal level of conflict, without giving it an opportunity to reach a dangerously high level.

As it is shown by Griffin [7, p. 546–547], in order to most effectively deal with conflict situations, the role of the manager is to choose one of the three main ways of managing the conflict. Among them, the author mentions stimulating the conflict, reducing the conflict and conflict resolution.

- *Stimulating the conflict* is treated as a full stimulating or initiating a conflict situation, with the aim of achieving an established outcome, a measurable effect from occurring conditions [7, p.546]. This method can be implemented through the recruitment and employment of workers from the outside, using by managers innovative methods of decision-making and implementation of non-standard solutions or reducing the span of management. Activities aimed at changing decision places, which are a consequence of alterations in the organizational structure of the company may lead to stimulating the conflict. This set of factors includes changes in previously used methods and techniques of management (encouraging competition, another bonus system...) and verbal provocations [7, p. 546; after: 2, p. 278].
- *Reducing the conflict* is a series of actions aimed at reducing the escalation of conflict situations or elimination of factors that may cause conflicts. Maintenance of the existing channels of information and the use of a fixed hierarchy of power in the organization, appointment or maintenance of task forces with a similar perception of the way of objectives realisation favour this method (this homogeneity concerns also views, system of values, a way of task realisation). Reducing the conflict is also fostered by the policy of rational use of resources [7, p. 546–547] and informing the crew and their current allocation.
- *Constructive conflict resolution* involves the use of appropriate and rational methods, leading to disappearance of the conflict. One of them is to reach an agreement and to develop constructive solutions through confrontational approach. During the confrontation, the parties of the conflict meet. In such a situation the manager faces a very important task. The maturity and the experience of the manager in shaping such a situation determines the success in resolving the

conflict. The search for a compromise is also one of the options of seeking a constructive solution to the conflict situation. However, it must be remembered that the compromise forces the sides to make some concessions (each side resigns from some of its claims to gain in another area) [7, p. 547] and such a solution is not a guarantee of success [4, p. 145], so the role of the manager is also invaluable in this case. Their job is to care for the result of such a solution and continuous monitoring of the development of the situation, to prevent the escalation of the conflict or the situation in which new demands appear, not related to the original cause of the conflict. Constructive methods of conflict resolution, among others, are fostered by correct interpersonal relationships in the organization, friendly atmosphere of mutual trust, maturity of participants, rational approach to the processes taking place in the company and the objectivity in perception.

The above discussion concerning management by conflict (conflict management) in the organization enables some systematics, leading to the analysis of the system of managing a conflict situation proposed by Penc [4, p. 147]. He mentions the potential sources of conflicts that create a pre-conflict situation. They include: an individual, an organization, work situation and the environment. They can be a stimulus to the appearance of a conflict situation, in which the author classifies individual conflicts (e.g. internal, role...) and group (managerial, interpersonal, competence...). They are caused, among others, by mistakes in the organization of work and the methods and techniques of management, abuse of power, an incorrect process of implementing changes or not complying with legal regulations, also inside the organization. These processes are the basis of transformation through analysing the level of conflict (low – tolerated, medium – disagreement and high – fight), and by taking appropriate actions. In the case of a low level of conflict, it is recommended to identify the causes and intervene, for example by using mediation. When there is a medium level conflict, an action must be taken in order to seek common solutions and slow down the increasing tension. Alleviation or elimination of a conflict situation occurs when the escalation of the conflict led to open fighting, that is the highest level of conflict. The process of transformation creates a basis for a post-conflict situation. It leads to the development of two circumstances. Firstly, through the peaceful coexistence or suspension of the conflict – adaptation, conflict can be suppressed (but not resolved). In the second situation, one has to

deal with a half solution of the contention or integration, that is the constructive solution. Both compromise and integration give rise to a new agreement and mutual cooperation in achieving the established targets. Reported stages of the development and management of a conflict situation showed a systematic approach to this process. It must be borne in mind that a resolved conflict, regardless of the results it has brought, is not the only and the last dispute in the organization. Proper conclusions should be drawn from each conflict and effort needs to be made to make next conflict situations clear and their effects measurable for the organization. That is, why according to Penc, the next step is a new situation of conflict, and the proceedings will be largely based on the experience from the previous one and on preventive actions. Among them, the author mentions: looking for and specifying objectives accepted by members of the organization, the ability to implement changes and creating the atmosphere for the development of favourable climate for innovation and creativity, the transmission of accurate information concerning their tasks, to all teams of workers recognising and rewarding mutual cooperation, adequate salary and using adequate methods of evaluation and incentives [4, p. 147]. Undoubtedly, in the situation of conflict, the role of the manager is the continuous monitoring and analysis of escalation in order to respond appropriately.

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The efficiency and effectiveness of work requires, in addition to theoretical knowledge, also the ability to use it practically. In the case of the manufacturing processes, it is a quite clear course of action, but when it comes to the participation of the human factor in the processes, particular caution should be taken. Particularly important is care and proper assessment of interpersonal relationships in the organization at the same time understanding social phenomena, because wherever there are people, conflict situations may occur.

The primary role of the manager in this area is to activate the ability to cope in such conditions. Depending on the circumstances and the escalation of conflict, the manager should demonstrate mastery in decisions and actions, regardless of whether or not the situation will need to alleviate/suppress the conflict, or rational managing the conflict in order to obtain tangible benefits for the organization. This is an extremely difficult task, requiring knowledge, experience, maturity and knowledge of the methods and techniques of managing organizational conflicts.

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