Intergroups Conflict Patterns

Doina I. POPESCU
The Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies, Romania
E-mail: doinaipopescu@yahoo.com
Phone: +4 0213110575

Abstract
In the endeavour of explaining the causes and mechanisms which fundament the emergence of conflicts, researchers have elaborated theoretical conflict patterns. Some researchers consider that conflict patterns describe either the process or the structure of a contrariety situation. Through the process pattern, there are identified events which characterize a conflict and the succession connection between different stages. Structural patterns define favourable conditions and describe the way in which they influence the conflictual behaviour. Another group of patterns have the purpose of describing organizational conflicts.
Among the conflict patterns, the ones which have special importance from both a managerial theoretical and practical point of view are the following: process pattern, structural pattern and organizational pattern.
Also, the paper describes the ways for managing the conflicts and the process of negotiation.

Keywords: *process pattern of conflict; structural pattern of conflict; organizational patterns of conflict; managing the conflict, negotiations*

JEL classification: A13, F51

1. Process pattern of conflict

A process pattern of conflict is one in which every stage anticipates the confliction episode and prepares the display of events from the next stages. The process evolves from a latent conflict to one which is understood, acknowledged evolving furthermore in an active conflict.

The latent conflict is determined by the consequences of previous confliction episodes. Among this we can mention: the insufficiency of resources, the desire for more autonomy, the difference between personal and organizational objectives etc. The outer environment influences also the latent conflict. For example, a company from a specific branch, on the wane, has to deal with more

stressful conditions than a company from a stabile branch or one in the full-development stage. In this way the conflict starts to be acknowledged.

The understood conflict emerges once with the acknowledgement that latent condition exists. The divergent objectives or purposes do not create a conflict as long as this is not obvious. The understood conflict is still in an incipient stage and the parties do not react in a plainly manner. The conflict is expressed in a latent state; the ones involved not taking it into consideration. It begins to transform in an active conflict only when the attention is focused on it. In this stage, even if the feeling of oppression appears, the threatening is barely perceptible and the parties do not consider the conflict as being important. At the same time the diversity of priorities drive the individual to focus his attention only upon a limited number of issues. Consequently, there can be more conflicts than we can handle. Due to this fact the acknowledged conflict does not necessarily become a felt one. People may not agree upon one or more issues, but this not necessarily implies a feeling of frustration or hostility.

The manifested conflict is expressed through behaviour, the most common reactions being apathy, drama, hostility or aggression. The managers, through their own mechanisms, can come up against the open manifestation of conflicts. The manner in which manifested conflicts are solved has an essential role upon the consequences.

The consequences of conflicts become an environmental factor for the next stage of conflict. If a conflict has been solved, the involved parties can decide to cooperate, otherwise, the conflict growing in intensity, and involving parties or issues which did not appear initially.

2. Structural patterns of conflict

Structural pattern of conflict is a pattern in which the parties react under the influence of oppressions and constraints. In such a situation, every individual/group has his own contribution in the emergence of conflict and in its orientation according to specific reasoning. For example, people with high performances and with competitive skills, tend to place the interaction in a competitive environment.

A first element of pressure is the cultural norms being able to determine both the causes which can launch a conflict, and development manners. This explains the fact that a confliction behaviour is less accepted and so, the probability of emergence is reduced between Japanese players rather than American ones, or especially between the Latin.

Another factor which influences the conflict is the manner in which a group's satisfaction implies the displeasure of another. High interests and standards can lead, according to the level of the conflict of interests, either to competition or to collaboration. If the interests are unimportant, the competition is reduced as well as the probability of conflict's emergence.

The settlement of the conflict can be realised through agreements/ commitment/contracts with a formal or informal feature. Many times the meaning of an agreement/ contract can be perceived in a different way by two or more partners. If between two American parties a verbal agreement can be considered a contract, between two Romanian partners in order to be fulfilled, the contract is mandatory to be a written document, made in minimum two copies, with original stamps and signatures.

3. Organizational patterns of conflict

In organizational patterns, the conflict is considered to have as sources communication, organizational structure and behavioural features.

Communication. Even if many specialists consider the conflict caused by the communication process a pseudo-conflict differentiating it from proper conflicts, it can have an important role in intergroup and interpersonal relations. Semantic difficulties can lead to different interpretations of the same message. When individuals or groups come from different environments, each interprets the message taking into consideration the personal experience and education. Therefore, the understood message can have a total different meaning from the one intended by the issuer. Communication can be altered also by the communicational circuit. In vertical circuits, each hierarchical level can perceive and interpret information in totally different ways. What is considered to be very important by a manager in an inferior hierarchical level can be appreciated as unimportant by a superior manager.

Structure. Structural variables such as bureaucratic elements, compensation elements, interdependency of tasks and personnel heterogeneity can lead to conflicts between individuals and groups. A high level of bureaucracy emergences to feeling of frustrations and favours the tendency to look for new methods for solving issues, not taking into consideration the formal structure's frame.

Personal behaviour factors. In this category can be included personality, work satisfaction, social and professional status and goals. Each of these factors can favour or diminish the emergence of conflicts, and the managers' role to influence their manifestation manner is limited.

Departmental connections are determined by the meeting point of subsections which need to be coordinated by a manager or group of managers in order to achieve results.

Cultural connections. Carrying on activities in an organization involves the interaction of some groups between which important differences regarding fundamental values, education, and objectives can appear.

Level connections are meeting points of persons and managerial groups divided in different hierarchical levels.

Organizational connections. The organizations which depend on each other for resources, information or objectives' achievement must interact.

Consequently, producers interact with suppliers of raw materials and beneficiaries and consumers. Also, a variety of interactions appear between companies and banking institutes etc.

Organizational conflicts have a specific evolution by accumulating step-by-step high tension states. According to this there can exist five situations: tension state, acknowledgement of the conflict, increasing tension, the emergence of the conflict and the end of it.

The tension state which contains conditions in order to emerge the conflict without being noticed. The limited feature of resources, the desire for autonomy, rejecting control, nonconformity between personal and organizational objectives can lead to tensional states. The effects of the environment also influence the latent conflict.

or by other persons outside the group. Divergent objectives do not generate the conflict until the moment this divergence is noticed. The understood conflict is still in incipient phase and the parties did not yet react emotionally. People can disagree regarding a certain issue, but this does not necessarily create hostility, anxiety or spite.

Increasing the conflictual state consists of accumulating tensional phases. In this phase, the conflict is inevitable, but it did not emerge yet.

Emergence of the conflict. In this stage, the conflict is clearly visible even by the parties exterior to the conflict.

The end of the conflict depends on changing the initial conditions which made the conflict emerge. The new conditions allow cooperation or the emergence of a new conflict.

4. Managing the conflicts

For managers it is important to handle the manners to treat and control organizational conflicts. Knowing the essence and the causes, manager can avoid them or, if necessary, reorient the development of conflicts according to admissible and controllable limits.

There are three levels of interventions for ending a conflict to taking into account by the manager. These are:
   a) strategic level, which implies choosing the right objective;
   b) tactical level, which implies choosing the right way to solve a conflict;
   c) common sense. This implies that the manager does not confuse strategic and tactic elements.

Whatever the manner to solve the conflict is, three preliminary actions could lead to increased probability of success. These are: defining exactly the subject of dispute, limiting the territory of dispute, enlarging the spectrum of solving possibilities.

Defining exactly the subject of dispute has an essential role when solving a conflict. Once defined the subject, the spectrum of solving possibilities can be enlarged, creating the premises for solving directly between the two parties. If the

two parties can not reach an agreement, they can resort to a third party to assure the mediation, conciliation or arbitrage.

Limiting the territory of dispute and enlarging the spectrum of solving possibilities: When solving a conflict the two aspects are inner conditioned. Also, limiting the territory of dispute is as important as enlarging the spectrum of solving possibilities.

Taking into consideration the satisfaction level of both personal interest and competitor's interest, K. W. Thomas identifies in his paper "Conflict and Conflict Managemant" (ed. Rand McNally, Chicago, 1976) five manners to solve the conflicts: avoidance, collaboration, competition, compromise, conformation. The choice between the methods depends on the context of the conflict.

Neglecting the conflict: There are situations when neglecting the conflict is possible. Often neglecting the conflicts can lead to the worsening of the situation.

Stimulating the conflict: A conflict can be stimulated by: communication, changing the organizational structure, adapting the personal behaviour.

Emphasizing the conflict: Some managers intentionally bring in everyone's attention an existing conflict and transmit its solving to the ones directly concerned.

Emphasizing is a special technique of conflict management. If a manager is not sure about the success it is recommended not to use such a solution. Emphasizing the conflict must be considered a last resort technique.

Generally the definitions of conflict tend to associate it with negative situations which generate inefficiency or dysfunctional consequences. The conflict is considered as disjoining, unnatural, and representing a behaviour which must be controlled and changed. Certainly, in extreme situations the organizational conflict can have disturbing, tragic consequences for some persons and have adverse effects upon the company's performance. Conflicts can lead to emotional and physical stress

However, the conflict is not necessarily a bad thing. Administrated in a proper manner, the conflict can have positive results. It can be an energizing force for groups and company, can be seen as a constructive force and in some circumstances it can be welcomed or even encouraged. For example, the conflict can be considered as support in implementing improvements, projecting and functioning of organizations in the process of decision making. The conflict can be an element of evolution and internal and external change. Properly identified and handled, the conflict can help minimizing the destructive influences of win-loss situations.

Taking into consideration a survey regarding managerial practices, which shows that managers spend 20% of their time dealing with conflicts, S. Schmidt, in his article "Interorganizational Influence Tactics: Explorations in Getting One"s Way" (Journal of Applied Psychology, August 1980) has noticed both positive and negative results from the conflict.

Positive results include:
- the emergence of better ideas;

- people are forced to look for new approaches;
- it can represent a resort of safety, holding a group united;
- it can identify hidden problems;
- it can energize and mobilize group's members;
- it can stimulate innovation and creativity;
- it can increase communication availability between members.

Negative results include:

- some people feel defeated;
- increasing distances between people;
- creating an environment of suspicion and losing confidence;
- individual focusing on personal objectives;
- the appearance of rather reluctance than team work.

Studies regarding the consequences of intergroup conflicts have revealed phenomena which appear both inside and outside the group.

Furthermore, during competition, each member of a group becomes more united with it, differences being forgotten for a moment and trust becoming more intense. The atmosphere in the group changes, the group becoming more interested in achieving the objectives. The leading style becomes more authoritative because the group feels the need of a strong leader and it is open to accept it. The group becomes more organized and well structured, its members are more loyal and form a common style against competitors.

At the same time with these phenomena inside the group, the connections between groups have common characteristics. Each group starts to see in other groups a potential enemy and a distortion of perception takes place, so that each sees only his qualities and only shortcomings for the enemy. The hostility directed towards other groups increases while the communication between groups decreases dramatically. This facilitates negative feelings and makes the correction of false perceptions more difficult. If the groups are forced to interact none of them will listen to other's argument.

Consequently, while competition and its effects can help motivation and make more efficient a group, the same factors which improve the efficiency in the group can have negative consequences upon intergroup efficiency.

When the negative consequences are very high, managers look for manners to reduce the tensions intergroups. In the paper "Intergroup Problems in Organizations" (eds. Plano, TX: Business Publications, 1983), E. Schein suggests that the base strategy which should be followed is finding a common enemy, inventing a negotiating strategy which brings sub-groups of the rival groups together for interaction. Then a common objective must be found, which is superior to the initial groups' objectives.

Avoiding intergroups conflicts can be done in many ways. First of all, managers must emphasize the contribution of each group to the organization's objectives, rather than emphasizing the own objectives of each group. Second of all, it must be increased the frequency of groups interaction and must be developed an awarding system for groups which help each other. Third of all, each time it is

possible, individuals should have the opportunity to be part of more than one department, to increase their knowledge regarding the organization, by this knowing better intergroups issues.

The organizations in which groups collaborate many times are facing conflicts which increase their efficiency. This takes place because in this situation individuals have trust in the people surrounding them, are open to express their opinions. In a harsh competitive situation groups tend to keep the information inside the group, resulting a drastic decrease of company's productivity.

Thus, the managers must identify the type of conflict which appears in the controlled organization. If the conflict can have negative consequences on the company's efficiency, it must be discouraged and methods to prevent it must be implemented.

5. Negotiations

Frequently, an important part of the process of conflict resolution involves negotiations. Negotiations may be viewed as a process in which two or more parties attempt to reach acceptable agreement in a situation characterized by some level of disagreement. In an organizational context, negotiation may take place (1) between two people (as when a manager and subordinate decide on the completion date for a new project the subordinate has just received), (2) within a group (most group decision-making situations), and (3) between groups (such as the purchasing department and a supplier regarding price, quality, or delivery date).

Regardless of the setting or the parties involved, negotiations usually have at least four elements. First, some disagreement or conflict exists. This may be perceived, felt or manifest. Second, there is some degree of interdependence between the parties. Third, the situation must be conducive to opportunistic interaction.

This means that each party has both the means and inclination to attempt to influence the other. Finally, there exists some possibility of agreement. In the absence of this latter element, of course, negotiations cannot bring about a positive resolution.

When negotiations are successful, each party feels that it has significantly benefited from the resolution. When they fail, however, the conflict often escalates.

Win- lose negotiating is the classical view which suggests that negotiations are frequently a form of a zero-sum game. That is, to whatever extent one party wins something, the other party loses.

In a zero-sum situation there is an assumption of limited resources, and the negotiation process is to determine who will receive these resources.This is also known as distributive negotiating. The term refers to the process of dividing, or "distributing", scarce resources. Such a win – lose approach characterizes numerous negotiating situations. Buying an automobile is a classic example. As the buyer, the less you pay the less profit the seller makes; your "wins" (in the form of fewer dollars paid) are the seller`s "losses" (in the form of fewer dillars of profit).

Note that in win – lose negotiating, one party does not necessarily "lose" in an absolute sense. Presumably the party selling the car still made a profit, but to the extent the selling price was lowered to make the sale, the profit was lower.

In organizations, win – lose negotiating is quite common. It characterizes most bargaining involving material goods, such as the purchase of supplies or manufacturing raw materials. Win – lose negotiating can be seen in universities where each college attempts to negotiate the best budget for itself, invariably at the expense of some other college. Frequently, the most varaiable examples of distributive negotiations in organizations are those that take place between labor and management. Issues involving wages, benefits, working conditions, and related matters, are seen as a conflict over limited resources.

Win – win, or integrative, negotiating brings a different perspective to the process. Unlike the zero – sum orientation in win – lose, win – win negotiating is a positive – sum approach. Positive – sum situations are those where each party gain without a corresponding loss for the other party. This does not necessarily mean that everyone gets everything they wanted, for seldom does that occur. It simply means that an agreement has been achieved which leaves all parties better off than they where prior to the agreement.

It may seem as if a win – win approach is always preferable to a win –lose one. So, instead the situation of having a winner and a loser is the situation of having two winners. Realistically, however, not every negotiating situation has an integrative payoff. Some situations really are distributive; a gain for one side must mean an offsetting loss for the other. In the automobile purchase example cited earlier it is true that both the purchaser and the seller can "win" in the sense that the purchaser obtains the car and the seller makes a profit. Nonetheless, this is essentially a distributive situation. The purchaser can obtain a better deal only at the loss of some profit by the seller. There is simply no way the purchaser can get the lowest price while the seller obtains the highest profit.

Even if the nature of what is being negotiated lends itself to a win – win approach, the organization of the negotiators may not. Win – win, or integrative, negotiating can work only when the issues are integrative in nature, and all parties are committed to an integrative process. Typically, union and management bargaining includes issues that are both distributive and integrative in nature. However, because negotiators for both sides sa frequently see the total process as distributive, even those issues which truly may be integrative become victims of a win – lose attitude, to the detriment of both parties.

The selection of specific negotiation strategies and tactics depend on a number of variables. The nature of the issues being negotiated is a critical consideration. For example, how one approaches negotiating distributive issues may be quite different than the strategy employed for negotiating integrative ones.

The context or environment in which the negotiations are taking place may also be an important consideration, as may be the nature of the outcomes that are desired from the negotiating process. In many negotiating situations this last consideration may be the most important.

One model for increasing negotiating effectiveness is found in the work of the Dutch management practitioner Willem Mastenbroek. Although the model is extremely comprehensive, the key focus is on four activities. These activities are:

➢ obtaining substantial results. This refers to activities which focus on the content of what is being negotiated. Desirable outcomes cannot be achieved if the negotiations do not stay constructively focused on real issues. A judicious exchange of information regarding goals and expectations of the negotiating process is an example of this type of activity.

➢ influencing the balance of power. The final outcome of negotiations is almost always directly related to the power and dependency relationships between the negotiators. Achieving subtle shifts in the balance of power through the use of persuasion, facts, and expertise are almost always more effective.

➢ promoting a constructive climate. This relates to activities which are designed to facilitate progress by minimizing the likelihood that tension or animositybetween the parties becomes disruptive. Specific activities might include attending to each party`s opinions, acting in a predictable and serious manner, treating each party with respect, and showing a sense of humor.

➢ obtaining procedural flexibility. These are activities which allow a negotiator to increase negotiating effectiveness through increasing the type and number of options available for conducting the negotiations. The longer a negotiator can keep the widest variety of options open, the greater the likelihood of reaching a desirable outcome. Examples include judicious choice of one`s initial position, dealing with several issues simultaneously, and putting as many alternatives on the table as possible.

References

1. Bazerman, M., H., Neale, M., A., (1992)., *Negotiating Rationally*, The Free Press, New York
2. Fisher, R., J., (1990)., *The Social Psychology of Intergroup and International Conflict Resolution*, Springer-Verlag, New York
3. French, W., Bell C., Zawacki, R., (1983)., *Organizational Development: Theory, Practice and Research*, 2 nd ed., Plano, TX: Business Publications, New York
4. Greenberg, J., (2005)., *Managing Behavior in Organization*, forth edition, Pearson-Prentice Hall, New Jersey
5. Hersey, K., Blanchard, P., Johnson, D.E., (2001)., *Management of Organizational Behavior. Leading Human Resources*, Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River, New Jersey
6. Hunsaker, Ph., L., (2005), *Management, A Skills Approach*, second edition, Pearson – Prentice Hall, New Jersey
7. Hunsaker, Ph., L., Dilmarter, D., (2004)., *Training in Management Skills*, Canadian edition, Pearson – Prentice Hall, Toronto

8. Ivancevich, J. M., Matteson, M. T., (1999)., *Organizational Behavior and Management*, Fifth Edition, Ed. McGraw-Hill, Boston
9. Jones, G., (1998)., *Comportament organizaţional*, Editura Economică, Bucureşti
10. Lax, D. A., Sebenius, J. K., (1986)., *The Manager as Negotiator*, Free Press, New York
11. Mastenbroek, W., (1989)., *Negotiate*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford
12. McGill, M., Slocum, J., (1994)., *The Smarter Organization*, John Wiley & Sons, New York
13. Mullins, L., J., (2005)., *Management and Organizational Behavior*, seventh edidion, Prentice Hall, Essex, U.K., London
14. Năstase, M., (2004)., *Cultura organizaţională şi cultura managerială*, Editura ASE, Bucureşti
15. Năstase, M., (2007)., *Lideri, leadership şi cultura organizaţională*, Editura ASE, Bucureşti
16. Popescu, Doina, (2009)., *Managementul general al firmei*, Editura ASE, Bucureşti
17. Popescu, Doina,(2006)., *Cultura organizaţională şi etica în afaceri*, Editura ASE, Bucureşti
18. Rahim, M. A., (1986)., *Managing Conflict in Organizations*, Praeger, New York
19. Robbins, S.P., (1995)., *Essential of Organizational Behavior*, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey., Prentice Hall
20. Robbins, S. P., Coulter, M., (2003)., *Management*, a şaptea ediţie internaţională, Upper Saddle River, Prentice Hall, New Jersey
21. Stoner, J. A., Freeman, R., E., (1999)., *Management*, Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey