MANAGEMENT THROUGH CONFLICT

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Abstract: Conflict is a phenomenon commonly occurring in organizations, no matter of fact how effective and highly qualified are supervisors. Managers have to respond as soon as possible at the time of the conflict creation, but also must control the techniques, which will minimize the devastating impact on the management of the organization. According to the theory of mutual human relationships, conflict is absolutely desirable, and can have a positive impact on the smooth functioning of groups and organizations. In this article will be presented ideas for supporting this thesis.

Keywords: management, conflict, people

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1. INTRODUCTION

When people work together in an organization things do not always go smoothly. In fact, conflict is an inevitable phenomenon in interpersonal relations within each organization. In the current paper impacts of constructive and destructive conflicts on functioning of an organization were discussed. A list of typical causes of conflicts was created. In the further part of the article various methods of stimulating and finding solutions to conflict resolution were proposed in order to make antagonisms serve in a constructive way, as means of achieving desired goals.

The essence and sources of conflict

Conflict is a situation occurring in a certain time and in a social space, resulted from diverse orientations and needs represented by different people and/or groups. It usually appears among concrete persons within an organization, among particular groups/teams or between institutions. It is often interpreted as a incompatibility or disagreement of interests, desires, attitudes/beliefs or targets. It might be characterized by a high level of an emotional engagement as well as a tendency to manipulate and deceive an 'enemy'. There are several different factors leading to a conflict; among them B. Nogalski and R. Ronkowski (2007, p. 60 – 61) highlight the following ones:

- a disagreement/incompatibility of values, based on differences in attitudes and opinions on issues related to ideologies, traditions/cultures or philosophical systems;
- an incompatibility of interests in a situation when one side or party is to fulfil own needs over another one;
- a conflict based on an ability to retrieve appropriate information – it occurs while there is lack of access to information, there is different/contrary information available or while the possessed information is interpreted in a different way;
- interferences occurring on the line between a supervisor (superior) and a subordinate

D. Lewicka (2010, p. 215) includes also other reasons into the mentioned above list: lack of communication or improper/bad communication; lack of appropriateness in sharing or distributing resources; differences in aims/targets and specific needs, especially if they have permanent character; interdependence of activities; over-generalized pieces of information becoming a basis for going-too-far generalizations regarding different cultural patterns, individual styles as well as some organizational ambivalence.

Evolution of opinions on conflict

An attitude towards a phenomenon of conflict has been changing for several years evaluating from a traditional views to a modern/contemporary approaches (Pocztowski, 2007, p. 391). Traditional theories saw conflict as a harmful factor that usually leads to some kind of 'wrongness'. The phenomenon had a strictly pejorative meaning and was associated with a violence, destruction and irrationalism. According to the traditional point of view, an opinion was forced that conflicts are to be avoided; and in the case when any conflict is observed, it should be treated as a worrying signal of existing interferences, and then immediately recognized and consequently eliminated. Such resolution was to improve an efficiency of a group or team as well as an organization as a whole (Robbins, 2004, p. 178).

In a clear opposition to the described above traditional concept is an attitude called 'a human relation perspective' in which a conflict is a commonly observed phenomenon in each group and organization, and it is not to be eliminated because in some situation it could influence in a positive way achievements and a general functioning of the group (Robbins. 2004, p. 179)

A key approach to understanding a meaning of conflicts in organizations is an interactive perspective, stimulating occurrence and sustaining the particular conflict at a minimum level in order to encourage workers to become active, creative and develop an appropriate degree of self-criticism. According to the interactive perspective of the conflict it cannot be treated as something only 'good' or 'bad'. In order to determine in a distinctive way that the conflict is something positive or negative one has to differentiate between its forms and its levels. When there is a functional conflict taken into account, then it is an example of a constructive form, leading to realization of aims defined by a group and increasing its effectiveness. In order to justify that a conflict has a positive impact on a decision making process in organizations as well as on an

improvement of teams' efficiency a few different situations need to be taken into consideration. When the conflict is constructive it improves the quality of decisions, stimulates innovation; it leads to raising interest and curiosity among members of a group; it gives necessary tools allowing to eliminate problems or constrains and easing tensions; it creates an atmosphere encouraging self-assessments and self-improvements. Among firms facing diverse problems because of lack of functional (constructive) conflicts there are such ones as: Sears, Roebuck or General Motors. S. Robbins gives following examples confirming that some constructive functional conflicts in the mentioned companies are needed: „Some 'yes-men'(do-what-they-are-told-to-do people) are hired and promoted by these companies – employees who are so loyal to their organization that have never questioned anything regarding its functioning. Managers, among them majority made by conservative white Anglo-Saxons brought up in Midwest of the United States, were not in favour of any changes – they preferred to look backwards on a successful past rather than into the future and new challenges. Additionally in the mentioned companies the top level managers were isolated in central offices in Chicago and Detroit, being protected from any unpleasant or unsuccessful news, and taken thousands miles away from changes that in a radical way transformed the retail sale of cars and the global automotive industry" (Robbins, 2004, p. 184).

U. Gros points out that in a situation when a conflict is introduced purposefully as a useful instrument for solving problems in an organization, it has a positive impact on the conflict's final results: an increased productivity/ effectiveness of work based on a higher amounts of items produced in a certain time, improved interpersonal relations based on a higher level of sensibility and taking advantage of creating better possibilities for co-operation and communication as an effect of an increased effectiveness of undertaken activities influencing precise descriptions of tasks and social expectations. Desired benefits might be also brought by taking advantage of the conflict as means of stimulating a process of looking for reasons of existing problems, possibilities to solve them and choosing optimal solutions (Gros, 2003, p. 211).

In the case of a destructive conflict a limitation of the group/team effectiveness may take place. S. Robbins points out that a certain type and degree of conflict may allow to engage a certain group of workers into a process of aims' achievements, whereas in the case of some other workers the conflict may have a negative or even destructive impact. The least desired effects of conflicts are the following ones: stopping appropriate interpersonal communication, weakening a coherence within a group/team, giving up a group target for a sake of a person who is dominant in the conflict, questioning an overall sense of existence of the group/team (Robbins, 2004, p. 179).

Thus a conflict should be seen as a crucial element of an efficient functioning of an organization. It might bring measurable profits as it allows to bring employees out of a state of apathy and make them be active and committed to hard work. The management through conflict is aimed at undertaking actions leading to provoking a conflict and then finding a way to fix it (Sekula, 2010, p. 151). A specific point of view in regards to a conflict in organization as well as an opinion on ways of taking advantage of it in the context of a proper functioning of a company was expressed by T. Watson – a funder of IBM – who assumed that for ensuring a stable and long-term increase of the company's competitiveness, the managerial staff has a lot to do in a sphere of the conflict. In the case of IBM a positive effect was achieved by an 'artificial calling' for a conflict between managerial and productions sections of the company. Keeping the conflict at an optimal level allowed to see it as an elementary factor of the company's motivation strategy (Kisielnicki, 2008, p. 159).

From a psychological point of view a conflict might be considered as a positive ('healthy') one in such a sense that it gives a possibility to get rid of negative emotions connected directly to a state of frustration, and gives a feeling of relaxation. From a sociological point of view a conflict has a positive connotation because it stimulate workers to show a critical attitude towards an existing status quo and initiates favourable condition for an introduction of social changes. It also formulates a basis in a process of shaping appropriate environment for a development of civic democracy, especially because of the fact that during the conflict there are suitable conditions for being in line with principles of pluralism and respecting rules of diversity (Hatch, 2002, p. 301).

Nowadays one of popular theories on conflict management is the modernist theory that according to M. Jo Hatch is the best way to understand the phenomenon of conflict in organization, and choosing the best possible strategy for tackling it. Some confirmation of this opinion needs to be looked for in an interpretation of a curved illustrating a relation between a conflict and a company's effectiveness. A low level of the company's efficiency is a result of a too low or too high number of conflicts; whereas the optimum degree of productivity and efficiency is achieved at an intermediate level of conflict. According to this approach it is advised to tackle conflicts in such way so that benefits resulting from an optimal stimulation of creativity could be retrieved and a level of the team coherence strengthened. In addition, at the same time the negative results of lack of collaboration or even opened hostility between different organizational units and concrete persons within the company can be minimalized (Hatch, 2002, p. 302).

Management through stimulation of conflict

Stimulation of conflict appearing as a desire to induce conflict might be reasonable in a situation when employees are not active enough at their workplace. In order to make them be committed to an optimal realization of tasks some managers decide to provoke conflicts and keep them at a certain level (Brzozowski, Kopczynski, 2007, p. 76). Amongst supporting instruments for the management through stimulation of conflict one may pointed out the following ones (Wachowiak, 2001, p. 162):
- People from outside – employment in the organization is given to new people who are ready to introduce innovative rules and procedures, stimulating all members of a particular group to become more active;
- Activities going against previously established working rules – such action is directed towards changes in a

company and mobilization of subordinates to more creative and active behaviour;

- Competition – it could bring desired results if managers can cope with it in an appropriate way and control it in order to stimulate an increased degree of effectiveness within the organization; taking use of that tool has a sense if employees are focused on achieving their goals by all available means;

- Changes at a top level of the managerial staff – it could be a sort of 'contribution' to conflict and consequently may lead to better engagement in duties among workers.

K. Kmiecik-Baran, W. Cieslak (2001, p. 63) highlight the meaning of three following factors, characterized below, that could be successfully used for stimulation of conflicts: communication instruments, an organizational structure and human factors.

Introduction of a situation of conflict in the communication failures context includes such elements as the following ones: ignoring established within the organization information channels, spreading double- or unclear meaning messages, and also transmitting too much information. Managerial staff may not undertake any discussion on planning any production increase or costs reduction but it requires to accept realization of tasks at a level of 70% as a maximum. Such action are aimed at directing employees attention on unrealized plans and making them see clearly that there is a critical situation within the organization in order to cumulate and focus their energy on finding ways of reducing the level of crisis (the state of emergency). Raising a degree of uncertainty among the subordinates is directed towards making them increase their productivity/efficiency. It might be a good way to motivate people at a workplace to realize their everyday tasks and properly forecast the results of their activities.

Stimulating conflicts through changes in the organizational structure is intended to produce uncertainty, redistribute managerial 'power', make changes in distribution of tasks and duties as well as provoke alterations in mutual dependencies. Conflicts lead to creating new systems of evaluation and also widen a level of contacts with an external environment. One of ways to achieve a desired level of uncertainty, and eventually further 'adjustment' is a re-organization of the whole working team through separating its so-far members. In the meantime a conflict may occur, and this is to help facilitate proper communication among employees, their better openness and unrestricted expression of own opinions.

The conflict management might be also achieved through forcing subordinates to compete, and gradually increase a degree of such competition. The nature of a competition itself is different to a conflict but in a 'favourable' circumstances it might lead to calling a trouble. Through creating unfair conditions for the competition one of involved groups may receive more profits than others, and that eventually lead to a real conflict. A factor that may finish the conflict is a modification of conditions, however as a result of previous stimulation based on the existing dispute/conflict, the members of the group do not resign from the competition, and that significantly influences an increase of their work effectiveness.

Changes in remuneration systems is another method that might contribute to calling a conflict. A group that forms a 'comparative basis' for payment/salaries, in relation to quarterly results of other groups, is a source of an inter-group competition. On a frequent basis the conflict situation appears within the competing group itself, when the received payment is compared with other amounts received in previous periods of time.

The management based on provoking conflict situation is a difficult undertaking. Before taking a decision whether to call a conflict in the organization it is necessary to answer the following questions (compare: Kmiecik-Baran, Cieslak, 2001, p. 64):

- Are decision being taken clearly justified?
- Are we able to control factors that may modified a course of the conflict?
- Will potential profits achieved out of the conflict not be lower than possible losses?
- Will the conflict not lead to a permanent changes in the working atmosphere and in interpersonal relations? "

In the case that an answer to any of the above questions is subject to a serious concern, it should be advised to decide on an implementation of another methods.

Traditional vs modern procedures of conflicts resolutions

In traditional approaches to a conflict there is a typical pre-assumption observed that the result of the conflict is a victory of only one of the parties/entities involved in it (Kuc, 2008, p. 237). The presented below solutions do not bring any real satisfaction to the conflict's parties, and do not favour finding any creative solutions.

Into a scope of examples of traditional ways of conflicts resolutions one may include the following ones (compare: Brzozowski, Kopczynski, 2007, p. 75):

– **Avoidance** – people involved in a conflict are aware of its existence but they try to avoid it or even hide or cover it. A consequence of such approach is a withdrawal of one of the engaged parties. Or alternatively, when the withdrawal for some reasons is not possible, an internal displacement of the conflict from own consciousness takes place. A characteristic feature of such behaviour is a low degree of aiming at achieving own goals or aspirations and also lack of any interest in targets set by other persons involved in the conflict. The most frequent action in such situation is trying not to notice the conflict at all (as far as it is possible) in order to postpone it.

– **Delaying** – the workers count on it that the course of events will somewhat lead to solving the existing problem. They focus on putting the conflict solution aside and tend to believe that they are not to be the blamed parties for the conflict.

– **Compromising** – the agreement might be reached by persons involved in the conflict when their demands/requests will be partly fulfilled. Weak aspect of such solution is the fact that each side of the conflict will lose something. However no-one will fill as if he/she is a real 'loser' because an exchange of different benefits takes place. The approach might be called 'negotiations and looking for constructive solutions', acceptable by all

persons engaged in the conflict. Looking for the compromise emphasizes the importance of own goals as well as targets of other people being in conflict. It needs to be added that the compromise is some sort of a 'half-way' between competition and collaboration models.

Currently it is observed that in the situation of conflict managers are expected to behave in a professional way to find an appropriate solution, including into the conflict resolving procedure the following elements: an accurate identification of parties engaged in a conflict, a proper diagnosis of reasons for the conflict, an assessment of potential consequences, resigning from any emotional involvement, staying out of any personal animosity and taking care of renewing a contact between the parties of the conflict. Not earlier than after having collecting all the necessary information and data, the most appropriate method for the conflict resolution might be found (Kuc, 2008, p. 237).

Among modern methods of the conflict management one may found the following tools: image exchange sessions, negotiations, therapeutic sessions, re-assessing of goals, mediations.

Image exchange sessions are focused on working out a solution to a particular conflict through co-operation of all the involved persons/parties. The aim of organising such sessions is making the involved people realize the nature of their own position in a dispute and help them also to see the conflict with the eyes of other participating people. The action is to allow to pay attention not only to own interests but also understand needs of others. After confronting discrepancies the parties have an opportunity to realize the fact that the achievement of their particular goals depends on co-operation with other people. (Encyklopedia zarządzania – Management encyclopaedia: http://mfiles.pl/pl/index.php/)

Re-assessing/re-evaluation of goals is among a group of methods which are used when it is difficult to reach an immediate solution as far as a settlement of a conflict is concerned. In order to be successful in diverting attention of parties engaged in the conflict from a real source of the conflict, some stimulation is made to raise interest within the whole group in finding a 'higher level' common goal (Banka, 2007, p. 238).

Negotiation is conducting direct talks with people who are engaged in a conflict to reach some consensus for all parties engaged. The consensus/agreement might be finalised when the parties can find satisfying solution for the conflict. In order to maintain good relations among the conflict participants it is necessary to introduce a 'win-win' strategy (Lewicka, 2010, p. 221).

Mediations is an effective means for conflict resolving. It is linked to an engagement into the resolving process of a 'third' (external) party that is not focused on imposing a concrete solution but on finding a final settlement for the conflict or preventing its further escalation (Kmiecik-Baran, Cieslak, 2001, p. 58). The important role of a mediator starts not earlier than there are not further chances for finding a solution by the involved parties themselves. The task of the mediator is to help in working out a voluntary and satisfying for all the involved persons agreement. Real challenges for the mediator are all factors that may make the agreement to be reached difficult (Lewicka, 2010, p. 222): high degree of the conflict, lack of motivation to achieve the agreement, low level of involvement in mediations; all disputes and arguments in which an important role is played by values or a particular ideology; not equal 'power' of the involved parties of the conflict or better self-esteem/eloquence etc. of one of the entities.

The mediator, playing the role of an intermediary, aims at carrying out successful mediations among the parties being in conflict leading to restoring of the previously lost mutual trust. In order to make both parties willing to open up in front of the mediator, it is necessary to take two directions of action – the first one is focused on selecting information, careful observation of steps taken by both parties of the conflict; while the other one is linked to a successful influencing of the conflicted employees in order to be able to reach the agreement among them (Lewicka, 2010, p. 222-223).

Therapeutics is a technic led by a person representing the conflicted parties and an external expert. During the conflict one may observe breaking links/liaisons among members of a group, and cooling mutual relations. In order to make people engaged in the conflict to re-establish proper relations/social interactions as well as re-build their destroyed psyche, the role of a therapist is focused on tools that may help in rational thinking and mutual collaboration. The therapist, through the introduced instruments, may finally reach the point when the conflict's parties will withdraw from any compensation out of the conflict. (Banka, 2007, p. 237).

2. CONCLUSION

Conflict is a social phenomenon occurring in every community, so it should not be avoided. Besides bringing negative effects, it also delivers some positive impacts. And therefore sometimes it might be deliberately provoked or invoked. Research on conflict show that there are several sources of initiating conflicts and antagonisms. Noticing in a conflict both: opportunities and threats, allows to turn it into a useful management tool by taking appropriate measures aimed at stimulating and resolving conflicts. Conflicts might be stimulated by means of communication, organizational structure or human factors. In the case of resolving conflicts either traditional and/or modern methods are used.

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