

CONFLICTS AT THE WORKPLACE AND THE POSSIBILITIES OF THEIR ELIMINATION. PROJECT FOR E-LEARNING.

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This thesis deals with conflict in the workplace. The goal was to bring the possibility of eliminating conflict managers, emerging in the workplace. The theoretical part deals with the conflict, the cause of conflict, consequences and resource conflicts. The second half of the thesis contains the rules for the efficient resolution of conflicts and possible ways of resolving conflicts. The issue of conflict, which is devoted to the theoretical part is then transferred to its practical shape in the form of an e-learning course, which is created in the Moodle system. The aim of the course is to facilitate knowledge of all participants to the conflicts and their possible solutions not only in the work environment. The course includes not only the theoretical basis of the work, but also images, videos and examples of conflict situations that are helpful in the study of this issue. The methods used in this work are the analysis of literature in the aforementioned areas, familiarity with the method of course design in Moodle system and work with text and video.

Keywords: Conflict, E-learning, Conflict resolution, Moodle

1 INTRODUCTION

The importance of the ability of managers to handle conflicts is constantly increasing. Conflict resolution is usually the most challenging task of managers in all companies. At the workplace managers solve conflicts of all types and sizes, and their task is not to ignore them, because the biggest conflict is unsolved conflict. Suppressed conflicts and conflicts unresolved on time can pack on more and more issues and involve more and more people who have nothing in common with the origin of the conflict. Conflict situations are so widespread and perhaps even natural, that it is prudent to try to understand them and then consider ways of their positive solution.

This work is compiled in the form of e-learning so as to serve as a basis for learning in this subject and to approach the issue of conflict in the workplace and the possibility of its elimination to the reader. This project is created in the Moodle system which is utilized by Faculty of Aeronautics for the creation and development of e-learning at the faculty. The course includes not only the theoretical basis of the work, but also images, videos and examples of conflict situations that are helpful in the study of this issue.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Summary of a term conflict

Conflicts are part of human life. They cannot be avoided and may be the driving force to resolve the problem situation. It is therefore important to focus on ways of resolving conflicts. Conflict is a part of our lives, but interpersonal insults, rudeness and violence are not a necessity of our life.

Professional literature defines conflict on many occasions. Conflict is a word of Latin origin, conflictus means crash. It has the prefix con, which means together with something and it is derived from the root of verb fligo, which means to strike, meaning to hit someone with something. The prefix indicates that this is not a one-sided situation, but that it involves at least two people.

Conflict, then can be understood as mutual interference, collide with someone, to be with someone in a mutual struggle. The classic definition of conflict is given by Morton Deutsch. Conflict is characterized as a "situation "in which incompatible activities occur. It's an activity that is incompatible with another activity; it prevents bars and brings difficulties, hurts, or otherwise renders the initial activity less effective.

2.2 Forms of conflict

- a) *Intrapersonal conflicts* take place within a man himself. One must fight with himself, when he has something difficult to decide or he just does not know well what it is really important.
- b) *Interpersonal conflicts*. When there are two or more people who do not understand each other and do not come together, interpersonal conflicts arise.
- c) *Conflict between individuals and groups*. This conflict may be, for example, between the manager and the subordinate group or between leaders and subordinates. Manager may initiate disciplinary proceedings against a member of the group, causing a conflict, which can result in reduced productivity.
- d) *Conflicts in groups*. Such group conflicts often arise from also changed working relations - ongoing management changes, people having to move to other offices and meet new colleagues, or company reorganisation.
- e) *Conflicts between organizations*. A conflict occurs also between organizations that are in some way dependent on each other. This conflict may be between the buyer (one organization) and distributor (another organization) about quantity, quality of materials, delivery deadlines and other commerce related issues between the two organizations.

2.3 Causes of Conflict

Each conflict has its cause and effect. Intervention is possible at both levels; however only at the cause level is intervention meaningful.

The most common causes of personal conflicts include:

- *Misunderstanding* - misunderstanding occurs when the intent or purpose of one party to the other is understood differently than intended.
- *Lying / dishonesty* - Lying between people may not even be in large; it requires only little half-truths resulting in a conflict.
- *Negligence* - Unfulfilled expectations, unfulfilled promises, avoiding responsibility and neglecting everything others expect from us.
- *Intent* – if a person has the intention to help another person, this selfless act is the interest of both, so in this case there is conflict prevention. What causes conflicts is if another person wants to "show" or be superior regardless of our reasons and outrage in the given situation.
- *Negligible investment in own position or belief* – when belief or ideology meets. It belongs among other causes of conflicts.
- *Unclear boundaries of personal space* - Unclear definition of the private area, how far it is allowed to go may lead to the fact that other people will occasionally inadvertently cross that border.
- *Fear* - Concern or fear of something causes also many conflicts. Almost everyone who has ever found himself in the conflict has felt threatened in some way.
- *Side intentions* - Side thoughts arise in situations where one party is interested in something which he wants to conceal or hide from the other party

2.4 Consequences of industrial conflicts

2.4.1 Upon employees

People often have a tendency to look at the conflicts in which they participate voluntarily or involuntarily, as situations that necessarily must have its winners and losers.

- a) *The winner and loser, win – loose*
It is clear that some work conflicts cannot be resolved in favor of both sides, so one side must get what the other party loses. Among the main reasons why most executives have negative relation to conflict is precisely this reason that most of them at the beginning look exactly like this type of conflict.
- b) *Both win, win – win*
Both sides are seeking a way to achieve their desired goals. The result of such a situation is satisfactory feeling on both sides, because they get what they wanted without the other having something to lose.
- c) *Both loose, loose – loose*
Loss of both parties is most often the result of the various conflicts in the life of the organization. This situation occurs when neither party is satisfied at the end of the conflict. The given situation is distressing for both parties.

2.4.2 Upon organization

Serious conflicts are characterised by two features that cannot be found in mild conflicts. They often lead to unfair practices that undermine work relations in the workplace and hinder business because rivals are more focused on their opponents than the work itself. Unfair practices can include false accusations, slander, verbal abuse or complaints about differences. Above mentioned serious conflicts tend to give rise to negative effects in the workplace affecting workers productivity.

Negative consequences of conflict can include:

- *Time and energy spent in the wrong way.* Wasting of time and energy to block opponents unnecessarily deplete scarce resources of the organization, which are subsequently absent in positive activities.
- *Deflected judgments.* Ability of the worker to perceive and make judgments is often inaccurate and distorted during the conflict. Upon occurrence of error in a group or organization, there is a trend of worker in question trying to attribute that error to everybody around, and not to admit his mistakes and shortcomings.
- *Psychological consequences of defeat.* Losers often deny, distort or trivialize the facts of their defeat. Losers close themselves from the world, look everywhere for real perpetrators, flee from the others and do not cooperate.
- *Deficiencies in coordination and cooperation.* Groups contained in the conflict set their goals above everything else. These goals are usually negatively perceived and formulated.
- *Irresponsible behaviour.* The opposite side of the conflict and the participants in the course of conflict, or after solution has been made and does not satisfy them, tend to resort to negative attitudes. For example, they do not care about anything including them.
- *Establishment of mistrust and suspicion.* Conflicts create a feeling of distrust and bad faith of acts on the opposing sides. Even the best -intentioned acts are summarily condemned as a particularly dastardly manoeuvre, which only reinforces the initial suspicion.

2.4.3 Positive effects of conflict

Feelings of frustration, slander, various dangerous forms of ridicule, loss of concentration, lack of communication, and stress, are other consequences of conflict. Serious negativities of conflict are perpetuation of the conflict with no hope of resolve. They can draw energy from themselves, gaining its own dynamics and appear at the time hardly predictable.

However, there are also many conflict situations or situations of acceptable non-compliance with values in the workplace, which are dealt in a responsible manner and help to solve many things, dispel, settle or vent working environment. These situations can be regarded as positive consequences of conflict.

For example:

- *Better value visibility.* The positive effect of the conflict demonstrates the value of the group or organization appreciated the most.

- *Clarifies position.* The culmination of the conflict leads to sudden clarification or explanation of several previously misunderstood opinions and attitudes.
- *Improving the quality of decision making.* If the conflict stimulates creativity, and acts as a tool providing a means of expressing dissent, encourages interested members, enhances the quality of decision-making which can be constructive.
- *Increases involvement.* Conflicts tend to attract people and therefore they lead people to greater involvement. Positive conflict resolution is usually an occasion to develop this commitment more and more.
- *Supports spontaneity in communication.* In conflict situations, people often do not realise how and what they say and also how they act. It often clarifies opinions and attitudes; and shows who the person really is.
- *Enhances productivity.* It is important how people look at the conflict, how they interpret its meaning, and how the conflict is solved. It helps to increase creativity. From time to time, it is advisable for managers to encourage some exchange of views, competitiveness or criticism of defiance against tradition.

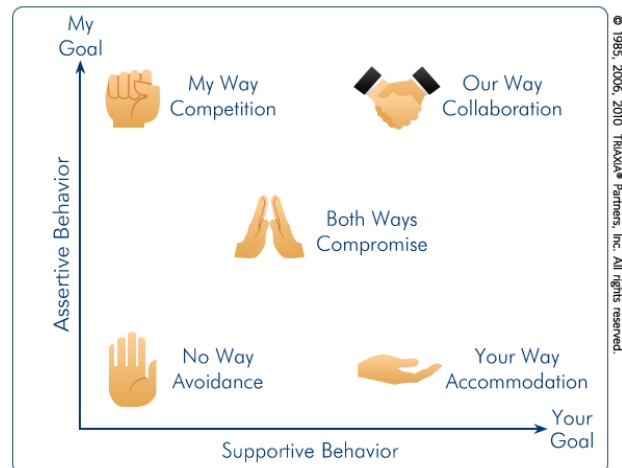
2.5 Rules of effective conflict resolution

The main objective in conflict resolution is always a positive solution. Also important factor is the monitoring and adherence to the following steps.

- *Define the cause of the conflict clearly* – to realise that the perception of conflict will be different from every perspective.
- *Say why I want to solve this conflict* – what impact it may have on the workplace and relationships in it.
- *Communicate* - if we want the conflict to be solved as quickly as possible and with the best outcome.
- *Solve problems directly by facing them* - comments, notes, e - mail, are not the best way to solve conflicts.
- *Stick to the issue* - in an effort to resolve the conflict it is right to bring in persons concerned and to address specific behaviour and situations. It is not right to deal with the past, deal with present only.
- *Make time if necessary* – if conflict resolution is quick and unprepared, it can influence our emotions so that our solution will not be productive. If we feel so, it is appropriate to take a break and continue addressing the conflict at another time.

2.6 Styles of conflict resolution in the workplace

In the 1970s Kenneth Thomas and Ralph Kilmann identified five main styles of dealing with conflict that vary in their degrees of cooperativeness and assertiveness. They argued that people typically have a preferred conflict resolution style. However they also noted that different styles were most useful in different situations.



Obr. 1 Styles of conflict resolution in the workplace

- *Accommodating*
Bear. Lost - win. This style indicates a willingness to meet the needs of others at the expense of the person's own needs. The accommodator often knows when to give in to others, but can be persuaded to surrender a position even when it is not warranted. This person is not assertive but is highly cooperative.
- *Collaborative*
Owl. Win - win. People tending towards a collaborative style try to meet the needs of all people involved. These people can be highly assertive but unlike the competitor, they cooperate effectively and acknowledge that everyone is important.
- *Compromising*
Fox. Lost - lost. People who prefer a compromising style try to find a solution that will at least partially satisfy everyone. Everyone is expected to give up something, and the compromiser him- or herself also expects to relinquish something.
- *Avoiding*
Turtle. Lost - lost. People tending towards this style seek to evade the conflict entirely. This style is typified by delegating controversial decisions, accepting default decisions, and not wanting to hurt anyone's feelings. It can be appropriate when victory is impossible, when the controversy is trivial, or when someone else is in a better position to solve the problem. However in many situations this is a weak and ineffective approach to take.
- *Competitive*
Shark. Win - lost. People who tend towards a competitive style take a firm stand, and know what they want. They usually operate from a position of power, drawn from things like position, rank, expertise, or persuasive ability. This style can be useful when there is an emergency and a decision needs to be made fast; when the decision is unpopular; or when defending against someone who is trying to exploit the situation selfishly.

2.7 Preventing Conflict in the right manner of behaviour

Successful companies have long understood that the success of any company is built on the fact that there are working not only qualified, but especially confident employees who are able to view and easy-tackle everyday tasks, manage obstacles and meet targets in line with the policy and philosophy of the company . One of the basic assumptions of successful employees is the ability to communicate effectively.

Conflicts are an integral part of life. Often they are created by our own thinking, our behaviour. Over 90% of all disagreements and conflicts at work and private life is due to inappropriate communication

2.7.1 Assertive communication

Your life can be greatly enjoyable by the fact that you can manage and use assertive communication techniques. Being assertive does not mean to ignore conflicts and to suppress negative feelings in yourselves, to be assertive means to solve conflicts in an appropriate manner, so that both parties come out of it satisfied and without guilt. It is not enough to grasp the assertiveness techniques in theory, it is necessary to adopt them and accept them to such extent that they become a natural part of your life. Assertiveness develops respect for others, self-esteem and improves life.

2.7.2 Unassertive behaviour

The opposite of assertive behaviour is unassertive behaviour. This behaviour can be divided into aggressive and non-aggressive. Aggressive behaviour can be divided into direct and indirect aggression.

Direct aggression - insulting, threatening gestures, denial of rights, disregard for the feelings.

Indirect aggression - apathy, boycott, sarcasm, irony, contempt.

Non-aggressive behaviour is divided into concealment and indirect expression.

Concealment - feelings, wishes, desires, needs.

Indirect expression - feelings, wishes, desires and needs.

Unassertive behaviour of individual threatens the unassertive individual himself or a team member. It can lead to feelings of incomprehension, congestion, guilt (formation of internal conflict) and may result in depression, anxiety and illness. Other participants may face aggression assertively – so they are stressed or unassertively leading to interpersonal conflict. With such behaviour in teams, it increases the risk of intrapersonal and interpersonal conflicts among the team members.

The importance of proper communication in work situations:

- need to communicate clearly, accurately and appropriately
- communication should be adapted to target and addressee.

2.7.2 Assertive behaviour

Positive feelings

- In assertive behaviour it is important to know how to give praise and how to accept praise. Refusal of praise is unassertive. We accept praise for it verbally or non-verbally (gesture, smile).
- We have the right to ask a colleague for collaboration, but at the same time we have the obligation to respect ones right to accept, postpone or reject our request.
- We also have the right to express our views and refuse someone's request.

Negative feelings

- We have no right to criticize specific actions and performances of our colleagues.
- We have no right to criticize the person as such, his abilities and personality.
- We have no right to criticize clients and superiors - the best way is to advise, recommend and offer.

3 E-LEARNING

3.1 E-learning

The exact definition of e –learning, or electronic learning does not exist , but in the literature and on the Internet , it is possible to find dozens of them and the reason for that is because e-learning is constantly evolving system that changes its form and scope. We can say that e - Learning can the use new multimedia technologies and Internet to improve the quality of education, by facilitating access to resources and services as well as to promote further exchange, cooperation and learning which is enabled or supported by the use of various information and communication technologies .

E-learning usually involves some form of interactivity, including online interaction among students and teachers and other peers. E-learning education is usually accessible via the Internet with its associated tools and software. Constantly evolving e-learning involves an increasing number of diverse technologies and tools such as video and audio conferencing, mobile phones, data projectors, digital cameras, GPS systems or interactive whiteboards.

Nowadays, e -learning, electronic learning in translation or learning via electronic media is a very popular tool for formal and informal education. Intelligent electronic systems known as Learning Management System (LMS) are using multimedia elements, combining the latest training techniques, allowing individualization of instruction tailored to each student.

3.2 Forms of e-learning

By connecting distinguish online e-learning and off-line e-learning

3.2.1 On-line e-learning

On-line e-learning is a form of e-learning, which requires connection to a computer network (intranet, internet, mobile telephone network). On-line e-learning has two basic forms namely synchronous and asynchronous.

Synchronous e-learning

All students and teachers are logged on at the same time they communicate with each other. Students need to be logged in at the same time when the online course starts, but not necessarily in the same place.

Synchronous e-learning uses:

- Chat
- conference calls,
- video,
- applications
- interactive video. [22]

Asynchronous e-learning

This model of communication does not require that students and teachers connected while at the same time. Students can watch downloaded curriculum from anywhere on earth with an Internet connection. The curriculum is available on the web and downloaded it may pace the student what he does and determine the time when he does determine. The curriculum is available to students 24 hours a day with the option to revert back to the subject matter. This method of study is called a spacer and is also more popular for its lower cost of development studies student autonomy and flexibility.

For example:

- websites
- discussion groups,
- email
- correspondence courses.

3.2.2 Off-line e-learning

Off-line e-learning is a form of exchange that do not require a network connection. Study materials are passed through CD-ROMs and DVD-ROMs. In primary schools is most often used off-line e-learning combined with face to face learning what is called blended learning.

3.3 Advantages of e-learning

- Flexibility, Convenience and Accessibility
- Easy and Quick accessibility any time anywhere.
- Self-pacing, the asynchronous way, allows each student (slow or quick) to study at his own pace and speed so it increases satisfaction and reduces stress.
- E-Learning presents different styles and facilitates learning through a variety of activities.
- Reduced overall cost – The cost of: Travel, lodging and meals. Production and distribution the course materials, guides...etc.

- Students can study in any place where they have access to a computer and Internet connection.
- Easy and quick reviewing, updating, and editing Learning materials needs.
- It moves faster - because the students can skip activities or materials they already understand and jump to new issues.

3.4 Disadvantages of e-learning

- Bandwidth limitation, or slow Internet connections, which can affect the ease of the learning process, because, it causes weak performance for multimedia: video, sound and graphics, as well as long waits for download
- Increased costs for initial development, because the greater portion of the costs associated are start-up costs.
- Some students might feel lonely and isolated from their instructor and classmates
- It requires computer skills and some times files and software management of online learning, which could be complex for beginner students.

4 CREATING A COURSE

4.1 Moodle system

Modular object-oriented dynamic environment for learning. Learning Management System Moodle or Modular Object - Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment. It is software that uses CMS (course management system) to support the training of fulltime and distance learning online courses that are available on the internet. It is a learning platform designed for educators and students with a simple, safe and integrated system, which creates a special learning environment that is comfortable and uncluttered.

Moodle is a free open source package distributed under the GNU Public License (General Public License). With this package everyone is entitled to copy and use the Moodle system to suit his needs. The only condition is then is making this modified code available to other users with the original copyright.

To enroll into the educational process in the system Moodle, log in to the appropriate course, after the entry you can see all the options and features on a single level. Subsequently, the area broken into the elements of teaching as lectures, study materials, videos, tasks or tests is available.

4.3 Course Conflicts in the workplace and the possibility of elimination

At the beginning, before creating courses themselves Dr. Jozef Galand, MEng., PhD., who is one of the administrators of Moodle at the Faculty of Aeronautics, created for me in this system a course entitled Conflicts in the workplace and the possibility of

their elimination. In this course, I was assigned the role of teacher as this position in the course may edit, modify, create and delete teaching materials and activities. Furthermore, they can grade the students and change some settings of courses, including writing students and to allocate certain other roles for registered users.

The first time I logged in, my course did not contain anything. The entire content and process of how it will look like and what will be its purpose was dependent only on me.

The course consists of seven lectures on issues of conflict in the workplace, their formation, solution and prevention. Students can check up on their knowledge regularly, each lecture is divided into several smaller, better memorable parts, after each often follows a question on the previous already taught part of the lecture.

Lectures are in a course arranged as follows:

1. Conflict and its forms
2. Sources and causes of conflict
3. Stages of conflict
4. Consequences of conflict rules and their effective solutions
5. Styles of conflict resolution in the workplace
6. What is my preferred style of conflict resolution?
7. Behaviour as a basis for successful employees without conflict

Lectures do not contain only theory; most of them contain either video to help better understand the issues or specific examples of conflict and conflict situations so called case studies.

5 CONCLUSION

None of us like conflict or disagreement, yet we encounter them at every step of our lives. Its cause can be money, goods, services, property, and many other things. Because conflicts cannot be avoided, it is best to know how to deal with and learn to live with them.

While writing my thesis on conflicts in the workplace and the possibility of their elimination, project for e-learning, I have enriched my awareness of new knowledge about this subject which I believe will in my next professional and private life be helpful not only to me, but also the wider surroundings when such knowledge is needed. I believe that I have fulfilled the goals that I set at the beginning of writing the thesis.

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