

## CONFLICT MANAGEMENT – A TOOL IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

*PhD Student Vanya Petsanova, Department of National Security and Public Administration, Faculty of Law and History, South-West University “Neofit Rilski”, Blagoevgrad*

**Abstract:** *The success of the private or public sector is dependent on the ability to manage conflicts. This study aims to define the conflict and the methods of effective conflict management in the public sector. The author describes different types of conflicts and the appropriate methods for solving them. It is proved that the public sector is 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, managers must identify their management arrangements.*  
**Keywords:** *conflict management; public sector; types of conflicts.*

## УПРАВЛЕНИЕ НА КОНФЛИКТИ – ИНСТРУМЕНТ В ПУБЛИЧНИЯ СЕКТОР

*Докторант Ваня Пецанова, Катедра „Национална сигурност и публична администрация“, Правно – исторически факултет, Югозападен университет „Неофит Рилски“ - Благоевград*

**Резюме:** *Успехът на частния или публичния сектор зависи от способността за управление на конфликти. Това изследване има за цел да дефинира конфликта и методите за ефективно управление на конфликта в публичния сектор. Авторът описва различните видове конфликти и подходящите методи за разрешаването им. Доказано е, че общественият сектор е йерархично сегментиран на отдели и индивидите се характеризират с повсеместни конфликти, които се проявяват в рамките на тази йерархия. Като се има предвид, че конфликтите могат да имат благоприятни, но и катастрофални последици, мениджърите трябва да развиват своите управленски умения.*

**Ключови думи:** *управление на конфликти; публичен сектор; видове конфликти*

### 1. Introduction

Conflict management is one of the key activities in the management of both the public and private sectors. First of all, when clarifying the

presentation of this issue, some basic concepts should be mentioned, such as "conflict management" and the definition of "conflict" in general, especially in the context of the public sector. Conflict management may be accepted as synonymous with conflict resolution. It is described as "having a workplace that precludes conflict and a management that successfully handles and resolves workplace issues".

## **2. Conflict Definition**

Conflicts are a part of our lives. It is impossible to avoid conflicts, so we should learn how to manage them. Mentioning the word "conflict" usually creates discomfort. The first signal reaction is to avoid conflicts at all costs. But conflicts, especially in the workplace, are inevitable. They are the most natural result of joint activity. Potentially, in an organization, they have a significant constructive role. They lead to identification, analysis, and problem-solving. Such positive results of the conflict can be realized if people and organizations are willing to meet this challenge directly and openly. At the end of the last century, Markham argued that "conflict is not necessarily bad, even though we tend to think of it as a completely negative phenomenon. In management theory and practice, there are different opinions about the place and role of conflict in the organization. *Conflict is defined as the absence of agreement between two or more parties.* At the same time, each party does everything possible to accept its opinion and does not allow the other party to do the same (Tschannen-Moran, 2001).

## **3. Positive and negative effects of conflicts**

Very often the conflict is considered and accepted as an undesirable phenomenon, as it is associated with aggression, threat, dispute, hostility. The negative attitude towards conflicts is also related to the understanding that:

- we waste time when we try to solve them;
- they are a consequence of management mistakes;
- they affect the microclimate in the organization negatively.

In modern conditions, however, it is not possible for the organization to lack conflicts. On the contrary, they are sometimes even useful because:

- leading to the emergence of different points of view;
- they help to develop a better management policy;
- they help to formulate a large number of alternatives, which makes the decision-making process more efficient.

The positive characteristics of the conflict define it as functional and the negative ones as dysfunctional. To avoid the negative consequences of the

conflict, we should be managing it efficiently. The management process must include the following phases:

- determining the type of conflict;
- an indication of the reasons for its occurrence;
- selection of an appropriate method for conflict management.

#### **4. Conflict types**

The following types of conflicts are known:

1. Intrapersonal conflict.
2. Conflict between the individual and the group, when the individual takes a position different from the one of the groups.
3. Intergroup conflict.

This is about the emergence of a contradiction between line and staff. To resolve the conflict on time and to avoid the dysfunctional consequences, it is necessary to use an appropriate methodology. There are two groups of methods for managing a conflict situation: structural and interpersonal. According to **Terziev and Georgiev (2017)**, the manager should not assume that the cause of a conflict situation is merely a difference in character. Of course, these differences can be the cause of a conflict in a particular case, but it is one of the factors that can cause a conflict. The manager should start with an analysis of factual evidence and then apply the appropriate methodology. They aim to gather sufficient evidence and arguments to get for the society the necessary degree of assurance that following the path of changes in thinking and, most of all, following the effective practical application of management models, high levels of effectiveness can be achieved on all hierarchical levels in key systems for society and the state.

**Turkali, Fosic, and Dujak (2008)** test on the research of conflict management styles, which are used by the employees in the four monitored Slavonija-Baranja organizations, and we will also present their view on conflict and how much does the same influence a successful course of business of their organization. According to the authors, every organization encounters conflicts daily. The conflicts cannot be avoided, but it is possible to manage them in a way that were cognize them on time. It is necessary to continuously track the organizational signals which point to their existence. If we do not react duly, this can lead to the situation that the conflict itself manages the organization. One of the more important determinants of productivity, efficiency, and performance, and finally job contentment is also the conflict as an independent variable of organizational behavior. By systematic research of organizational behavior, the authors want to make a positive influence on dependent variables, but first, they have to understand and get a good insight into individual elements of organizational behavior. The main contribution of

their study is to brighten the meaning of conflict in the organization, the conflict process, and possible conflict management styles. We will show the relationship between the level of conflict and the impact on organizational performance.

### 5. Phases of the conflict and methods for its management

Conflicts, especially before the phase of their escalation, can lead to positive consequences for a state body in the public sector or a company, a business entity in the private sector. We may describe the following phases of the conflict:

1. Hostility phase – it begins when one of the parties makes a political decision on the possible use of military force as a means of resolving the dispute.
2. Demonstration of hostility – the initial goals of the conflict are being realized and may lead to an escalation of the use of military means.
3. consolidation of hostility – It is possible to start hostilities or negotiate peace, but this does not mean that the dispute is resolved, but only that it is resolved by other means.
4. Dispute phase - occurs when the dispute is not resolved with the conflict and it continues by other means.
5. Settlement phase – occurs when the dispute preceding the conflict has been resolved in an appropriate manner, accepted by both parties.

**Blake and Mouton** describe the reaction of individuals in dealing with conflicts in organizations, especially in the public sector. Figure 1 illustrates the conflict management methods (Baron, 1990).

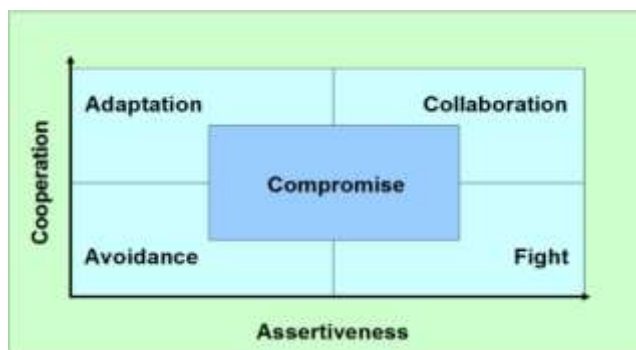


Fig. 1. Conflict management methods

**The fight** is a method of conflict management based on the fact that a person is highly oriented to his personal goals and low oriented to the relationship with the other party. In adopting such methods of conflict management the manager must have skills, such as argumentation and debate, exploitation of rank, proper evaluation of feeling (**Stoica-Constantin Ana**,

**2008**). A person who uses this method takes a firm position in the argument and does not want to take into account the other's point of view. He insists that his position should be accepted or denies someone else's position. The fight is an appropriate method for dealing with conflicts when:

- a quick decision must be made and there is no time for discussion;
- the subject of the conflict concerns values and principles in which one party is firmly convinced and unwilling to betray;
- measures must be taken against people who will benefit from the situation if this method is not used.

**Adaptation** is a method of conflict management in which a person is low oriented to his personal goals and highly oriented to the relationship with the other party. In practice, this is the exact opposite method of Fight. A person who uses a similar style sacrifices his own goals and needs to meet the goals and needs of the other party. In this way, good relationships are built, but at the expense of other people's desires over their own. Adaptation is an appropriate method for dealing with conflicts when:

- peace and tranquility are more important than anything;
- it is important to gain trust and / or goodwill of the other for later;
- The opinion of one of the parties is wrong and wants to admit it.

Practice shows that the style of adaptation is the best style when a person meets another and wants to be liked quickly. By focusing on other people's goals, trust is gained, which is the basis for good relationships in the future.

**Collaboration** is a method of conflict management in which a person is highly oriented to his personal goals and highly oriented to the relationship with the other party. Collaboration can be defined as the joining of ideas to achieve the best solutions for a conflict. The best solution is defined as a creative resolution of the conflict, a solution that is not generated by a single person. According to **Haridas (2004)** collaboration is the appropriate method when:

- different points of view need to be taken into account;
- the empathy of all parties must be won;
- the topic is strategically important for everyone in the long run and it is not desirable to make compromises.

**Avoidance** is a style of conflict management in which a person is low-oriented to his personal goals and low-oriented to the relationship with the other party. In this method, people tend to avoid conflict for fear of engaging

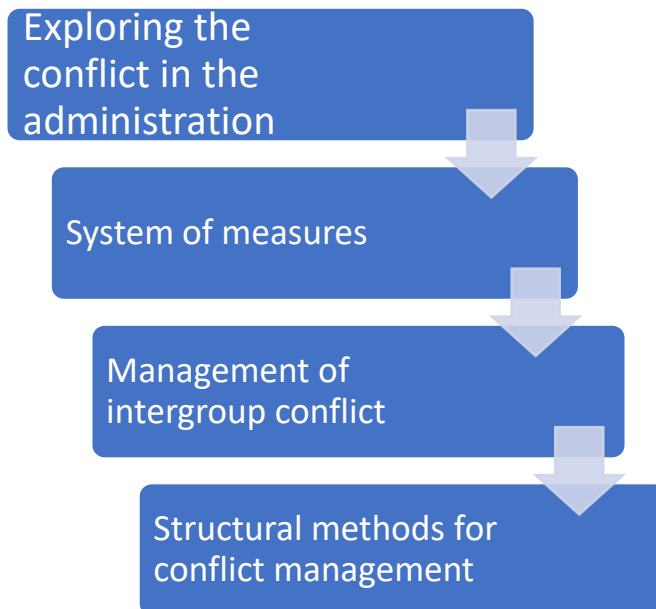
in a tense situation or because they lack sufficient confidence in their ability to manage conflicts.

**Compromise** is a conflict management style in which an individual is partly oriented towards one's personal goals and partly oriented towards the relationship with the other party. A person who uses this method tries to find a solution to the situation, realizing that it is important for everyone. In practice, in life, it is often necessary to make compromises to continue to develop a business or personal relationship. Compromise is an appropriate style for dealing with conflicts when:

- the topic is important;
- the parties to the conflict have equal power and mutually exclusive goals;
- cooperation or fight does not work;
- a quick solution to the problem must be reached.

Skills necessary for conflict management are adopted by the negotiated compromise that the art of finding them iddleway is the ability to assess situations and to make concessions (**Baro, Robert 1992**).

In Figure 2, we present a scheme of the conflict within the public sector, namely in the public administration.



*Fig. 2. A theoretical model for studying the conflict within the state administration*

## **6. Conclusion**

The public sector is 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, managers must identify their management arrangements. Effective conflict management is essential for the mission of the institution.

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