

## THE MAIN WAY OF SOLVING CONFLICTS FROM A SCHOOL MANAGER'S PERSPECTIVE

### STILUL PREDOMINANT DE SOLUȚIONARE A CONFLICTELOR DIN PERSPECTIVA MANAGERULUI ȘCOLAR

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**Abstract:** *This study aims at presenting the main way of solving conflicts in school organisations, from the school manager's point of view. The conflict, a form of opposition based on the incompatibility between goals, intentions, and values of the parties involved is natural and even desirable within an organisation. Among its positive effects we could mention the following: awareness of the problems, supply of useful information on the organisation problems, stimulation of curiosity and creativeness, increase of internal cohesion of the members, determination of changes. The solution of the conflicts should represent an important part of a manager's activity. In this sense, competences allow him/her to play different roles, thus facilitating the rapid adaptation to such situations. On the ground of the questionnaire applied to a number of 15 managers of pre-academic education institutions, we have proved that efficient managers have behaviour traits typical to the co-operative style: they trust their employees' integrity and competence, they help their subordinates, they have great expectations from their achievements, and they are good team workers.*

**Rezumat:** *Scopul acestui studiu constă în surprinderea stilului predominant de rezolvare a unei situații conflictuale, în organizațiile școlare, din perspectiva managerului. Conflictul, formă de opoziție bazată pe incompatibilitatea scopurilor, intențiilor și valorilor părților implicate, este firesc, natural și chiar dezirabil în cadrul unei organizații. Printre efectele sale pozitive s-ar putea enumera: conștientizarea problemelor, furnizarea unor informații utile asupra problemelor organizației, stimularea curiozității, a creativității, creșterea coeziunii interne a membrilor, determinarea unor schimbări. Soluționarea conflictelor trebuie să reprezinte o parte importantă a activității managerului. În acest sens, competențele sunt cele care îi permit acestuia să exercite diferite roluri, facilitând adaptarea rapidă la astfel de situații. Pe baza chestionarului aplicat unui număr de 15 manageri din învățământul preuniversitar, s-a dovedit că managerii eficienți dețin trăsături de comportament tipice stilului cooperant: manifestă încredere în integritatea și pricepera angajaților, își ajută subordonații, au mari așteptări în ceea ce privește realizările lor, muncesc în grup.*

**Key words:** *school organisations, school manager, solving conflicts, manager's activity, competences, co-operative style*

**Cuvinte cheie:** *organizații școlare, manager școlar, situații conflictuale, activitate managerială, competențe, stil cooperant*

#### INTRODUCTION

Conflict is a source of energy and vitality in the measure in which it animates creeds, enhances passions, and revive symbols (MOSCOVICI, 1976) or a state of matters in which a force or a complex of forces meet another force or complex of forces similarly organised (BARRON, 1990).

In order to achieve a true conflict management, it is necessary to know the conflict typology. Thus, conflict can be a goal, cognitive, affective, or procedure conflict; or it can be hierarchical, functional, leadership, formal or informal; or prestige, socio-cultural (BOGATHY, 2002).

They generally admit five styles of solving conflicts, types of styles characterised by

the following (ALEXIU, 2001):

1. *The cooperative style* (“He/she takes into account his/her pair’s opinion and together they reach a solution”):

- High assertiveness and cooperativeness;
- Gain-gain approaching through the maximisation of the cooperative gains;
- Acceptance of the conflict as natural phenomenon, opportunity to solve some problems;

- Conflict solution and not victory at any cost is the main objective;
- Emphasis on negotiations and on cooperation with his/her partners;
- Taking into account the pair’s opinion;
- Desire to meet both parties’ requirements;
- Attempt to get the pair’s cooperation;
- Advantages from the point of view of team’s cohesion.

2. *The evasive style* (“I need to avoid fight”):

- Passive behaviour;
- Ignorance/denial of the existing conflict;
- Withdrawal from the problems having determined the conflict and from the people involved and avoidance of fights;

- Withdrawal is considered a better alternative than facing the conflict;
- Lack of the desire to get involved, impossibility of facing the conflict;
- Aversion towards conflict situations;
- Delegating the responsibility of solving problems;
- Avoiding expression of one’s own opinion if it can lead to fight;
- Reporting only positive aspects and neglecting unfavourable ones.

3. *The comfortable/adaptive style* (“I can give up my objectives provided you like me”):

- Miming cooperation in solving the problems;
- Paying attention to relations rather than to objectives;
- Avoiding conflicts in favour of interpersonal harmony;
- Emphasising common points;
- Concern for the emotional side of the conflict;
- Limited creativeness.

4. *The concessive/compromise style* (“I try to get a compromise solution”):

- Reaching consensus under diverse points of view;
- Reaching a solution as a result of mutual giving up;
- Avoiding latent or manifest conflict situations;
- Reciprocal awareness of interests and exigencies;
- Searching solutions that maximise interest convergence;
- Searching medium solutions;
- Maintaining good relationship in the future;
- Considering compromise a rapid way to solve conflict situations;
- Negotiation.

5. *The competitive/confrontational style* (“I try to enforce my point of view”):

- Gain-lose approach in interpersonal relationships;

- Following one's own goals, without taking into account the others;
- Using threats and penalties to reach goals;
- Trying to patronise the others;
- Using an authoritarian, excessively formal style;
- Limited creativeness.

### **MATERIALS AND METHOD**

In our research on a sample of 15 subjects (managers of general schools in Timișoara) concerning the identification of a dominating negotiation style in a conflict situation, we applied a questionnaire adapted after the model developed by KENNETH THOMAS and RALPH KILMANN from FRUJINĂ & TEȘILEANU'S book „Comunicare, negociere și rezolvare de conflicte” (Communication, negotiation, and conflict solution, 2002).

The questionnaire contains 25 discourses ranging between 1 and 5 (1 - total disagreement; 2 - moderate disagreement; 3 – neutral attitude; 4 – moderate agreement; 5 – total agreement).

Each of the five styles of negotiation has five types of discourses (cooperative, competitive, comfortable, concessive, and evasive).

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Information thus obtained was allowed us to statistically process them particularly based on the ground of frequency and frequency percentage calculus.

Percentage data are presented synthetically in the table below:

*Tabel 1*

Styles of negotiation		
<i>Specification</i>	<i>Styles of negotiation</i>	<i>%</i>
Predominant style	Cooperative	60%
2 <sup>nd</sup> place	Concessive	20%
3 <sup>rd</sup> place	Comfortable	12%
4 <sup>th</sup> place	Evasive	6%
5 <sup>th</sup> place	Competitive	2%

We can see that 60% (9 of 15 people) of the school managers have made an option for the cooperative negotiation style in conflict situations, ranging this style first. At the opposite pole is the competitive style, with only 2% of the questioned subjects.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

In school managers' opinion, knowing and getting aware of the causes leading to conflicts are the first steps to take in preventing them. Thus:

- The manager will try to maintain a balanced atmosphere in the team he/she leads;
- The cooperative style adopted by school managers in the solution of the conflicts is superior to any of the other five styles due to its numerous advantages;
- Solving conflicts through a cooperative style leads to a flexible approach of the conflict situations, to the improvement of the personal relationships, thus determining a climate of safety within the institution;
- Solving conflicts depends on the strategic options of the school managers and of the organisations they are part of;
- A managerial style should also contain the solution style for conflict situations;
- They consider there is a mutual relationship between efficient cooperation and the

constructive solution of the conflicts.

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