

# COMPANY CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AND THE ROLE OF THE LEADER

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## **Abstract**

*Taking decisions involves certain risks and uncertainties, both individually and collectively. Decision making is the art of choosing the most appropriate solution of all the available ones; the choice will be made using one of the three possible situations regarding the existing data: certainty, risk or uncertainty. This paper will present some of the management strategies and the techniques used by a leader in order to overcome conflictual situations.*

**Keywords: conflict management, management strategies, communication, decision making process**

## **Introduction**

Taking decisions involves certain risks and uncertainties, both individually and collectively. Decision making is the art of choosing the most appropriate solution of all the available ones; the choice will be made using one of the three possible situations regarding the existing data: certainty, risk or uncertainty.

The whole process seems fairly simple and people automatically make decisions based on it, but the difficulties surface when a leader must identify the selection criteria and the information which lead to an easy decision-making process.

The leader must be up to date with the news in the decision-making process; he must be aware that his decisions have an important role, to guarantee that the organizational activity run smoothly, according to the set objectives.

### 1. Techniques for conflict management

The management strategies for resolving conflicts take into consideration two main aspects (A. Manolescu et al, 2007, pp. 553-576)

- the perseverance of each party involved in the conflict in imposing their own point of view or interests;
- the willingness of each party involved in the conflict to cooperate, in order to satisfy the other party's needs or interests.

It is important that the leader know the nature, type, causes, extent and intensity of the conflicts, to identify and adopt the most appropriate techniques to manage and resolve the organizational conflicts: (A. Manolescu et al, 2007, pp. 553-576)

- the strategy-focused on sidestepping (avoidance): treats the conflict as a situation that should be avoided at all costs, recognizing the existence of the conflict and avoiding the confrontation;
- the accommodation-oriented strategy (adaptation): it involves maintaining the interpersonal relationships at all costs, undervaluing the importance of achieving the personal goals;
- the competition-oriented strategy: it tends to maximize the enforcement of one's personal point of view, minimizing cooperation; the absolute priority is given to the objectives, facts or one's own procedures, since the opposing parties only act towards achieving their own goals;
- the compromise-oriented strategy: it usually involves a negotiation; its objective is to find a mutually beneficial solution that partially satisfies the parties in conflict;
- the collaboration-oriented strategy: the parties accept a dialogue and see the conflict as a challenge to their ability of solving it.

2. Reaction types in situations of conflict

In a conflict, we can observe the following types of reactions, resulting in: (A. Manolescu et al, 2007, pp. 553-576)

AVOIDANCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the participants do not address or accept the conflict via withdrawals/avoidance, absenteeism, the avoidance of critical issues and a persistence in remaining silent</li> <li>- they are aware of the possible positive results, but do not prove enough they desire them</li> <li>- in order to avoid the conflict, they appeal to rules/procedures ("I'm sorry, I'm only doing my duty/job").</li> </ul>
ACCOMODATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the participants tend to mitigate the conflict, showing great interest for the other person rather than for the conflictive issue; they'd rather postpone resolving the conflict in order to avoid creating grudges; they give up their own goals, interests and needs in favor of the other</li> </ul>
COMPETITION (CONFRONTATION)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the participants assert themselves by force, they show interest only for their goals/interests, they apply the "zero sum game" (the more a partner is</li> </ul>

	winning, the less the other will win); they exhibit an argumentative and selfish behavior, with methods to coerce the other.
COMPROMISE	- it identifies practical solutions, with results that are pragmatically oriented towards the interest; each party accepts the partial loss of its objectives which were initially set via the strategy “give and receive” – the realistic settlement of the issue, with gains and losses for each side.
COLLABORATION	- it is preferable in managing and resolving conflicts, by reaching a mutual arrangement which pleases both sides; the “win-win” approach is preferred, which implies respecting your own interests as well as those of the other.

### 3. Communicating feelings in case of conflict

Feelings are an integral part of a conflict. Wherever there are people, there are also ideas, values, circumstances, styles and standards that may come into conflict, which means that anything can be cause for a conflict: from objectives, goals, aspirations, habits, prejudices, personalities and ideologies, to sensibility, offenses, aggression and many others (A. Manolescu et al, 2007, pp. 554). The moods of an individual can be the cause, potentiometer and reason of settling the conflict; the feelings may represent a symptom or an indicator, involving emotional reactions towards a certain situation or person, indicating a disagreement (A. Manolescu et al, 2007, pp. 554). Everyone is entitled to an initial emotional reaction to what they are communicated. The initial reaction is not necessarily the final one as well. Each individual has the right to react in a certain way towards the other (A. Stoica-Constantin , 2004, p. 70).

Depending on the case, communicating feelings in times of conflict involves:

- Relieving the emotional expression;
- The temporary suppression – suspending the emotions up to a point;
- Expressing feelings in order to exhaust them and deplete their potential;

#### 4. Attitude changing in case of conflict

When a conflict is solved efficiently, it can stabilize a relationship, even through the use of social influence techniques for changing the attitude in case of conflict (A. Stoica-Constantin, 2004, p. 176-193):

- **The classic “foot-in-the-door” or the “Franklin manipulation” or the foot-in-the-door with an explicit demand:**
  - The traditional “foot-in-the-door” with an explicit demand: by a first explicit request, a non-problematic behavior is obtained from the subject, in an environment governed by freedom of choice he is requested to do something insignificant and difficult to refuse. This is followed by a second request addressed to the subject, which is also explicit, where they are invited to render a new, more costly conduct which otherwise they would never have made spontaneously. The subject will accept the subsequent request with greater ease. In other words, someone who has already done you a small favor is more likely to grant you a major concession.
  - The “foot-in-the-door” with an implicit demand: the initial request is still explicit (a colleague asks you to hold her stack of files while she looks for her keys in the purse, in order to enter the office), but the other request, immediately addressed after the first, is implicit, the circumstances dictating the behavior (the stranger who was just passing by dropped his briefcase and scattered the papers in it all over the floor; you rush to help him). The “foot-in-the-door” with an implicit request, unlike the classic version, has the upside that it does not arouse suspicion in the manipulated party.
- The touching/physical contact technique: the slight touch of the forearm in the context of “the-foot-in-the-door” is particularly effective and adds a persuasive bonus to the technique.
- “Slamming the door right in the face/nose of someone”: it represents a much too costly behavior to be accepted before formulating the request regarding the expected behavior: a small request in terms of importance, but with chances to be honored. In other words, in order to increase the chances of obtaining a favor from someone, we start by asking a lot, knowing that we will be turned down, that we will have “the door slammed in our face”. This is followed by the real request, which will be accepted. It is necessary that both requests be made by the same person and that the initial request be absurd in comparison to the next, the real one.
- The “baiting” technique (lowballing): a partner withholds or distorts a piece of key-information or an inconvenience, until the other reaches the decision he’s been waiting for, after which the one who has been “played” is presented the missing information, without fear that they will back down: they had just decided to go one way and they will not go back on their decision once they know the real inconveniences. Therefore, the source brought up

some fictitious advantages, which will be seen as illusory only in the end, in extremis.

- The unnecessary expense/ the hidden trap/ “the freezing effect”: it is the self-deception form which has in common with lowballing only the idea of persevering in a decision. The effect is seen when an individual stays true to a strategy or line of conduct in which they have previously invested in (money, time, energy), in the detriment of more advantageous ones.
- Subliminal messages: information transmitted at a low intensity of the stimulus (visual/auditory), so that it does not exceed the threshold beyond which it can be perceived by the human senses; it is at the limit of conscious perception, penetrating the preconscious however; it has a critical role in decision-making.
- The “YES...., BUT/AND....”, instead of “NO...”: it utilizes the formula “Yes, you’re right, but let’s not forget that ...” which can be used to formulate one’s own opinion as a continuation of what the partner said.
- The cold-hot variation (Good cop – bad cop): the technique is used in the union-employer negotiations, with several negotiators (a “good” negotiator versus a “bad” one); the partners are intimidated and discouraged one by one, after which the technique changes thorough politeness, empathy and encouragement.
- The “deliberate errors” technique: it is used in business, when a deal, memorandum, agreement or contract that needs signatures and has a final form is closed. The deliberate error appears in the calculations (wrong additions), numbers (the salary you are employed with), as mixed words (“net” with “gross”; with or without transport), in the calendar dates; two situations are possible:
  - When the mistake is discovered on the spot – it will be corrected without any remarks, perhaps some apologies;
  - When it is overlooked, the document is signed and the “error” becomes a binding clause which needs to be respected as such.
- The “hostage” technique (the “corpse in the house”): the hostage is held captive until the opponent pays the ransom or makes the deal; they can be outrageous, but the alternative is even worse.
- The small-steps or salami slice technique (the “Salami” technique): it implies patience and is very time consuming, but the victory is almost certain.
- The questions technique: it is a strategy which helps you to take over, to check the other’s statements, to corner them, to defuse certain tensions, to delay, to set traps etc.
- The “sweeteners”/granting of a minor concession technique, at the end of a humiliating or disadvantageous negotiation for the other.
- Mimicry: the subtle imitation of the other’s gestures, mimicry and intonation.
- Adjusting your breath to your partner’s.

- The subtle change in language (in terms of vocabulary), adapting it according to the other's dominant perception type, which can be visual, auditory or sensitive. The identification of the partner's type is done observing the favorite expressions they use and the direction of their gaze when they are concentrated (people focused on the visual look up, the ones focused on the auditory perception look down and those on the sensitive one look in the bottom right, diagonally).(S. Prutianu, 1998, pp 20-42.)

5. The factors affecting a conflict:

M. Deutsch identifies 8 categories of factors: (S. Prutianu, 1998, pp 20-42.)

- the parties' orientation in relation to the conflict:
  - a cooperative orientation: the concerns for themselves and for the others are in balance;
  - an individualist orientation: everything for themselves, whilst being indifferent towards the other;
  - a competitive orientation (one party has an interest in succeeding better than the other and doing everything for themselves;
- the personality traits of those in conflict: values, aspirations, objectives, physical and intellectual resources, morals, beliefs, strategy and practice conceptions;
- the previous relationships between the parties involved: attitudes, beliefs, expectations, assumptions;
- the nature of the problem;
  - the type of problem;
  - the character of the problem;
  - the rigidity of the problem;
  - the purpose/ significance/ phrasing/ conflict periodicity.
- Ethnocentrism: is the conception according to which one's own group is the center of reference, all others being assessed in relation to it;
- The elements involved in the perpetuation and escalation of the conflict can be identified through:
  - an anarchic social situation in which rational behavior is not possible, one where social order and mutual trust are lacking;
  - reckless commitments;
  - internal conflicts within the parties (as groups), which are expressed by external conflicts;
  - a cognitive rigidity;
  - erroneous judgments and misperceptions;
  - self-fulfilling prophecies;
  - vicious escalating spirals.
- The public interested in the conflict: it can influence, through the audience's relationship with the interests/ characteristics of those involved in the conflict;

- The strategy and tactics used by the parties in the conflict: the use of positive and negative reinforcements, the credibility level, the type of reason to which they appeal.

## Conclusion

Communication is the element which stimulates the managerial processes and, at the same time, ensures an adequate organizational and motivational climate in which the tasks can be achieved. The managers and their subordinates have the role of transmitters and receivers of the information, through informational messages and communication channels; communication becomes a basic tool for the manager, through which they may exercise their managerial duties: planning, organizing, motivating, training, coordinating, controlling, evaluating and achieving the objectives.

In order to solve conflicts in an organization, it is necessary that we use a variety of languages or that we try and express ourselves as plainly as possible, whilst, at the same time, also being accurate. The tone and variety of the voice, the body language also require attention. The visual aids, practical examples, the exercises, demonstrations, the humor and understanding of the audience's concentration level must be taken into consideration, especially in group situations.

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