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**Published First Online:**

19.12.2023

**Pages:** 255-364

**DOI:**

[https://doi.org/10.37075/JOMS  
A.2023.2.07](https://doi.org/10.37075/JOMS<br/>A.2023.2.07)

# THE CONFLICT: TYPES AND MODE OF ACTION

## ABSTRACT

Conflicts are an inevitable part of our lives and it is important to have the skills to define them, relate them to a specific type and apply management techniques to deal with them in different situations. The article presents an analysis of the types of conflicts classified according to different criteria. In accordance with the levels of conflict in the organization, the four main types of conflicts are described in detail: intrapersonal conflict; interpersonal conflict; intra-group conflict; intergroup conflict.

The main focus is on the most common conflicts in the organization conforming to the causes of occurrence. The author presents a description of the distinctive features of different types of organizational conflicts. It points to specific examples of conflicts and provides guidance on how to deal with them.

**KEY WORDS:** conflict, management, types of conflict, organization

**JEL:** H00, H12, L20, M12

## INTRODUCTION

Conflict is an unavoidable companion in human existence. It is as old as humanity itself. The study of conflict dates back to the 1920s with the development of psychoanalysis. Later, issues related to the conflict between activity and environment were included. Conflict comes from the English word "conflict" - clash, contradiction, clash

(lat. conflictus - clash, collision, derived from "con" - with and "fligo" - to poke), and the science studying conflict is called "conflictology" - it deals with new issues, its areas of study have become established in the last 15-20 years. Conflicts initially started to be studied in the USA, research units, laboratories, institutes were established. Masters programmes in conflict management/resolution are gradually being introduced in universities, and are making inroads in Europe. Out-of-court dispute resolution became popular in Bulgaria in the early 1990s. In 1995 the University Centre for Conflict Management and Organisational Studies at Sofia University was founded. It was later renamed the University Centre for Conflict Analysis and Resolution.

The relevance of the topic comes from our everyday life, because conflicts are everywhere - within us (intrapersonal conflicts), between us, within groups, within social communities (interethnic conflicts, interstate conflicts).

Today, it is important to distinguish the types of conflicts, the reasons that give rise to them. In addition, to be aware of the need to form young people's practical skills to cope with the challenges in their lives, including their skills to deal with conflicts in their daily lives - at work, at home and with their friends.

## 1. TYPES OF CONFLICTS

There are different classifications of conflict types. Most often, conflict typologies are considered according to two characteristics: **the levels of conflict** and **the consequences of conflict**. Several models are presented in a generalized form.

According to **the levels of conflict** in the organization, four main types of conflict emerge:

### 1. INTRAPERSONAL CONFLICT

Intrapersonal conflict occurs when an individual realizes the incompatibility of the goals assigned to him and his personal capabilities and role. At this level of conflict, strong feelings, inner emotional states, and volitional process develop.

D. Dimitrov gives the following definition of this type of conflict: "intrapersonal conflict is a struggle between at least two contradictory tendencies that coexist inevitably in the psyche of each individual". This type of conflict has been studied extensively by the following four strands of psychology: psychoanalysis, behaviorism, humanistic and cognitive psychology. Psychoanalysis explains conflict as a manifestation of the eternal and hidden struggle between the unconscious psychic forces hidden in the nature of man and the necessity of survival in the social environment. Behaviorism advances the idea that intrapersonal conflict arises because of the individual's faulty experience and faulty training. Humanistic psychology recognizes the existence of this type of conflict when the growth of the constructive origin of the "human self" is impeded. From the standpoint of the cognitive strand of psychology, conflict is seen as caused by the contradiction between psychologically incompatible thoughts or beliefs. V. Avramov explains the origin of these conflicts as a consequence of unsatisfied individual needs, the satisfaction of which is a continuous and prolonged process.

Similarly, D. Dimitrov also believes that the reasons for the emergence and development of intrapersonal conflicts are due to the unsatisfaction of basic human needs. The author draws an analogy with Maslow's concept of needs, which distinguishes physiological needs, the need for security and safety, the need for success and self-confidence, the need for respect and the need for self-actualization.

In one's social life, one fulfils different social roles, some of which one can choose, but there are also roles where the choice is limited or made "from the outside". The contradiction that arises between the different role positions of the individual and his ability to cope with them, according to V. Merlin is at the heart of the intrapersonal conflict. Based on this, the author identifies two types of conflict. The first of them is the "I-role" conflict, and the second type that the author considers is the interrole conflict. Self-role conflict involves contradictions arising between the demands of the role and the capabilities of the individual. The subjective experience arising in a person in such a situation is defined as personality-role. The resolution of the conflict is based on which will be preferred, the preservation of the self or the preservation of the role.

Inter-role conflict arises in situations where the role positions of individuals prove to be incompatible. In everyday experience, a person tries to cope successfully with all of his or her obligations related to the demands of the individual social role, but this is not always achieved.

### 2. INTERPERSONAL CONFLICT

Develops when two individuals express disagreement about goals, actions, decisions, outcomes, etc. The reasons for this conflict lie in the different perceptions of the two, different motivations, different learning styles, differences in assessment styles, and other internal

individual differences between people. This conflict at work manifests itself in different ways. For example, two people may get into interpersonal conflict in a struggle over who gets more of the limited resources or who gets approval of their project.

D. Dimitrov considers interpersonal conflicts as a clash of interests between two people.

V. Avramov's understanding of the nature of interpersonal conflict is similar to that of D. Dimitrov, but he also adds that the parties involved in the conflict are bearers of mutually exclusive goals.

Regardless of whether this type of conflict arises in a work situation or not according to W. Markham it has a destructive effect on relationships. It also negatively affects those who must work with one or both parties involved in the conflict.

M. Mescon, M. Albert and F. Hedowry consider interpersonal conflict as directly related to communication between people in a community.

### **3. INTRA-GROUP CONFLICT**

Occurs and develops mainly because of intellectual differences (and hence differences in behaviour) between group members. In addition, this type of conflict is also based on the emotional reactions of group members to a situation.

A. Angelov, M. Harizanova and M. Kuzmanova adhere to the idea that intragroup conflict exists in the organization when an individual violates the norms of behavior established in the group. This immediately leads to the adoption of disciplinary measures against the group by the leader. The expected results of the presence of such conflict may find expression in negative behavior towards the individual or the group. Furthermore, it may lead to a decrease in work productivity and a deterioration of the relationship between the supervisor, the individual and the group.

K. Levin in the process of studying group dynamics determines the level of tension that exists in the person and the group. According to him, the occurrence of conflicts depends on the atmosphere that is established in the group, on the group norms imposed and on the relationships between the members in the group. As the cause of the emergence and development of intra-group conflict, he points first to the degree of satisfaction-unsatisfaction of needs. Unmet needs increase the likelihood of conflict. Secondly, the author puts the amount of space for free movement of a person. K. Levin believes that the adaptation of an individual in the group is formed by the subjective space for free movement, which provides opportunities for the satisfaction of individual needs. In case it is restricted, the tension increases. The third reason for the occurrence of intragroup conflict is associated with the presence or absence of opportunities to get out of an unpleasant situation. The increased internal tension creates a tendency to leave. The last cause is determined by the degree of congruence or divergence between the goals of the members and the group. If the goals coincide and are common, it implies interaction in achieving them.

The American sociologist L. Kozler advocates the idea that the more closed the group, the more intense the conflicts within it.

In the great variety of groups in which a person is involved, he seeks to satisfy his needs, goals and interests. On the other hand, he is obliged to conform and obey the group norms, requirements and values existing in the group. And conflict can arise precisely from the discrepancy between individual and group desires and interests.

#### 4. INTERGROUP CONFLICT

This conflict arises between groups, whether formal or informal. These are disagreements between separate groups dependent on each other in an activity where dissatisfaction is expressed leading to opposition.

J. Greenberg advanced the idea that intergroup conflict exists when two groups are in conflict with each other and each group is trying to achieve its set goals.

W. Markham shares that some organizations actively encourage conflict and competition between teams and employees in their organization, believing that by doing so, teams will work harder and achieve better results. In this case, competition can become a leading line of behaviour and not have a positive impact on performance. In such situations, measures should be taken immediately and the energies of each team should be redirected in other directions, especially those that are in the strongest competition. Competition between teams can result in members of one group deliberately sabotaging the efforts of the other in their strong desire to win. This might not be to the benefit of the organization, due to a lot of wasted time and effort, but can lead to conflicts in the workplace.

The dynamics of intergroup conflict provide an opportunity to uncover the ways in which individual groups function within the whole organisation. The division of people into separate structural units leads not only to the sharing of a common organizational culture, but also to the development of its own subculture, whose values and norms are specific and sometimes differ significantly from other subcultures in the organization. Individual subcultures are formed both horizontally and vertically and reflect the core values and goals of the group. Adherence to different values and competition for resources place departments and groups in a near conflict situation.

An important moment in the development of conflict situations between groups is the process of building group cohesion and group identity, in which one seeks opportunities for identification with the group to which one belongs. This contributes to the reinforcement of his self-concept, strengthens his self-confidence and realizes the adequacy of his self-esteem. The more cohesive a group is, the stronger its identity and the danger of difficulties in coordination and integration in interdependent tasks. As a result, intergroup conflicts may arise and several changes in intergroup relations may occur. First, group perceptions become distorted, as each group perceives itself as better than the other does. Furthermore, the opposing side is seen in an unfavourable light. Another change occurs in the direction of increasing distrust of the other group.

There is hostility, which in turn leads to a restriction or avoidance of communication, and consequently the decision-making process breaks down.

The conditions that create the prerequisite for the emergence of intergroup conflicts according to V. Avramov are primarily rooted in the organizational instability of the firm. Moreover, the mistakes made in the allocation of resources between individual structural units can also be considered as a cause of the emergence of this type of conflict. As another cause, the author considers the clash of interests between different groups in the organisation.

M. Mescon, M. Albert and F. Hedowry describe this type of conflicts as more complex than interpersonal conflicts, where individuals can act independently to resolve contradictions among themselves, but as members of groups they have to comply with the norms, values and goals of the group, as well as be loyal to it.

According to **the effects** that conflict has, the conflict typology outlines other types of conflict: **constructive conflicts** and **destructive conflicts**, i.e. they lead to an increase in organizational

effectiveness or they lead to a decrease in personal satisfaction, group cooperation and organizational effectiveness.

In interpersonal conflicts, the results can be positive (the conflict is resolved, the parties gain experience and broaden their worldview) - this is the so-called **functional conflict**, but they can also be negative (disruption of interpersonal relationships) - **dysfunctional conflict**.

Another classification of conflicts defines them as:

**1. Conflict of interests** - incompatible aspirations to limited resources, goods, etc. It is associated with competitive behaviour between participants and striving to gain at others' expense, which gives rise to enmity, fighting, etc.

**2. Cognitive conflict** (conflicts of ideas) - associated with solving problems on which individual participants have different views, which gives rise to inconsistencies in assessments of the situation, and hence in behavior.

There are three derivatives of cognitive conflict:

- *Attitudinal conflict* - refers to the biases of the disputants;
- *Values conflicts* - due to different social experiences, culture, moral and normative system, paths of socialization, etc.;
- *Psychological conflict* - due to the peculiarities in characters, to the discrepancy in the dynamics of mental processes, to the differences in intellect, in upbringing, etc.;

**3. Organizational conflict** - as a result of poor organization of joint activity.

According to **the nature of the relationships** of the participants, conflicts are divided into **vertical** - between superiors and subordinates and **horizontal** - between collaborators in the respective collective.

According to **the environment**, there are conflicts between the organisation and the environment. They arise mainly from the uncertainty in relations with state authorities, partners, suppliers, consumers.

In addition, conflicts can be conditionally distinguished into **content, procedural and relationship conflicts**. There are important conflicts affecting the substance of relationships with other people, as well as those for which unnecessary efforts are often wasted, not affecting individuals as a whole.

According to **the way they arise**, conflicts are: **spontaneously occurring** and **consciously provoked**, and according to **the degree of publicity** - **hidden** and **open**.

In their **gradation**, conflicts can be:

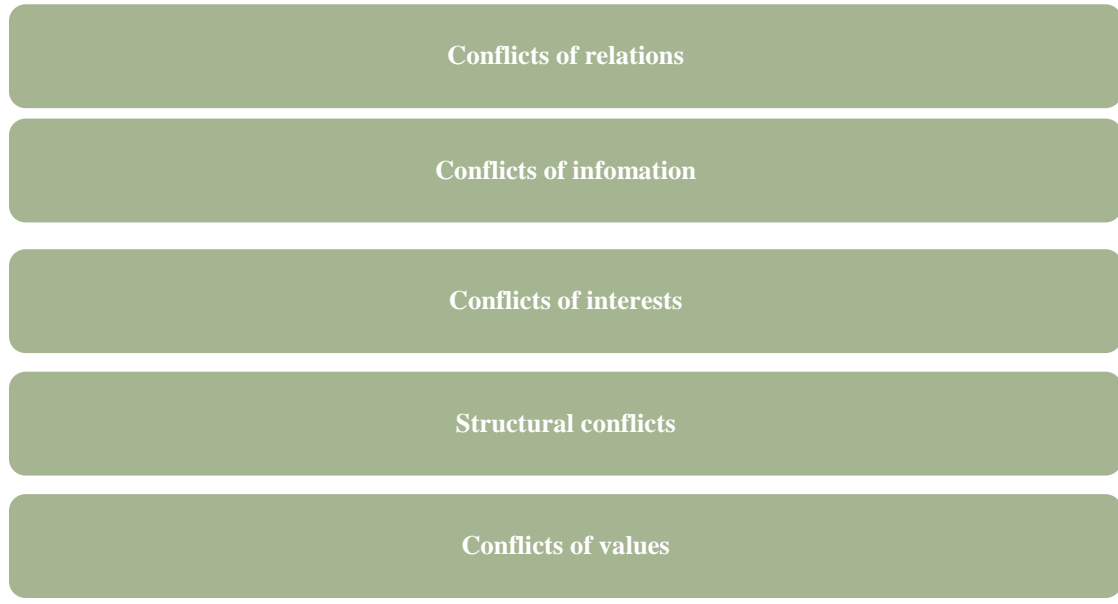
**1. The "business dispute" type** - in this type the disagreements are about the joint activity. The resolution of this type of conflict is easy, it does not require the intervention of external people;

**2. The type of "formalization of relations"** - in it the circle of disagreements is expanded and the participants in the conflict do not believe that a consensus can be reached. Sometimes the conflict is transferred to a third party - the management or the collective, which leads to its difficult resolution;

**3. The type of "psychological antagonism"** - in this type the parties are openly hostile to each other and do not make any attempts to reach an agreement. This makes conflict resolution extremely difficult.

Figure 1 presents the most common conflicts in organizations, according to **the causes of occurrence**, and Table 1 describes the causes, characteristics, and courses of action, respectively.

**Figure 1.** Conflicts in organizations, according to the causes of occurrence



**Table 1.** Main types of conflicts in organizations

Types of conflicts	Causes	Characteristics	Mode of action
<b>Conflicts of relations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor communication</li> <li>• Different stereotypes</li> <li>• Negative behaviour</li> <li>• Strong emotions</li> <li>• Repetitive negative behaviour</li> </ul>	They are conditioned by strong negative emotions, layered stereotypes, misunderstanding of the situation, ineffective communication and unwillingness to understand each other. Often these conflicts are defined as 'unnecessary', as they arise even when no objective conditions exist. They are the surest means of escalating tensions.	<p>By identifying them, the following steps can be used to resolve them:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• clarifying perceptions through effective communication;</li> <li>• exercising control over emotional processes and the emotions expressed;</li> <li>• recognising the importance of feelings;</li> <li>• encouraging positive decision-making attitudes;</li> </ul>

Types of conflicts	Causes	Characteristics	Mode of action
<b>Conflicts of information</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of information</li> <li>• Misinformation</li> <li>• Different criteria</li> <li>• Different interpretation</li> <li>• Different assessment procedures</li> </ul>	They generally boil down to: inadequate communication system; lack of information; different criteria for evaluating information; different interpretation of information.	<p>Easily resolved by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• improving hierarchical and vertical communication networks;</li> <li>• developing a system for collecting and processing information;</li> <li>• developing common criteria for evaluating information;</li> <li>• using experts.</li> </ul>
<b>Conflicts of interests</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Property</li> <li>• Competing interests</li> <li>• Substantive</li> <li>• Procedural</li> <li>• Psychological</li> </ul>	These conflicts are caused by rivalries in the distribution of scarce goods. Most often, one side attempts to satisfy its needs at the expense of the other. This type of conflict concerns both the content of the processes /money, resources, goods/ and the ways in which the dispute is conducted, i.e. the procedure. Moral-psychological issues such as trust, mutual respect, fairness are also involved.	<p>In order to resolve these conflicts, it is necessary to diagnose those roles that are mutually exclusive, complementary and common. Only on the basis of common interests can stable relations develop between the parties, following the steps described for resolution, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• creating a conducive working atmosphere;</li> <li>• focusing on interests rather than positions;</li> <li>• developing solutions that meet the needs and interests of all.</li> <li>• developing a reward system;</li> </ul>
<b>Structural conflicts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Various resources</li> <li>• Geographical constraints</li> </ul>	Structural conflicts are related to the place of the conflicting parties in the management hierarchy, the social role they play, the	The resolution of structural conflicts is achieved by:

Types of conflicts	Causes	Characteristics	Mode of action
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time constraints</li> <li>• Unequal power</li> <li>• Violation of rules</li> <li>• Unclear/unacceptable rules</li> <li>• Unclear objectives</li> <li>• Skipping phases</li> </ul>	<p>different degree of control over resources and the unequal distribution of power. Considering structural conflicts, one can speak of two types of conflicts: hierarchical-role and functional-role.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The former are the result of unresolved problems between units and specialists of different hierarchical levels, of artificially maintained great distance, of poor leadership style on the part of superiors, of deliberate suppression and discrediting of those who are capable and those who wish to grow in the profession.</li> <li>2. The second is the result of misallocation of authority horizontally, i.e. between units/organisational forms at the same management level. The struggle is for better positions, for redistribution of responsibilities, for faster career advancement when it comes to individuals. Here the conflict can be referred between the supervisor /formal leader/ and the informal leader, as well as the conflict between the heads of the different functional units.</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• clear and precise definition of roles;</li> <li>• establishing a fair and mutually acceptable decision-making process;</li> <li>• changing the way influence is exercised;</li> <li>• changing time constraints;</li> <li>• responsibility to bear the burden associated with the moves made and decisions taken.</li> </ul>



Types of conflicts	Causes	Characteristics	Mode of action
<b>Conflicts of values</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Religion, ideology</li> <li>• Differences in criteria for morality</li> <li>• Contradictory values</li> </ul>	They are distinguished when the people involved in the conflict have a different value orientation and feel a desire to impose their values on the other side or show intolerance to its value system. The characteristic features are: incompatible value systems; different criteria for assessing values; different way of life, ideology, religion.	<p>These conflicts are very noticeable and are resolved by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• allowing parties to have their own values;</li> <li>• avoiding defining the problem;</li> <li>• search for a higher value that unites the parties;</li> <li>• creation of spheres of influence.</li> </ul>

*Source: Own (Adapted from the practical advice of various organizations.)*

## CONCLUSION

Conflict exists on different levels. Depending on criteria, different classifications can be made. In organizations, there are five types of conflicts that need to be addressed most often. Sometimes conflicts have a destructive effect and a timely response would contribute to maintaining stability in the organization. In other cases, the conflict has a beneficial influence to clarify the situation and can be seen as an opportunity for development. The skills and actions that will be taken are important for the overall development of the company and its people. Every manager should recognize the type of conflict, know its characteristics and take the most adequate measures to deal with it.

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