

TITLE MANAGER AND CONFLICT IN PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

Assistant professor Liviu Crăciun PhD
University of Craiova
Faculty of Economics and Business Administration
Craiova, Romania

Stefan Ponea Ph. D Student
University of Craiova
Faculty of Economics and Business Administration
Craiova, Romania

Cezar Leonard Băndoi Ph. D Student
University of Craiova
Faculty of Economics and Business Administration
Craiova, Romania

Abstract: In an era of constant change, the management of conflict becomes a common practice. Managers of public organizations are often confronted with conflicts, which forces them to adapt their arsenal of tools, methods and techniques used to solve disputes. The article presents the results of the research undertaken in a public institution about the perception of employees with respect to how managers act when conflicts arise. There are also displayed some recommendations to improve the way conflicts are approached.

JEL classification: M10, M12 ,M54

Key words: conflict; conflict management; public sector; change

1. INTRODUCTION

Institutions and systems are considered to be the most important sources of conflict at work, but they are not the only causes of conflict. Personal behaviour of managers may also lead to conflict between supervisors and subordinates, between employees, or between employees and management. Thus, an analysis of conflict management at work is not complete until it addresses the way employees perceive how managers solve conflicts.

Managers work in a world dominated by frequent changes which are difficult to predict. Managers have more exposure, influence, power and responsibility than any other member of the organization. The way they act or react has a greater effect on the magnitude and logical development of conflict at workplace, than the one of any other group of individuals. Managers may cause conflict both through their direct interaction with subordinates and through the way they manage the processes of the organization.

2. OBJECTIVES

The efficiency of the ways to manage conflicts by the manager may be better analysed from employees' perspective because questioning the manager could be influenced by the inherent subjectivity of his role. Hardly would a manager admit that his efforts of creating a suitable climate for performance are not successful, recognising his own inability of solving conflicts arisen in the team he leads.

This research carried out to determine to what extent the management of public institutions is interested in solving conflicts and how it is done, through what ways they are trying to solve problems, and also the perception of the employees towards the efficiency of management interventions in solving the conflicts. Such a study may have practical relevance by identifying the set of appropriate measures and strategies to reduce conflict situations.

3. METHODOLOGY

To investigate employees' opinions, it was considered that a quantitative research (survey) is the most effective way by using the questionnaire. When projecting the questionnaire they have primarily analysed the instruments used for measuring the problems of the conflict: Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory I and II (ROCI-I and ROCI-II) (Rahim, 2001); The Research of Conflict Management, Telemetry, 1996; and The Questionnaire for Decision's conflict and Cooperation (DCCQ) (Dalton & Cosier, 1989) etc. There were studied also few instruments based on internet that measure the aspects of conflict management (Psychtests.com, 2002). The mentioned questionnaires were selected because there were used psychometric processes in their development, thus proving its empirical credibility.

The questionnaire, that comprises 30 items of which five refer to the employee, was developed based on the study. Of the 25 items related to the topic investigated, 23 are multiple items while the other two involve the hierarchy of responses.

The questionnaire was administered to employees of the County Police Inspectorate of Mehedinti. Collecting data was conducted from September 1 to October 25, 2008, and interviewed subjects were informed about the fact that the questions were designed to help the realisation of this work, and the answers will be used only for that purpose, and their names will not be mentioned. 106 questionnaires were administered.

4. ANALYSES

A prior analysis of the collected questionnaires was conducted before entering the answers in the database. It was established that all 106 questionnaire were valid. Data processing was performed with SPSS software package, version 17.

The first aspect studied is related to the frequency with which the manager interferes. According to the data in Table 1, the employees consider that the manager is very often involved in conflict solution (43.4%), often (20.8%), moderate (22.6%), respectively, a sum of 88.8%. This level contradicts the fact that most employees considered that conflict does not occur in the organization.

Table no.1. How often the manager got involved in solving the conflict

	Frequency	%	% cumulative
Very Often	46	43,4	43,4
Often	22	20,8	64,2
Moderate	24	22,6	86,8
Rarely	13	12,3	99,1

Never	1	0,9	100,0
Total	106	100,0	

Regarding the strategies of solving conflicts, as shown in Table 2., the most commonly used was the reconciliation (48,1%), followed by collaboration (34%). The strategy of avoiding conflict was applied in the opinion of about 16% of respondents and only 1,9% of all respondents considered that mediation was used.

Table no.2. Strategies for solving conflicts

	Frequency	%	% cumulative
Reconciliation	51	48,1	48,1
Avoiding	17	16,0	64,2
Collaboration	36	34,0	98,1
Mediation	2	1,9	100,0
Total	106	100,0	

Regarding the role of the manager in solving conflict, 43.4% of subjects considered that the supervisors have provided support and advice, 31.1% consider that they have offered solutions, 17.9% said that intervention as a mediator was a priority and only 7.5% described the manager's role as being passive (Table 3.).

Table no.3. Manager's role in solving the conflict

	Frequency	%	% cumulative
Supports and gives advice	46	43,4	43,4
Interferes as mediator	19	17,9	61,3
Gives solutions	33	31,1	92,5
Passive	8	7,5	100,0
Total	106	100,0	

The employees interviewed considered manager's intervention to be appropriate as it is shown in the following table. Thus, 57.5% consider that the involvement of the manager is always positive, 24.5% often valued it as a positive and only 2.8% believe that the intervention has no positive impact.

Table no.4. Manager's involvement is positive

	Frequency	%	% cumulative
Always	61	57,5	57,5
Often	26	24,5	82,1
Sometimes	16	15,1	97,2
Never	3	2,8	100,0

Total	106	100,0	
-------	-----	-------	--

According to the employees, as noted in Table 5., managers' interventions have led to reducing conflicts, 84% of those questioned answered "Yes" and "Mostly". Only 16% felt that reducing conflicts with the intervention of managers was slight or non-existent.

Table no.5. There was conflict reduction

	Frequency	%	% cumulative
Yes	57	53,8	53,8
Mostly	32	30,2	84,0
To a small degree	14	13,2	97,2
Never	3	2,8	100,0
Total	106	100,0	

By analysing correlatively the way managerial involvement and manager's role are appreciated in solving the conflict we found that among the 66 investigated persons who believed that the intervention of the manager is always positive, 33 consider that the manager supports and gives advice in the context of a conflict, 18 consider that he just offers solutions and 9 that he only interferes as mediator.

Table no.6. Correlative analysis of manager's involvement and role

		Manager's role in solving the conflict				sum
		Supports and gives advice	Interferes as mediator	Offers solutions	Passive	
The manager's involvement is positive	Always	33	9	18	1	61
	Often	7	7	11	1	26
	Sometimes	6	3	4	3	16
	Never	0	0	0	3	3
Total		46	19	33	8	106

To see which of the manager's roles have led to results, there were analysed correlatively the perception of employees regarding the role assumed by the manager and to what extent there was conflict reduction. From table 7., we can observe that among the 57 employees who stated that the conflicts were reduced, 36 considered that this was due to the fact that the manager supported and gave advice to employees, 13 bring this state of things into account of manager's willingness to provide solutions and 7 value the intervention of the manager as mediator. It can be seen that among the 32 employees who considered that reducing conflicts occurred most of the time, most of them, 14, attributed this to the fact that the manager offered solutions, while 11 brought to the fore the role of mediator.

The value of the Pearson's R coefficient of correlation calculated for the two variables is 0.432, while the level of the Spearman coefficient is 0.426, which shows a positive correlation between manager's role and the rate of reducing conflicts.

Table no.7. The analysis of the correlation between manager's role and the degree of solving conflicts

		Manager's role in solving conflicts				Total
		Supports and gives advice	Interferes as mediator	Offers solutions	Passive	
There was conflict reduction	Yes	36	7	13	1	57
	Mostly	5	11	14	2	32
	To a small degree	5	1	5	3	14
	Never	0	0	1	2	3
Total		46	19	33	8	106

The analysis of correlation between the strategies applied by the manager and the degree of reducing conflicts highlights, according to data in Table 8, that reconciliation was the most successful strategy, 39 employees (68.4% of those who believed that there was conflict reduction). On the second place there was collaboration - 13 employees (22.8% of those who believed that there was conflict reduction), the percentage is higher for those who have stated that reducing the conflict occurred mostly – 56.3%. It is noted the failure of the mediation strategy, which has no percentage from the subjects, who felt that there was conflict reduction - 89 of 106 people in total.

Table no.8. The analysis of correlation between strategies of solving conflicts by the manager and the degree of reducing conflicts

			There was conflict reduction				Total	
			Yes	Mostly	To a small degree	Never		
Strategies of solving conflicts	Reconciliation	Count	39	8	3	1	51	
		%	68,4%	25,0%	21,4%	33,3%	48,1%	
	Avoidance	Count	5	6	6	0	17	
		%	8,8%	18,8%	42,9%	,0%	16,0%	
	Collaboration	Count	13	18	4	1	36	
		%	22,8%	56,3%	28,6%	33,3%	34,0%	
	Mediation	Count	0	0	1	1	2	
		%	,0%	,0%	7,1%	33,3%	1,9%	
	Total		Count	57	32	14	3	106

			There was conflict reduction				Total	
			Yes	Mostly	To a small degree	Never		
Strategies of solving conflicts	Reconciliation	Count	39	8	3	1	51	
		%	68,4%	25,0%	21,4%	33,3%	48,1%	
	Avoidance	Count	5	6	6	0	17	
		%	8,8%	18,8%	42,9%	,0%	16,0%	
	Collaboration	Count	13	18	4	1	36	
		%	22,8%	56,3%	28,6%	33,3%	34,0%	
	Mediation	Count	0	0	1	1	2	
		%	,0%	,0%	7,1%	33,3%	1,9%	
			Count	57	32	14	3	106
			%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

5.CONCLUSION

The research shows that the manager is, even in the public sector, a major player in attenuation of conflicts. The main way in which the manager can create an environment without conflicts is to develop a collaborative climate.

Collaboration involves working together to create or find something new and innovative by merging different perspectives and points of view with a synergy that creates value. Cooperation requires each employee to balance the assertiveness of his points of view and concerns with concerns and points of view of the other colleagues.

Collaboration is more than a way of solving conflicts. It can be used to achieve goals, to solve problems, to create new opportunities and to create other things that meet in the best way the needs of all parties. When such needs are met, the probability of such a conflict is reduced.

REFERENCES

1. Dalton, D. R. Development and psychometric properties of The Decision and Cooperation Questionnaire. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 49, 697-700,1989
2. Forsyth,D. *An introduction to group dynamics*, Monterey CA, Brooks/Cole, 1983
3. Gamble, T.K. *Communication Works*, McGraw Hill, New York, 1993.
4. Gordon, J. *Organizational Behavior*, 2nd Ed., Allyn and Bacon, Boston, Ma., 1987
5. Hellriegel, D. *Organizational Behavior*, West Publishing Company, New York, Slocum, J.W. 1992
6. Pammer, Jr.,W.J. *Handbook of Conflict Management*, Marcel Dekker Inc.,New York, 2003
7. Killian, J. *Managing conflict in organization*, Greenwood Publishing Group, Westport, 2001