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FROM ANCIENT PHILOSOPHIES TO MODERN ORGANIZATIONS: THE EVOLUTION AND MANAGEMENT OF CONFLICTS

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Abstract:

As social beings, humans are naturally inclined to interact and communicate with one another. Since ancient times, societies have formed, evolving through social and cultural development. Communication has been crucial in this evolution, shaping individuals through socialization. However, despite its benefits, communication can sometimes lead to misunderstandings, which may escalate into conflicts. Conflict arises from differences in perspectives, interests, and needs as a social phenomenon. These differences stem from various factors, including cultural background, education, social status, upbringing, and personality traits. While conflicts can have negative consequences, they can also be constructive, fostering problem-solving, improved communication, and mutual understanding.

Keywords: conflict, communication, socialization, conflict management, mediation, tolerance, constructive conflict, cultural differences.

Introduction

Socialization and communication are fundamental aspects of human life. Sometimes, despite efforts for effective communication, misunderstandings may arise, which can escalate into conflicts. Conflicts stem from differences in perceptions, interests, and needs, and these differences can be caused by various factors such as cultural, educational, social, and other distinctions. Every individual has their perspective and truth, sometimes creating tensions and disputes.

Conflicts can arise for different reasons, including political, religious, national, professional, or international causes. They are present in all aspects of social and work life and are often the result of disagreements between individuals or groups. Contemporary society is marked by increasing divisions, dissatisfaction, and low tolerance, which increases the potential for misunderstandings and conflicts.

Effective conflict management is crucial for maintaining good relationships among people. If not resolved constructively, conflicts can lead to serious consequences such as intolerance, violence, and deteriorated interpersonal relationships. However, when conflicts are controlled, they can lead to positive outcomes, such as fostering creativity and innovation.

Various conflict resolution techniques have emerged, considering the inevitable presence of conflicts in everyday life. Sometimes, when both parties cannot reach a mutual understanding, third-party interventions, known as mediation, are used.

To reduce intolerance and prevent new conflicts, everyone must follow the timeless wisdom of "Do not do to others what you do not want done to you."

Conflict – Concept and Definition

Conflict can be defined as a situation that arises when two or more parties have differing opinions, viewpoints, or approaches regarding a particular issue, activity, or situation (Kitić, 2020). Conflict represents a disagreement in which the involved parties perceive a threat related to their interests, needs, and fears (Videnović, 2017). A conflict exists when one party's actions hinder or obstruct another party's goals and needs. In modern lifestyles, conflict can quickly arise in any organization and can never be entirely prevented or eliminated.

The term *conflict* has Latin origins, derived from the word *conflictus*, which means clash or disagreement. This term consists of the prefix *"con"*—which means clash—and *"figure"*—which means

striking together. When these two parts are combined, *conflict* means clashing together, implying opposition between different parties. In various contexts, the term *conflict* can have multiple meanings.

- In sociology, conflict represents disagreement or opposition between individuals or groups.
- From a psychological perspective, conflict can signify an internal struggle within an individual.
- In politics, the term is often used to denote armed clashes or wars.

The board's use of conflict makes it relevant in many disciplines and aspects. Conflict arises when two or more values or opinions are misaligned, contradictory, or opposed.

The concept of conflict has a long history and has been used in various contexts. About its application in psychology and social sciences, the term *conflict* began to be widely used in the 20th century. One of the first theorists to explore conflict in a social context was the Polish-Austrian sociologist Ludwig Gumplowicz (1838–1909). His work *Sociology and Politics* laid the foundation for the social conflict theory, analyzing conflict as an inevitable and fundamental aspect of social interactions.

Later, other psychologists and sociologists, including Karl Marx, the father of social conflict theory, further developed the concept of conflict. Karl Marx emphasized conflict between social classes, while Georg Simmel (a German sociologist, critic, and philosopher) examined conflict from the perspective of social interaction. Simmel also believed that social conflict arises due to human nature's inherent aggressiveness.

Conflicts in the Past

Since misunderstandings and conflicts have always existed, people have also faced various types of conflicts in the past. Throughout ancient history, people resolved their disputes using different methods and techniques. Different nations and cultures developed their ways and styles of conflict resolution.

Among them, councils of elders played a significant role in many traditional cultures, where elder leaders held the most important position in resolving conflicts and promoting reconciliation. Other societies practiced traditional customs and special rituals to overcome conflicts and misunderstandings.

The ancient Romans, Greeks, and other civilizations used arbitration and mediation in their disputes. This involved including a neutral third party whose role was to calm and mediate between the conflicting sides. Some ancient civilizations also developed their judicial systems. Among the first to implement courts were the ancient Romans, who established a complex judicial system known as the Roman legal system, which included judges, lawyers, jurors, and other legal roles.

The ancient Greeks also had their legal systems, particularly in city-states like Athens, where formal judicial systems were established to resolve conflicts. Democratic processes in Ancient Greece were widely utilized in special institutions, such as assemblies, councils, and other governing bodies, where citizens could debate and make decisions on matters of public interest. Philosophers such as Aristotle, Plato, and Socrates emphasized the importance of philosophical and ethical approaches to conflict resolution, including dialogue, justice, logic, and reasoning.

Socrates used a unique method of dialogue between individuals based on questioning and answering, which encouraged critical thinking and self-examination. This is known as the "Socratic Method" and is still considered a valuable tool for fostering discussion and resolving disputes through rational discourse.

Other Conflict Resolution Methods in the Past

Other societies, however, resolved conflicts through physical confrontation and duels. Mandatory reconciliation was enforced in some cultures, and sanctions were imposed on those who initiated conflicts.

Ancient kingdoms often relied on negotiations and diplomacy to settle disputes both within the state and beyond its borders. Diplomats were responsible for achieving agreements and alliances, helping to maintain peace or strengthen political power.

Another well-known historical strategy for conflict resolution was marriages between ruling families. Many kingdoms, tribes, and nations arranged marriages to secure alliances, prevent wars, and expand their territories through dynastic unions.

Additionally, religious and spiritual leaders played an important role in conflict resolution in many cultures. Priests, shamans, and other religious figures often used their authority to mediate disputes and promote peace through religious or spiritual methods.

Types of Conflicts

There are many different causes for the emergence of conflicts. Likewise, conflicts can differ in nature. For example, constructive conflict is necessary and beneficial, as its goal is to contribute to the growth, development, or improvement of a particular situation or activity. Constructive conflict should lead to positive changes and the discovery of practical solutions. In constructive conflict, both parties should strive to reach a mutual agreement, collaborate, and find common understanding. Constructive conflict involves mutual respect, understanding, honesty, a focus on problem-solving, and a willingness to compromise.

In contrast, destructive conflict is the complete opposite. Negative emotions, tension, stress, and unfavorable consequences characterize it. Instead of leading to a resolution, destructive dialogue and conflict escalate the situation, fostering hostility and negative feelings. Destructive conflict is typically marked by aggressiveness, hostility, hatred, anger, nervousness, personal accusations, lack of empathy, sadness, fear, frustration, and even anxiety and depression.

According to Seneca, *"To be angry means to be irritated, to be affected,"* while Aristotle stated that *"Anger is a desire to inflict pain in return."* (Seneca, 2003).

Psychological Aspects of Conflict Resolution in the Context of Educational Sciences

In modern conditions, the psychological aspects of conflict resolution in the context of educational sciences are particularly significant, as conflicts within the educational system can arise from various sources: between teachers and students, among teacher colleagues, between teachers and parents, and among students themselves.

These conflicts can affect the quality of teaching and learning, making effective conflict management essential for creating a productive and positive educational environment.

- **Emotional intelligence in education** – empathy, self-awareness
- **Communication skills and conflict in education** – active listening, clear communication
- **Conflict resolution skills**

Emotional intelligence is the ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's emotions and those of others. People with high emotional intelligence can typically recognize the emotions triggered by conflicts, have high control over their emotions to avoid impulsive reactions, and better understand others' viewpoints.

Emotional intelligence means monitoring one's and others' feelings and emotions, controlling them, and using this information in thinking and behavior (Kosovrasti, 2015).

Emotional intelligence is crucial in conflict resolution because it allows individuals to understand and control their own emotions as well as recognize and comprehend the emotions of others. People with high emotional intelligence are more successful in handling and resolving conflict situations.

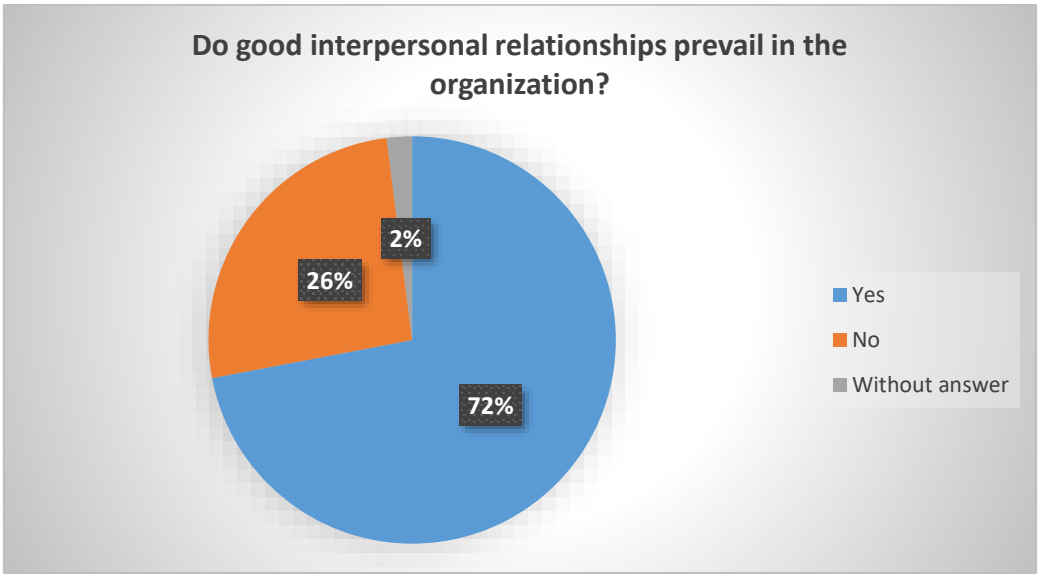
Communication skills are an essential element in everyday life and work. Good interpersonal communication has countless advantages, and the advantages related to conflict resolution include active listening and unambiguous messages to avoid misunderstandings. Communicating means sharing information among an organization's members, and by effectively sharing information and experiences, bonding and connection among human resources are achieved (Davcheva, 2018). Effective communication is one of the most important aspects of conflict resolution. Listening without interruption, clearly expressing one's feelings and demands, and avoiding blame is part of successful communication.

Perception of the causes of conflicts and how they are experienced can significantly impact people's behavior in conflict situations. How we perceive the conflict and the other parties involved is crucial. Cognitive distortions, such as overgeneralization, can exacerbate conflicts.

Empirical Research on Conflicts in Organizations

Conflicts are an inevitable part of everyday operations within organizations. The fast pace of life, stress, environmental and organizational changes, interpersonal relationships, motivation, behavior, and attentiveness or lack thereof in daily work tasks are possible causes of organizational conflicts.

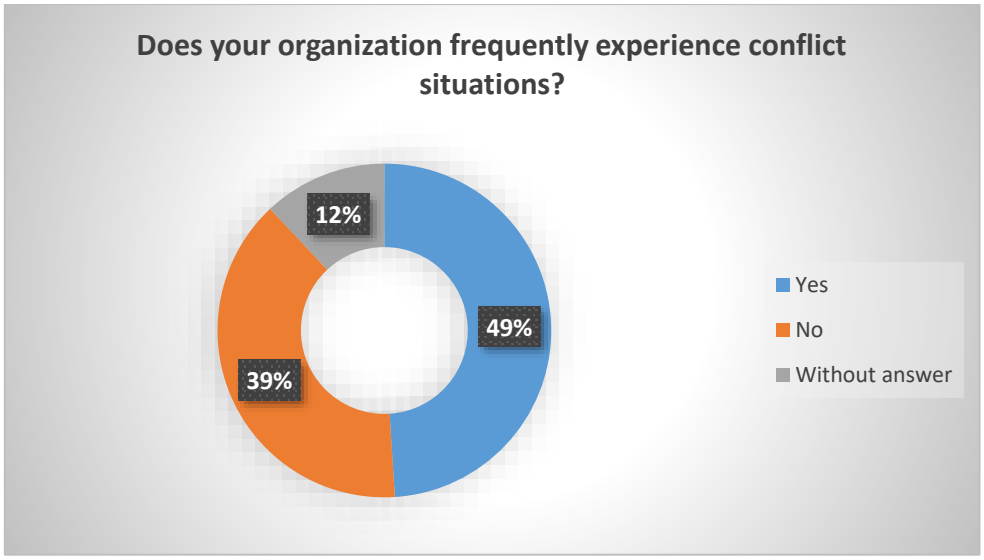
Empirical research focuses on analyzing the occurrence of conflicts in organizations. The research methodology includes survey questionnaires. Twenty employees from one organization participated in the survey. The research was conducted in a library in Macedonia, which is part of the education sector.



Picture n. 1. Question n.1. Do good interpersonal relationships prevail in the organization?



Picture n. 2. Question n.2. Are conflicts in the organization resolved on time?



Picture n. 3. Question n.3. Does your organization frequently experience conflict situations?

Analysis of the Results from the Charts

1. **Chart of Interpersonal Relationships in the Organization**
   - 72% of respondents believe good interpersonal relationships prevail in the organization.
   - 26% have a negative opinion, meaning they do not believe that good relationships prevail.
   - 2% did not provide an answer.
     → This indicates that most employees perceive interpersonal relationships positively, but a significant portion hold the opposite view, suggesting potential internal issues.

2. **Conflict Resolution in the Organization**
   - 36% of respondents believe that conflicts are resolved on time.
   - 59% think that conflicts are not resolved promptly.
   - 5% did not answer.
     → This highlights a significant concern regarding conflict resolution, as more than half of the respondents are dissatisfied with problem-solving timeliness.

3. **Frequency of Conflict Situations in the Organization**
   - 49% believe that conflicts frequently occur in the organization.
   - 39% disagree, stating that conflicts do not happen often.
   - 12% did not provide an answer.
     → The fact that nearly half of the respondents think that conflicts frequently arise in the organization suggests problems in communication or the management of interpersonal relationships.

Conclusion

- Although the majority of employees believe that good interpersonal relationships exist (72%), At the same time, a high percentage (49%) feel that conflicts frequently occur in the organization.
- Additionally, 59% of respondents think that conflicts are not resolved promptly, indicating a potential issue with conflict management.
- This points to the organization's need for improved communication, mediation, and problem-solving mechanisms.

Recommendations:

- Implement clear policies for conflict management.
- Improve communication and teamwork.
- Organize training sessions to enhance interpersonal relationships and conflict resolution skills.

Conclusion

This awareness and ability to recognize a conflict in time represent the first phase in its successful resolution. The ability to recognize conflict situations implies concluding that there is some misalignment and misunderstanding, which leads to inefficient and ineffective work and the failure to achieve set goals. Managers have a serious responsibility to identify conflict situations promptly. However, they must also possess the skills to determine the causes or sources of disagreement and then find ways to resolve them promptly and constructively.

To recognize conflicts on time and successfully resolve them, managers in all organizations should pay attention to communication both within and outside the organization, build good interpersonal relationships, foster a positive work atmosphere, encourage cooperation, measure employee satisfaction levels, improve working conditions, and so on. By doing so, managers will be able to recognize conflicts in time and prevent their negative impact, which can sometimes have serious consequences. Conflicts are inevitable in everyday work, but they can sometimes be necessary and beneficial if they are positive and constructive. In such cases, conflict can bring about positive change, serve a motivating role, and constructively improve matters.

Since conflicts are unpredictable and their outcomes cannot always be planned, one must be mindful of one's emotions, perceptions of events, the extent to which personal interests are affected, emotional intelligence, and all psychological aspects that influence behavior in conflict situations.

The most important thing is to remain calm and composed in conflict situations to prevent them from escalating into serious difficulties, tension, hostility, etc. Maintaining calm during conflicts can contribute to clear, logical, and rational thinking, making well-considered decisions, controlling emotions, actively listening, and understanding opposing viewpoints. These factors provide a positive example and create opportunities for constructive problem resolution.

In conflict situations, everyone should follow the words of Serbian Patriarch Pavle: *"Let your words be gentle, but your arguments strong."*

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