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**STRATEGIES FOR APPROACHING CONFLICT MANAGEMENT  
IN SCHOOL ORGANIZATION**

Claudiu Langa (a)\*

\* Corresponding author

(a) University of Pitesti, Targu din Vale street, no. 1, Romania, [claudiu.langa@upit.ro](mailto:claudiu.langa@upit.ro)

**Abstract**

Conflict is an undeniable reality of organizational life, therefore it represents a reality of the activity of a school manager. In sociological literature, conflict is defined as "a blockage of the normal decision-making mechanism, of the way in which an individual and a group faces difficulties in choosing their way of action". Organizational practice shows that conflictual situations are used as important strategies for obtaining a better result to the detriment of the others' progress.

The purpose of the study is the analysis of using various interventions strategies on the part of the manager in solving the conflict situations, depending on the parties involved in the conflict and the type of conflict. Correlation between some preferences for applying certain strategies and seniority in education of the managers was also taken into account, the managers' attitude towards conflicts and trigger causes of the conflicts.

The methodology used in this investigative approach is the questionnaire applied on a group of 90 students from the master study program Educational management, University of Pitesti. The questionnaires were applied on face to face sessions.

Findings and Results. The data gathered from the applied questionnaires have been elaborated and analyzed through statistics methods such as the descriptive and the inferential one and have confirmed the necessity of choosing agreeable strategies for conflict solving, depending on the parties involved in the conflict and the type of conflict.

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**Keywords:** Conflict, school organization, strategies, students, teachers.



## 1. Introduction

In any community, class, or group, a range of tense situations may appear, caused by different factors, and which can take various forms: latent or active, short- or long-term, immediate or delayed, entirely or partly solved, or even postponed, etc.

As a vocabulary term, *conflict* derives from the Latin “*conflictus*” which means “to keep together by force”. The conflict is a form of opposition centred on the opponent, based on the incompatibility of goals, intentions and values of the conflicting parties (Vlăsceanu, 1993). The conflict may be materialized by: misunderstanding, disagreement, clash of interests, violent discussion, antagonism, confrontation, disputation, contention, strife, etc.

## 2. Paper theoretical foundation and related literature

The conflict is “a situation in which interdependent people express (manifest or latent) differences in satisfying their individual needs and interests, and they experience interference from each other in accomplishing these goals” (Donohue & Kolt, 1992).

Conflict refers to some form of friction, disagreement, or discord arising within individuals or a group when the beliefs or actions of one or more members of the group are either resisted by or unacceptable to one or more members of another group. Conflict pertains to the opposing ideas and actions of different entities, thus resulting in an antagonistic state (Tschannen-Moran, 2001).

The conflict, in Daniel Shapiro’s opinion (1998), is associated with a tree. Each component of the tree represents a part of the conflict: the soil – the social environment where conflict erupts (family, team, company); the root - the multiple causes of conflict; the trunk – the parties to the conflict; the hollow - the clearly defined problem of the conflict; the flowers - own positive and negative emotions of those involved in the conflict; the leaves - the concrete actions of the people involved and the fruit – the conflict resolution

Every apple, which has not been eaten on time, falls down, and from its seeds, a new tree is born. Similarly, any conflict which has not been resolved in time serves as a premise for the birth of another conflict.

The dynamics of the conflict was often compared to an iceberg. The “iceberg” model suggests that only a small part of the conflict is visible at the surface. Six sevenths of an iceberg is under water, invisible - but they are the ones that determine the size and behaviour of the iceberg.

There are several strategies that are intended to enable effective cooperation among youth, which promote the ability to handle conflict in an autonomous and positive way, such as the circle of time (group discussions of different issues between teachers and pupils, enhancing mutual trust and active listening), the friend-operator (the activation within the class of a small group of comrades with functions of emotional or practical support of their peers) and peer education (the sharing of information, attitudes or behaviours among peers) (Menesini, 2003).

The strategies for dealing with conflicts are divided into three categories (Panisoara, 2003):

- Strategies to prevent conflicts that may contain: focus on objectives, clear delineation of tasks, well-structured and accepted by the members of the organization; encourage communications and avoid win-lose situations.
- Conflict reduction strategies that focus on changing the behaviour and focusing the approach, which can be achieved by: using influential people in the group who can reduce the intensity of a range of conflicts; rotating people from one group to another, rotating responsibilities in the group and identifying super-ordinate goals that require groups to work together.
- Strategies for resolving conflicts - from the vast field of varied issues related to conflict, two effective ways of solving conflicts are being delimited: negotiation and mediation.

We all react differently to conflict situations, some are angry, or retreat inside ourselves, or we tend to resort to external aid (Langa & Bulgaru, 2009). From the many ways of conflict resolution patterns, we will focus on four behavioural types regarding the people's behaviour during conflict and on the conflict resolution strategies (Souni, 1998):

*The bypass style.* This style of managing conflicts is characterized by a low capacity of asserting own interests and secondly, by a very low collaboration with the negotiating partner. This strategy can also be called "ostrich head in the sand". Although this has not been considered as the most appropriate strategy, it can be a good policy if it is followed by practical measures to improve the situation. In other words, it is the most appropriate way to gain time, provided that this time is well spent.

*The committed style.* A committed management style requires a minimum of personal interests and a maximum achieving of cooperation. Thus, the foundations of a partnership are laid, if desired, which are likely to last. This style can be explained as follows: A helps B without claiming anything for the moment, having more to gain in the future. Some authors consider that such management is a sign of weakness, but it can be considered a good model of cooperation, and also a model of commitment.

*The competitive style.* Through this method of management, self interest is required and any form of cooperation is reduced. This creates a dictatorship of the one who is stronger and who is not in any way interested in working with partners of a lower class. Teachers who go for this way of resolving any conflicts in the classroom, will induce a tense atmosphere among students, which will, in its turn, generate conflicts, but in latent form.

*The collaborative style.* Finally, this last conflict management style is considered the best as it involves maximizing both personal interests and communication. This style is considered to be the most appropriate between the two main actors in a school - teacher and students - who have common goals.

The efficient resolving of conflict situations requires the identification and awareness of the causes that generated them, as both the nature of the conflict, and the ameliorative recovery methods depend on the causes (Popescu, 2014).

One of the objectives of educational strategies promoted by The European Council is the necessity to build an open and flexible educational strategy, adapted to social and individual needs, favouring the development of each student's capacity (Tăușan, 2012). The competence being a complex finality, result of the student implication in his own training, the competence assessment encompasses the obtained result, the degree of formation and use of cognitive capacities, and also the motivations, the assumed attitudes and behaviours exhibited by student in the learning approach. (Tudor, 2016). As the

curriculum main and determinant organizer, the construct and multidimensional concept of competence is defined by students potential and available personality traits that facilitate the integrated mobilization of the resources acquired in time by students in unintended or designed learning situation (Soare, 2015). The conflict management skills naturally replenish the set of skills specific of school managers.

### **3. Methodology**

**3.1. The purpose of the study** is the analysis of using various interventions strategies on the part of the manager in solving the conflict situations, depending on the parties involved in the conflict and the type of conflict. Correlation between some preferences for applying certain strategies and seniority in education of the managers was also taken into account, the managers' attitude towards conflicts and trigger causes of the conflicts.

#### **3.2. The research hypotheses of this study are:**

1. There are significant differences among the students enrolled in the Masters' program, according to their working years in education, as regards the strategies of approaching the conflicts.
2. There are significant differences among the students enrolled in the Masters' program, according to their working years in education, as regards the strategies of approaching the conflicts between the manager and the teachers.
3. There are significant differences among the students enrolled in the Masters' program, according to their working years in education, as regards the strategies of approaching the conflicts between the teachers and the parents.
4. There are significant differences among the students enrolled in the Masters' program, according to their working years in education, as regards the strategies of approaching the conflicts between teachers and teachers.

#### **3.3 Description of the target group and instrument**

The method used in this investigative approach is the questionnaire applied on a group of 90 students, first and second year, from the master study program Educational management, University of Pitesti. All the students are also teachers in pre-university system of education. The questionnaires were applied on face to face sessions. The questionnaires were structured based on the following dimensions:

- ✓ Obtaining information on options towards optimal conflict management strategies in relation to the specific potential conflicts;
- ✓ Preference towards ways of resolving conflicts, and approaching styles depending on the actors involved in these conflicts;
- ✓ Socio-professional status, education seniority, the environment of the education unit they activate in.

#### 4. Findings and Results

The hypothesis “There are significant differences among the students enrolled in the Masters’ program, according to their working years in education, as regards the strategies of approaching the conflicts” was tested through *chi square test*. According to the results obtained (table 1), there are no significant differences among the students enrolled in the Masters’ program, according to their working years in education, as regards the strategies of approaching the conflicts [ $\chi^2 (2)= 1.299, p>0.01$ ]. Conflict prevention strategies are the first option of both teachers, future managers that have a reduced teaching experience, and of those who have an extensive teaching experience. Strategies to reduce conflicts represent the second option of the students included in the target group and strategies to resolve conflicts represent their final option, because the call to this strategy is only made when the problem reached the critical point.

**Table 1.** The chi-square analysis regarding strategies of approaching conflicts according to the teaching experience of the students enrolled in the Master’s program.

Variables	n	Teacher’s seniority		$\chi^2$	df	P
		Beginner’s teachers	Experienced teachers			
<i>Strategies for dealing with conflicts</i>				1,2999	2	>0.01
Strategies to prevent conflicts	60	35	25			
Conflict reduction strategies	18	9	9			
Strategies for resolving conflicts	12	5	7			
Total	90	49	41			

According to the results obtained (table 2) through the application of the Person  $\chi^2$  test for the verification of the second hypothesis “There are significant differences among the students enrolled in the Masters’ program, according to their working years in education, as regards the strategies of approaching the conflicts between the manager and the teachers” [ $\chi^2 (3)= 23.874, p<0.01$ ]. The students enrolled in the Educational Management Masters’ program, who are debutants in the education system, are prone to a greater extent, compared with those who have more teaching experience, to adopt the bypass style, which is a good solution to save time in the event of building a better conflict resolution strategy. More experienced teachers predominantly appeal to the collaborative style that involves maximizing the common interests of the parties involved in the conflict.

**Table 2.** The chi-square analysis regarding strategies of approaching conflicts between the manager and the teachers according to the teaching experience of the students enrolled in the Master’s program.

Variables	N	Teacher’s seniority		$\chi^2$	df	P
		Beginner’s teachers	Experienced teachers			
<i>Strategies of approaching the conflicts between the manager and the teachers</i>				23.874	3	<0.01
The bypass style	14	14	0			
The committed style	33	22	11			
The competitive style	7	2	5			

The collaborative style	36	11	25
Total	90	49	41

The third hypothesis “There are significant differences among the students enrolled in the Masters’ program, according to their working years in education, as regards the strategies of approaching the conflicts between the teachers and the parents” was also tested through Person  $\chi^2$  test. According to the results obtained (Table 3), there are significant differences among the students enrolled in the Masters’ program, according to their working years in education, as regards the strategies of approaching the conflicts between the teachers and the parents [ $\chi^2$  (3)= 23.338, p<0.01]. The committed style would be mostly adopted by the inexperienced teachers for the resolution of conflicts arising between teachers and parents. A committed management style requires a minimum of personal interests and a maximum achieving of cooperation. More experienced teachers would rather choose the competitive and the collaborative style.

**Table 3.** The chi-square analysis regarding strategies of approaching conflicts between the manager and the teachers and the parents, according to the teaching experience of the students enrolled in the Master’s program.

Variables	N	Teacher’s seniority		$\chi^2$	df	P
		Beginner’s teachers	Experienced teachers			
<i>Strategies of approaching the conflicts between the manager and the teachers</i>				23.338	3	<0.01
The bypass style	7	7	0			
The committed style	33	27	6			
The competitive style	26	9	17			
The collaborative style	24	6	18			
Total	90	49	41			

Through Person  $\chi^2$  test was tested the fourth hypothesis “There are significant differences among the students enrolled in the Masters’ program, according to their working years in education, as regards the strategies of approaching the conflicts between teachers and teachers”. According to the results obtained (table 4), there are significant differences among the students enrolled in the Masters’ program, according to their working years in education, as regards the strategies of approaching the conflicts between teachers and teachers [ $\chi^2$  (3) = 31.394, p<0.01]. In resolving this type of conflict students enrolled in the Masters’ program, who are debutants in the education system, prefer the collaborative style, which involves maximizing communication and satisfying personal interests. The more experienced teachers are interested both in the competitive style, which is more aggressive, and in the collaborative style.

**Table 4** The chi-square analysis regarding strategies of approaching conflicts between teachers and teachers and the parents, according to the teaching experience of the students enrolled in the Master’s program.

Variables	n	Teacher’s seniority		$\chi^2$	df	P
		Beginner’s teachers	Experienced teachers			
<i>Strategies of approaching the conflicts between the manager</i>				31.394	3	<0.01

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and the teachers

The bypass style	17	6	1
The committed style	19	16	3
The competitive style	18	0	18
The collaborative style	46	27	19
Total	90	49	41

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## 5. Discussions and Conclusions

Within organizations, a variety of conflicts may occur; Morton Deutsch (1973) identifies six types of conflicts: the veridical conflict - occurs when the parties wish to use the same object simultaneously in order to achieve personal purposes; the contingent conflict - occurs when, although the parties to the conflict have been provided with several items they could use to ensure the achievement of goals, cling to use one and the same object; displaced conflict - occurs when the parties involved in the conflict focus on wrong, unreal aspects, on other issues than those that generated the conflict; misattributed conflict - occurs when a party assigns to another party ideas, feelings or behaviours that the latter has not shared, never lived or realized; latent conflict – its existence is not manifest, it has been repressed, but when conditions intensify, the individual understands the new situation and the conflict may become manifest; false conflict - appears in tense situations, charged with hostility, suspicion, and where the perceptions are flawed.

Among the actors involved in the educational act, teachers, parents, students and managers, all these types of conflicts may occur and can be caused by the interdependency of tasks, the inconsistent statutes, communication problems, dependence on and competition for limited resources, lack of common performance standards and the existence of individual differences.

The results of the survey show that the professional experience is an important but not a decisive factor in the choice of conflict management styles. Each type of conflict, according to the parties, means addressing a specific strategy that fold better on resolving a conflicting state. Since conflicts are inherent in the life of an organization, it is desirable that all teachers who aspire to managerial positions in educational institutions have a range of professional skills and skills aimed at efficient management of conflict situations.

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