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The Impact of Conflicts in the Organizational Development

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Abstract: Conflict, regardless of its forms, is inherent in social life, being obviously present at the level of different types of organizations. This paper aims to highlight the impact and positive, constructive effects of conflicts in organizational development. Conflicts are inevitable and often lead to the efficiency of the organization's activity, to its development. Sometimes conflicts need to be caused in order to generate something new, evolution and invigorate an organization. Conflict is inherent in human interaction, appearing as a result of different systems of social values, differences in principles, culture, interests. Considering these aspects, it tends to manifest itself with a greater emphasis within an organization, considering the multitude of groups and subgroups that make it up. A mirror analysis between the particularities of the group, as a production entity and the constituent elements of the conflict phase, from its outburst to its fadeaway, will be a sufficiently calibrated working tool to be used in the analysis matrix and strategic reconstruction of an organization.

Keywords: conflict; organization; impact; development

Introduction

For individuals who are involved in the conflict, this is of particular importance and it is very real. The vast majority of conflicts have a destructive, negative effect on the organization in which they have arisen, which is why they should never be ignored or denied, but approached in an active and combative manner.

Conflict represents a disagreement, a confrontation of opinions, interests between different people or groups of people and when we refer to its causality, we must consider a multifactorial and very diverse one. Elements with a general title that could fall into the causality of some conflicts, both interpersonal and organizational, are: age difference, perception of situations, level of training, level of education, differences in behaviour and character, poor or defective communication, accepted and promoted values and norms, knowledge of other organizations experiences, perception of past organizational experiences, receptivity or resistance to change, to the new, different interests and objectives and others.

Content

Along the time, there have been different views in the specialized literature on how to approach conflicts. Summarizing all these approaches, the following perspectives can be considered:

- the *traditional* one, according to which the conflict is dysfunctional by definition, adopting a negative attitude towards any type of conflict. Therefore, the traditional approach promotes the avoidance or elimination of conflicts, by eradicating their causes and sources;

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- that of *human relations*, an approach according to which a conflict is a natural and inevitable result for any social group or organization. Therefore, the conflict is not only perceived as negative, but also positive, functional, obviously, with certain limitations. In this opinion, the acceptance of the conflict is supported, proposing as solutions the recognition of conflicts and their resolution or elimination;

- the *interactionist* one, which appreciates the conflict as being not only inevitable, but also necessary and which can determine innovation and change. This perspective supports the maintenance of a certain conflict level. As a solution, the elimination of conflicts is not promoted, but their correct management is likely to allow the positive stimulation of the parties involved in the conflict. The latter approach has begun to be more and more appreciated by theorists and specialists as being realistic and pragmatic. Therefore, conflict is no longer seen only as a negative, destructive process, which can be quickly settled and eliminated, but in certain circumstances and at a certain level it can be a factor in stimulating the positive energies of groups or individuals in conflict. In this regard, Gary Johns believes that such an approach encourages leaders to cause organizational changes through a strategy which stimulates conflicts. (Johns, 1998, p. 57) (Johns, 1998, p. 424).

Conflicts are not automatically destructive, but this aspect depends to a large extent on how they are perceived by those who observe them, but equally on how they are managed by the manager who has to take into consideration the constructive, positive aspects of a conflict and diminish the destructive peculiarities. Effective management of conflict situations requires previous identification of their causes in order to act with a view to properly use the positive effects and reduce the impact of negative consequences. The constructive or destructive perspective of a conflict depends on the approaches used by the parties involved, which in their turn are influenced by their personalities and interpersonal skills. Among the positive effects of a conflict at organizational level, we can mention: improving interpersonal relations, increasing solidarity among those on the same side, an in-depth knowledge of the organization's issues, knowledge of the interests and views of the other party. The perception according to which conflict is negative and destructive is obsolete and must be rejected.

The vast majority of managers define conflict as a state of tension that occurs when two or more groups within an organization need to interact in order to accomplish a task, to decide, to achieve an institutional goal, or to solve a certain problem. However, simple interaction is not enough to generate a conflict. It is necessary that the interests of the groups be different, for the actions of one group to cause negative reactions from the other group, and the groups, unable to solve the situation, to blame each other. In other words, conflict is the process that occurs when one person or group in one organization frustrates another in achieving the proposed goal. From this point of view, interpersonal conflict presupposes negative, hostile and antagonistic attitudes and behaviors.

In the specialized literature there have been identified multiple causes of conflicts generated at the level of an organization, the main ones being the following (Deep & Sussman, 1996, p. 14):

- different views on the priority organizational objectives (even if all members of the organization share the organizational objectives and are adequately motivated, however the individual goals as well as the roles they are expected to have will always be somehow divergent);

- different points of view on the methods used (groups or individuals may have common objectives, but different opinions on how to carry them out);

- differences in the way of perception or in the system of values (most conflicts occur because of the different way in which people perceive reality, or the ways in which power is exercised);

- lack of communication or defective, incomplete communication, which generates certain misunderstandings;

- competition for supremacy (it manifests itself when one person tries to outdo, or to eclipse another person to promote or gain an influential position within the same organization);

- ambiguity in establishing organizational goals and objectives, performance criteria, in transmitting decisions or distorted presentation of reality;

- the interdependencies between positions, functions and compartments of the formal structure;
- aggression and hostility of some organization members, etc.

A conflict situation does not automatically mean something positive or negative, being rather a circumstance of difference, of manifestation of some intrinsic differences, which are neither constructive nor destructive. Actually, the vast majority of definitions that have been attributed to conflict reveal that a conflict is not necessarily good or bad. Conflicts can be both negative and positive, destructive, but also constructive. The consequence of this vision is that the manager must not eliminate all conflicts, but only those that prove to be real obstacles in front of the organization's goals. In addition, several sources and levels of conflict prove to be beneficial when used as tools for change and innovation at the organizational level. The real challenge is not the conflict itself, but how it can be channeled and managed. In other words, management and channeling are what turn the conflict into a positive or negative one.

Several strategies for resolving conflict situations have been outlined in managerial theory and practice (Johns, 1998, p. 424). As such, it is argued that managers, in order to resolve various conflict situations, must adopt the most appropriate strategies for resolving organizational conflicts, such as:

- avoidance-oriented strategy;
- accommodation-oriented strategy (adaptation);
- competition-oriented strategy;
- compromise-oriented strategy;
- collaboration-oriented strategy.

Management strategies of conflict resolution take into account two main dimensions, namely: the willingness of each party involved in the conflict to impose its own point of view or its own interests and the degree of cooperation of each conflicting party in meeting the needs or interests of the otherpart.

The avoidance strategy is characterized by the fact that, although the parties in the conflict acknowledge its existence, they do not want to confront it. Consequently, this strategy is characteristic of people who do not believe in them and who do not risk being put in the situation of facing a manifest conflict, as they do not possess the necessary skills to resolve it. Conflict avoidance can be a preferred solution, especially if the opponent is strong and hostile and it can be achieved by diplomatic removal of a subject or problem until a more appropriate action, or by changing the subject, ignoring information or transferring responsibility to others. The effectiveness of this strategy is limited, as although it contributes to reducing the stress generated by the conflict, in reality it does not change the situation too much, the conflict remaining dormant.

The accommodation-oriented strategy involves maintaining interpersonal relations at all costs, without taking too much into account the personal objectives of the parties involved. Giving up, satisfying and avoiding conflict are seen as ways to protect the relation between the parties. In other words, the parties involved in a conflict overestimate the value of maintaining interpersonal relationships and underestimate the importance of achieving personal goals. Although in the short term this strategy is effective, especially when the proposed goals are not very important or when the opponent is very strong and unwilling to give up, in the long run this strategy is not appropriate as people do not always wish to sacrifice their own goals only to maintain certain interpersonal or collaborative relations.

The competition-oriented strategy is especially suitable in situations where a lot of power is available, when the circumstance is of the win-loss type. This strategy focuses on overestimating self-interest and underestimating cooperation. In the case of such conflict management, the parties are uncooperative and determined to pursue their own interests, regardless of circumstances.

The compromise-oriented strategy is that type of conflict management which combines, in moderate proportions, the imposition of self-interest with cooperation or meeting the others' needs. The main objective of this strategy is to identify a mutually beneficial solution that satisfies both sides of the

conflict. Considering that both parties in the conflict adopt a “minimum gain-minimum loss” position, which means that both parties have equally unsatisfied interests, compromise represents a smart solution to achieve a certain balance.

The collaboration-oriented strategy is that way of approaching conflicts which overestimates both the imposition of one's personal interest or point of view, as well as the cooperation or satisfaction of others' needs, in order to satisfy all interests of the conflicting parties. This strategy aims to resolve conflicts by maintaining interpersonal relations between the parties and ensuring that both parties achieve their own goals. Therefore, in this strategy, the parties adopt a win-win solution, they respectively share certain beliefs, such as (Cândea & Cândea, 1996, p. 148):

- differences of opinion can and must exist, as they stimulate creativity, the others' opinions must be appreciated;
- in any conflict there must be a mutually acceptable solution;
- cooperation is preferred to competition and differences of opinion are an important part of cooperation;
- trust must be given to the conflict partner, as trust entails trust.

Considering all this, the collaboration-oriented strategy, although it requires a lot of time, energy, creativity, communication, through its advantages it ensures the improvement of organizational efficiency. The collaboration-oriented strategy “is more effective for the organization in terms of productivity, profit and morale and offers equal opportunities for the careers of the individuals involved.” (Dumitrescu, 2002, p. 34).

No manager should avoid the disagreements that emerge within an organization, as a totally homogeneous organization or group, free of controversies, is usually characterized by poor performance and results. At the same time, a poor or superficial approach of a conflict by the manager, the failure to use an adequate resolution strategy are the main causes for the inefficiency of some organizations or obtaining results below expectations, even if they could benefit from all necessary resources, be they financial, logistical or human.

Conclusions

In all organizations, regardless of their size, the conflict is an integral part of the process of development and capitalization of human resources within the organization, which requires a permanent analysis in the direction of strategic development of those entities. Identifying a particular mechanism for positivizing the conflict effect by the top management of an organization, translated into a working tool with increased versatility in implementation, can be a beneficial and productive solution in the medium and long term. Considering the structural, substantive, conflict-triggering diversity, we believe that a scientific analysis of the conflict influence in the productivity indicator is the most effective mechanism for maintaining an organization in the area of stability and intra-institutional consolidation. Besides, the approach of conflicts through the medium of an indicator calibrated on subjective criteria, from the perspective of micro group production relations, can be an effective tool in achieving a successful organizational management.

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