CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN THE MEDICAL PRACTICE

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Abstract: The study of conflict management in organizations is dealt with by the management of human resources since it contributes to a better knowledge of individual and group behaviour inside of an organization. Conflicts arise because of differences between people or because of the fact that employees notice a certain disloyalty in the behavoiur of their managers or of the organization towards them as individuals or as a group, as managers, we have to understand the differnces which generate conflicts, as well as the sources of the conflicts in order to be able to apply adequate strategies to be able to solve situations having a distructive potential. We can obtain more types of results after a conflict, depending on its intensity, on the implied persons, on the organizational culture and on our own style of management.

1. Introduction.

The conflict is the intentional mixture of an individual or of a group of individuals in th effort of realising the goals of another group (Dănăilă, 2000). Sometimes the difference of opinion, points of view, interests, values or concepts can lead to conflicts. The conflict is, usually very real and very important for those implied. The avoiding or ignoring of conflicts do not lead to their solution but to its agravation. For this reason, managers have to understand and approach potentially destructive conflicts.

The oraganizational practice shows that the conflictual situations are used as important strategies of obtaining a better result in the detriment of others' progress (Dănăilă, 2000). Consequently, the conflict has to be seen as an element of organizational life, due to divergences existing between attitudes, goals, acting modalities or towards a situation from the leading process. The succesful management practice imposes from the very strat the identification of conflictual sources as well as the factots favorizing their orientation in order to diminish managerial performances.

In the study there have been implied 94 persons, doctors and medical assistants, being employed at Hospital X from Oradea. With these persons there has been followed the identification and administering of conflicts. The study has been done in the period of 20. of January – 20. of March 2008. In order to test hypothesis and realisation of proposed objectives there have been used activities, investigations and questionnaires.

2. Causes of conflicts.

The existence of a conflict is easily recognized (arguments, contradictory discussions, nerves, sometimes physical confrontations – or discussions having official character and reclamations), but unfortunately many divergences can be less noticeable and can be identified with difficulty or only by an experienced person. (Mastenbroek, 1987). Recognizing these symptoms in an incipient phase can lead sometimes to the avoiding of serious, destructive conflicts only through simple discussions and counselling activities. In order to identify a conflictual situation, the persons participating in the study were

requested to: describe two conflictual situations at the work place in which they were implied or which the noticed.

The most frequent signs of the identified hidden conflicts buy the subjects were:

Table 1 – Signs of conflict

Nr.	Conflictual situations	Number of persons identifying the conflict	% from all answers
1	A certain coldness or rigid formalism in relationships between colleagues	31	33%
2	Long silent, embarrassing periods during meetings	25	26,6%
3	Absences from meetings	14	14,9%
4	Points appearing many times during meetings, which are never solved	10	10,6%
5	Refusal of communication between indicviduals or groups	7	7,5%
6	"combat" of an individual or group by another	4	4,2%
7	withdrawal of employees from discussions and avoiding some subjects	2	2,1%
8	Constant ...from rules and formal procedures recursul	1	1,1%

Identification of conflictual signs is preferred to be made before the start of the conflict. In this sense, the interviewed persons were asked to answer: if these signs were present, were they recognized before the start of the conflict?
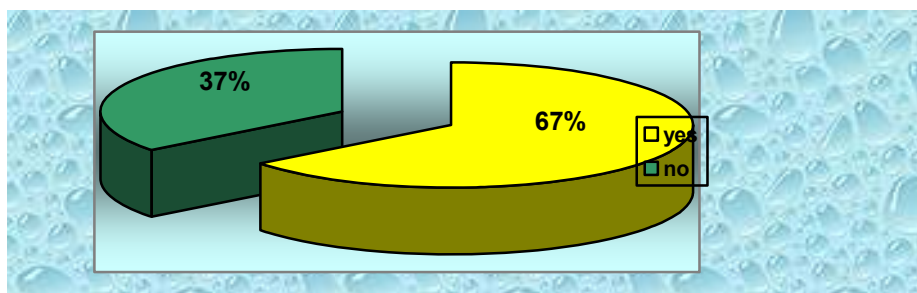

Fig.1– Recognition of conflict signs before the start of the conflict

Conflicts are not necessarily negative or non-productive (Dănăilă, 2000), neither the point of view of the organizations, nor that of the individuals or groups inside of it. In this sense participants were asked to mention if a conflictual situation can produce advantages and which are they.
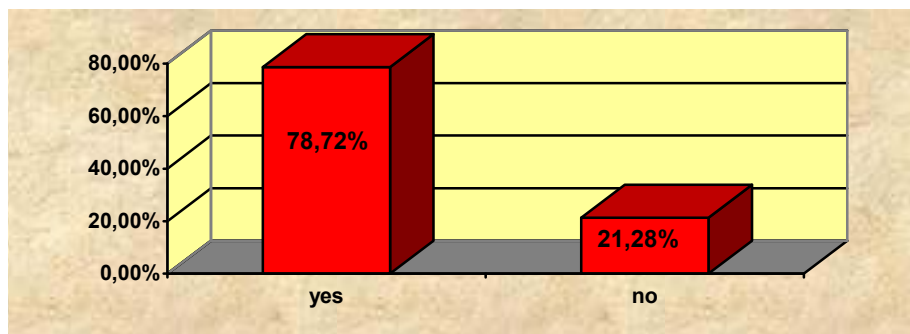
Fig.2– Existence of advantages through conflict analysis

The main advantages described were:
- ➢ Improvement of personal relationships (people need to express powerful states of mind towards some aspects with which they are confronted at their work place or in front of their colleagues);
- ➢ Improvement of group dynamics – by evidencing some personal interests and building the basis to establish some objectives, norms and adequate procedures (the point of view of some colleagues who are not afrad to express their disagreement helps those who are less daring to contribute more actively and present their ideas);
- ➢ Improvement of ideas and practices (necessity to justify their ideas which can make people reflect upon them).

The constructive or destructive aspect of a conflict depends on the style and abordation of the implied parties, who are determined by personalities and their interpersonal attitudes. The conflicts are influenced in the same time by organizational and hystorical factors (Mihuț, Petelean, 2000), like structure and existing or alliances which were made.

3. Types of conflict.

In order to understand a conflict, first of all the hystorical context has to be analyzed. Our answers to the conflict are conditioned by precedent experience, in similar situations. As inconfidence generates inconfidence, experience related to conflict solving in an open and non-abusive manner can favour the gaining of confidence the constructive character of the conflict. Over the time, the types of confluct appearing in apparently similar organizations can be different and can have different solutions.

Taking into consideration the two categories of personnel (doctors and medical assistans) colleagues, they were asked to specify the most frrequent actions affecting communicational process, and the answers were (table 2):

Table 2- Actions affecting communicational process

Doctors	Medical assistants
Support given to the doctor colleagues in public discussions	Exagerated respect of the opinios expressed by doctors
Rhetorical affirmations related to medical experience	Reticence in expressing real feelings
Conviction that any misunderstanding or mistake demonstrates the reticnce of doctors towards medical assistants	Silence or vague expression related to delicate subjects

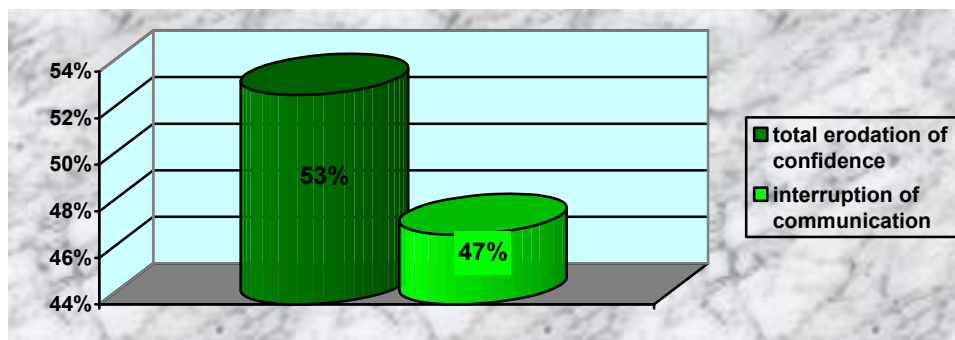If these processes lasted longer, there appear a lot of communicational deficiencies (fig.3):

Fig.3– Results of action persistance affecting communcational processes

Many of the conflicts which appear are not explicite. The division between the two grouos can intensify, simultaneously with degradation of work relationship. Consequently the organizational efficiency would be diminished (Dănăilă, 2000).

Once a non-confident climate appears, a divising and destructive conflict, this tends to consolidate, being very difficult to make it disappear. In fact, each party considers that the orther is incapable of a necessary change and they cannot be requested to do anything else than he does. Such a polarization can bring advantages to both parties, whicg stimulates to maintain their positions. Complex problems become thus easier and everybody knows whom to blame if things start to get worse.

4. Conflict sources
In spite of the fact that it is so widespread the conflict inside of an organization is a suprisingly evasive phenomenon. Even if it is evident, often it is very difficult to establish the reason. It is possible that the parties cannot agree concerning the nature of their disagreement - usually one of the parties denies the existence of a real conflict (Mihuț, Petelean, 2000).

The interviewed subjects have identified the following sources of conflict:
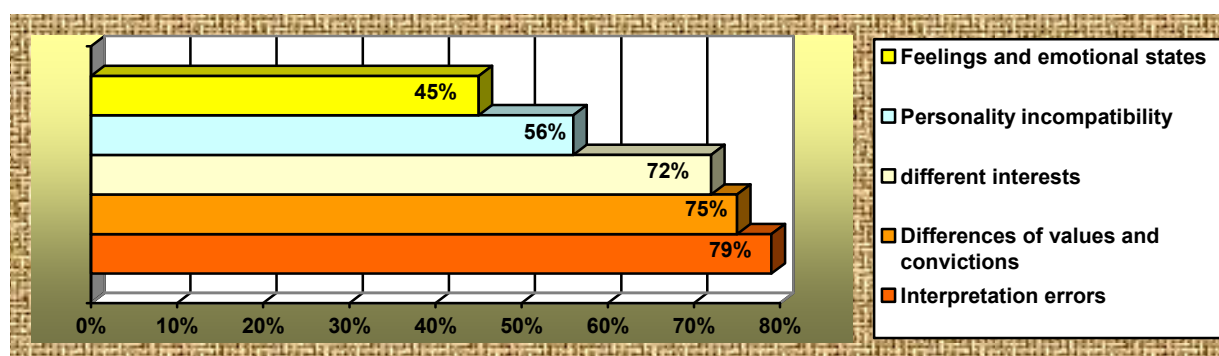

Fig.4– Conflict sources

In the middle of some organizational conflicts there are the different values, convictions and interests. Exactly these differences are the factors modelling the political manouvres taking place in an organization. The subjects were than asked to specify if they think that the other party evaluates the conflict source in the same way .
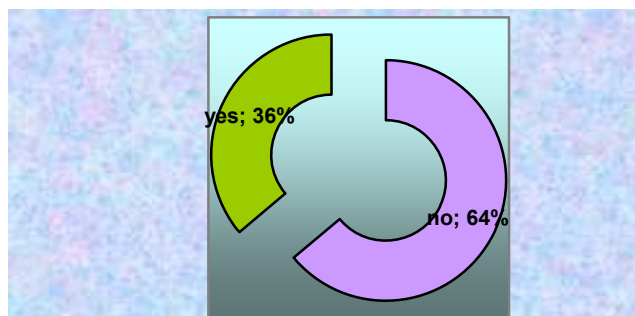
Fig.5- Appreciation of conflict source
by the other party

By this activity I tried to underline some of the conflict sources which can generate conflicts. Even if we cannot solve conflicts we are not implied in, such an analysis can contribute to the establishing of an agreement about the real causes of the diagreement.

5. Strategies in conflict management.

There are more possibilities or strategies which can be used, but before choosing one of them, we have to evaluate the situation. We have to take into consideration factors like the seriosity of the conflict, time (if it has to be solved urgently or not), the result which would be considered adequate, the power we have, personal preferences, atuurile and weaknesses manifested when solving the conflict. If it is about a banal conflict or a simple rivalry we can decide not to get implied at all. If there is the danger of the growth of a conflict to a destructive one, we have to find the moment when to get implied.

The subjects have been presented the main strategies used when solving a conflict: ignorance, tolerance, reducing or limitation, solution, prevention (Mastenbroek, 1987). They have been asked then to think of a situation ignored by them or of a conflict tolerated without intervention . Looking back did they take the adequate decision?
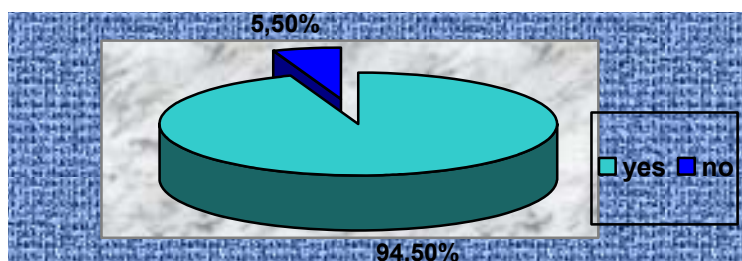

Fig.6- Appreciating the taking of an
adequate decision in case of solving a conflict

Most of the interwieved subjects (87 persons) consider having taken a good decision when solving a conflict. If it was a destructive conflict or caused by minor problems, the interwieved persons considered that their decision was justified. There is still the problem of some of them who did not have this impression. Evidently in case the conflict persisted, grew bigger or got a destructive character, some of them regretted the taken decision. The most frequent strategies meant to reduce or limit the conflict were:
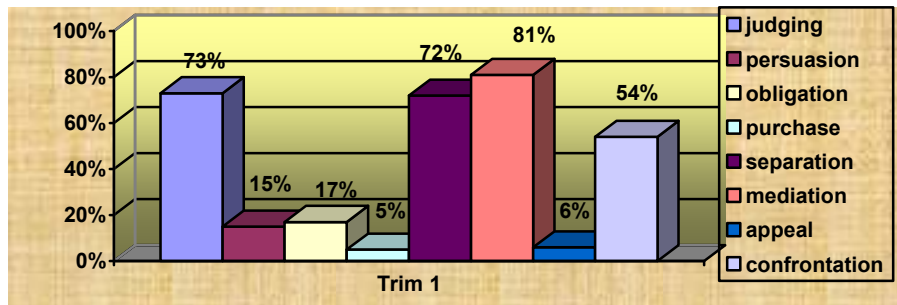
Fig.7- Strategies used to limit or reduce conflict

The solution strategies are applied generally on the long run and follow the identification of solutions for the respective conflict. They try not only to dscuss the conflict but to create conditions necassary to avoid some destructive conflicts in the future.
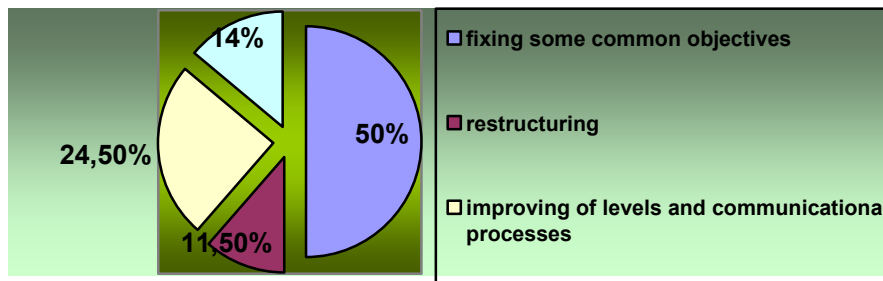

Fig.8– Strategies of solving conflicts

Probably the most efficient approach of a destructive conflict is to try to prevent it from the very start. The solution strategies create a climate meant to stop the appearance of destructive conflicts in the future. Moreover, it is important to stimulate a spiritual state that makes people to find solutions win-win creatively, at least some kind of compromise. (Dănăilă, 2000). If people trust each other and want to communicate onestly and openly, they have a better chance to realize this. A possibility to institute such a climate is a good exmaple for the others.

The most frequent measures adopted to avoid the apperance of destructive conflicts, identified by subjects, were:

Table 3- Measures that have to be adopted to avoid the appearance of destructive conflicts

Measures that have to be adopted to avoid the appearance of destructive conflicts	% of persons who answered
To respect others and to treat them as I like to be treated	90,5%
To ask for people's opinion and to listen to them carefully	87,2%
To address criticism in a constructive and sensible manner	73,4
To verify what others know about some important subjects before acting	61,7%
To consult others before taking decisions which can affect activity	54,2%
To find ways of allowing both parties to reach agreement	48,9%

6. Conclusions.

Conflicts appear because of differences between people or because of the fact that employees notice a certain lack of loyalty in the behaviour of their managers or of the organization towards them, as individuals or as a group. Consequently the conflict represents an inevitable aspect of organizational life and does not necessarily has to be considered destructive; many conflicts are constructive and useful. Not all signs of a real or potential conflict are visible and explicit: their recognition can contribute sometimes to the avoiding of worsening situation.

Conflicts are not necessarily destructive. Among the advantages of the constructive conflicts we can mention:

➢ Improvement of interpersonal relationships;
➢ Improvement of group dynamics;
➢ Improvement of ideas and adopted practices.

Understanding long conflicts implies their analysis in historical context and the indentification of conflict types and necessary solutions.

If in the organization there are differentiation on more levels, these succeed as long as they are not to great to create complex systems of alliances to promote constructive conflicts and make the organization have greater adaptability and flexibility.

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