

## **Conflicts of Human Behavior in Organizations and the Influence of Human Factor on Innovation**

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**Abstract:** *Conflicts of human behavior occur everywhere people work together and interact. It is a ubiquitous and inevitable phenomenon. Conflicts are simply disagreements. They become apparent when people contradict and oppose. Conflicts result from a variety of attitudes, needs, beliefs, goals people have and ways human respond to various situations. Disputes reveal a clear contradiction between people. Conflicts occur in a situation where facts, desires or fears push the participants of a conversation in divergent directions or against each other. It has been observed that conflicts arise when the parties of a conversation assess the behavior of the interlocutor as threatening, disadvantageous or adverse, or as a behavior which may lead to unfavorable outcome of a particular situation or such that may have a negative impact on realization of own interests. The purpose of this article is to show the widespread nature of human conflicts in Polish, Ukrainian and Dutch companies. It has been hypothesized that a conflict may bring a positive result and influence competitiveness and innovation of an organization in a positive way. Empirical studies were carried out in the organizations of public administration.*

**Keywords:** *innovation, human factor, conflict, communication.*

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### **I. The Nature And Meaning of Conflict**

The concept of „conflict” comes from a Latin word “conflictus” which means a “clash” or “fight”, and from a verb “confligō” which means “to disagree”, “argue” “collide”, “be at war”[1] .

The clash occurs when people have different opinions, attitudes, beliefs, aspirations and moral position regarding certain facts. Conflict may arise if people disagree on some views, have a different idea on how to solve a problem. If there is a contradiction in interests, values, preferences, habits expressed with a negative emotional attitude towards the other party, such as: anger, reluctance, aversion, resentment it is likely that people will argue. Often the feuding parties who are convinced of their „rights”, judgments and decisions often put a blame on other. Blaming another person for an event or state of affairs is always made on an interpersonal level [2]. K. Balawajder points out that “a conflict is a social situation in which there is a conflict of interests, views, attitudes of individuals or social groups coexisting and interacting with each other in a certain place and time”[3] .

S. Chelpa and T. Witkowski agree that the “reason why people argue may be of a material and economic or symbolic nature (the latter are undoubtedly more difficult to solve and thus produce stronger antagonisms)” [4]. The most serious consequence of a conflict is an aggressive action. Such actions are undertaken by individuals or groups who realize that there are contradictions between their objectives.

In the opinion of D. Dlugosz and A. Garbacik by social conflict one may understand “a situation when two or more groups of people have irreconcilable differences in their interests or values, or are unable to gain important resources, or are unable to meet their needs and therefore prefer to implement or take actions that will change this situation for the benefit of the group. The type of actions (aggressive, cooperative) they undertake decide on the nature of conflict. Then, these groups may choose the consequence of these actions and conflict may be escalated, mitigated or be solved”[5] .

In an organization a conflict is defined as a dispute between „two or more members of a group or between groups of people who have to share limited resources or works, or take a different stand, or have different goals, values and attitudes”[6] .

Members of an organization or whole departments while being in conflict aim for their point of view or their case transcended the point of view of other people. This definition neither defines the way people try to solve a problem, the intensity of it, nor the way of managing a conflict or the outcome of a conflictual situation however, these factors determine whether a conflict is functional or dysfunctional for an organization [7].

## II. Types of Conflicts

Taking into account the psychological criteria, conflicts that occur in an organization generally used to be divided into argumentative and emotional. The first concerns a situation when simply two parties have a different idea on how to solve a particular problem. They are of non-personal nature. The second type, emotional, in turn, is a consequence of a certain, specific emotional attitude in interaction with another person and often is of an irrational nature.

There is also a distinction between the disputes which occur in an objective and subjective sphere [8]. J. Sikora is of the opinion that “the source of conflicts which arise in the subjective sphere of an organization are the personal features of a person: character, attitude, behavior, opinions, goals and dreams in life, expectations towards his or her work and satisfaction from undertaken activities. On the other hand, conflicts in the objective sphere are caused by different needs of particular employees or group of employees and the general public needs of the company as a whole”[9].

We may distinguish between the following types of conflicts:

- dissimulated conflict, a kind of conflict in which the primary factor, its reason, lies in human behavior. It manifests itself in interpersonal disputes, and disruptions in communication, etc ;
- apparent conflict is a conflict that lies in working environment, it manifests itself in a feeling of stress, danger and emotional discomfort, etc;
- open conflict, reveals in an aggressive actions between employees, the communication between employees is broken, people assess the situation in an emotional way etc.

Because of the fact that conflict is a clash of contradictory interests and ideas, it may take different forms and intensity. We may distinguish between minor conflicts that may be amicably resolved and antagonistic conflicts that may be resolved only by elimination, destruction or subordination to one side of it”[10]. Different types of conflicts in organization are presented in table 1. Four criteria have been distinguished: the subject of conflict, duration of conflict, the reason and form of conflict.

**Table 1.** Typology of conflicts in an organization

Criteria	Types of conflicts
Subject of conflict	Economic- they result from the rules of division of duties, wages, from ownership relations Social- concern working conditions, problems regarding the existence in an organization Organizational- concern business dependencies, positions, organizational units Competence- result from the scope of power, discrepancies in capabilities and business duties Goals and purpose conflicts the reason of which are different values and aims people have in an organization – they concern motives, needs, interest of a person
Duration of conflict	Long- lasting Short-lasting
Reason of conflict	Rational- result from factual reasons, rational basics e.g: power, position, right Irrational- result from fictional reasons, apparent, from suspicion, jealousy, social stereotypes
Form of conflict	Open- employees show the reason for conflict, the purpose of conflicts (e.g complaints) Hidden- they manifest themselves indirectly and the reasons of them are hidden (e.g rumors, anonymous letters, personal strifes) Organized- based on a planned activities (e.g strike) Non-organized- spontaneous

Source: J. Sikora: Zarządzanie konfliktem w zakładzie pracy. TNOiK, Bydgoszcz 1998, p. 13.

An interesting typology of conflicts was presented by J. Graltung The author juxtaposes types of conflicts (internal and external) with the level of their disclosure. (individual and collective). After analyzing the sources of disputes, it can be concluded that, despite their diversity, conflicts in organizations are developing in a similar way. As the conflict develops, new issues, often non-related to the original problem are being added what may cause it more difficult to solve.

## III. Positive Dimension of a Conflict in an Organization

Conflicts in organizations cannot be completely eliminated. There are so many differences between people who work together that despite the common goal they have, despite the fact that they work together for the benefit of an organization, know their obligations and duties there are situations that cause people to change their attitude and behavior in an explicit way [11].

Recent theories regarding conflicts in organizations treat conflict as fully legitimate phenomenon, and even as a source of a positive development of an organization which may even stimulate its innovation. Modern organizations form a system in which competition and cooperation intertwine. People work together, have a common goals, but at the same time they compete, fight for a better position in organization, climb the career ladder, strive for various privileges, etc [12].

The key aspect of conflicts management is to make them a tool, a stimulator of innovation. If an organization makes an effort to turn each unfavorable situation into beneficial, a conflict would be a highly desirable phenomenon. The point is that managers should allow the occurrence of conflicts at a lowest, fully controllable level and teach employees of ways of problem solving. This would lead to an open discussion, a constructive dialogue which purpose is to search for a positive solution, new or more profitable ways of doing things. If employees see that each problem meets an attention and raises creativity and initiative for a better outcome, the motivation among them would increase and this would be a starting point for an innovative action [13].

There are many positive dimensions of solving a problem in an open dispute. Controlled discussion allows to see the differences between employees. If their attitudes, opinions anxieties are expressed openly the others start to be aware of key problems people have and start to think of how to help others overcome them. People should be taught how to express their views correctly, how to argument, prove their point and persuade others to change their mind. Discussions also help people to show their hidden feelings, release tensions and make them feel free to speak. If the management is able to make people of different backgrounds, believes and opinions motivate each other and achieve common goal, this may be called a stimulation. Extremely important is also to find the reason for conflicts, be aware of the differences in attitudes, ideas, ways of implementing duties by employees and turn each factor into positive tool. Each conflict could contribute to a better understanding between people, could eliminate competition at all costs and detect troubles before they start to be problematic for the entire organization. Disputes may contribute to more effective group work and positive changes [14].

It is advisable for the company to fight an atmosphere of stagnation. Furthermore, if people stick to their habits, perform their duties in the same way, if the communication between employees is broken and if there are too many family or social connections it would be very hard to bring positive changes. Conflicts many be the source of progress if well managed and if there is a way to integrate conflicted parties.

Therefore, recently a method started to be popular, in the concept of management, that leads to counterbalancing the interests of employees. Conflicts are managed in such a way so as to bring benefits for the entire organization. The activities of the management should be also focused on efficient problem solving by giving conflicts a more productive nature.

Each problem is of a different nature and there are no situations that may be managed in the same way. Finding a solution to a problem depends on the type of conflict, its duration, reason and form or whether the conflict is functional or dysfunctional and many more. There are certain approaches on how to cooperate with people and solve troublesome situations and the managers should be aware that their actions determine whether the outcome of problem brings a positive or negative result. The settlement of a problem each time may be either constructive or destructive. If a solution is constructive, participants in the conflict would cooperate and reach an agreement, a common purpose and increase its innovation and effectiveness. Dysfunctional conflicts, in turn, hinder the efficiency of the whole group and lead to slowing down the progress of the whole organization. It is not easy for a manager to determine what type of conflict occur and what solutions to choose from. Sometimes, even if the type of conflict in one group is specified and methods applied by the manager foster better achievements, in another group the situation may be slightly different. The most important criterion for distinguishing between types of conflicts is the efficiency of the group [15].

In a situation where a conflict improves the quality of decisions, it may stimulate creativity and foster changes. Moreover, it may raise interest and curiosity of members of the organization, favor self-assessment and improvement and encourage conducting disputes. The negative impact of the conflict on the effectiveness of the group translates into a general dissatisfaction, weakness of employee relationships, inefficient communication, stronger competition, divisions between employees and group, and in the extreme cases terminations of employment [16].

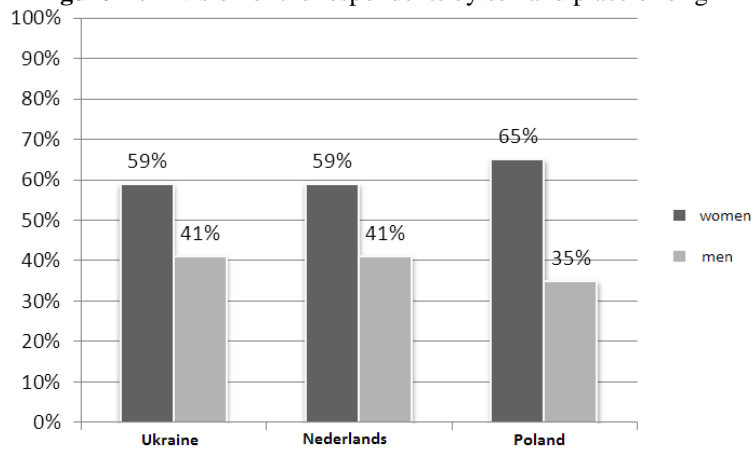
#### **IV. Conflicts In Organizations – Result of Empirical Research.**

Employees of an Institute of Economy and Management of a University in Poland carried out research on barriers in the process of communication. The research has been carried out in Polish, Ukrainian and Dutch companies. Respondents were classified by sex, education, age and frequency of the occurrence of conflicts. The classification was as follows:

- sex
- education
- age
- frequency of the occurrence of conflicts.

Figures from 1- 5 show these information

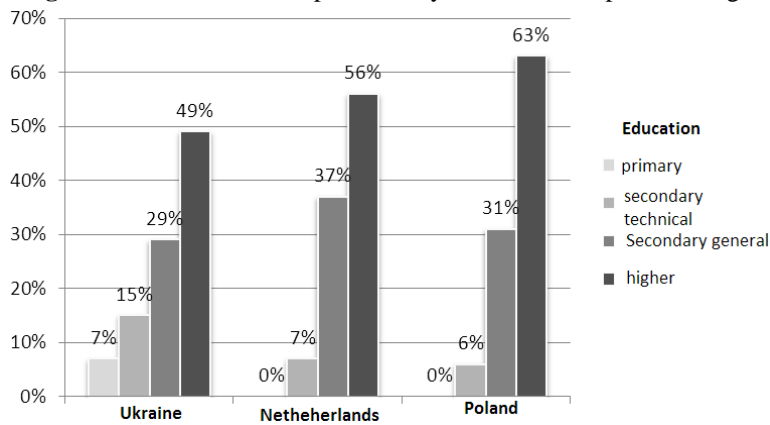
**Figure 1 .** Division of the respondents by sex and place of origin



Source: Own research

In all three countries the majority of the respondents were women. In Ukraine 59 %, in Netherlands 59 % and in Poland 65%. It can be observed that more than half of the respondents included women.

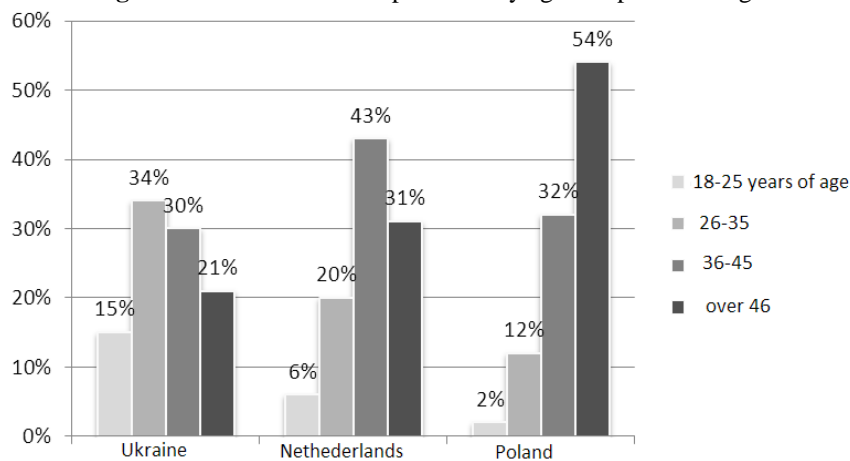
**Figure2** Division of the respondents by education and place of origin



Source: Own research

The largest percentage of the respondents were people with higher educational level, starting from 49 % in Ukraine, 56% in Netherlands and 63 % in Poland. There were no respondents in Netherlands and Poland with primary education and in Ukraine this group constituted 7 % of the whole.

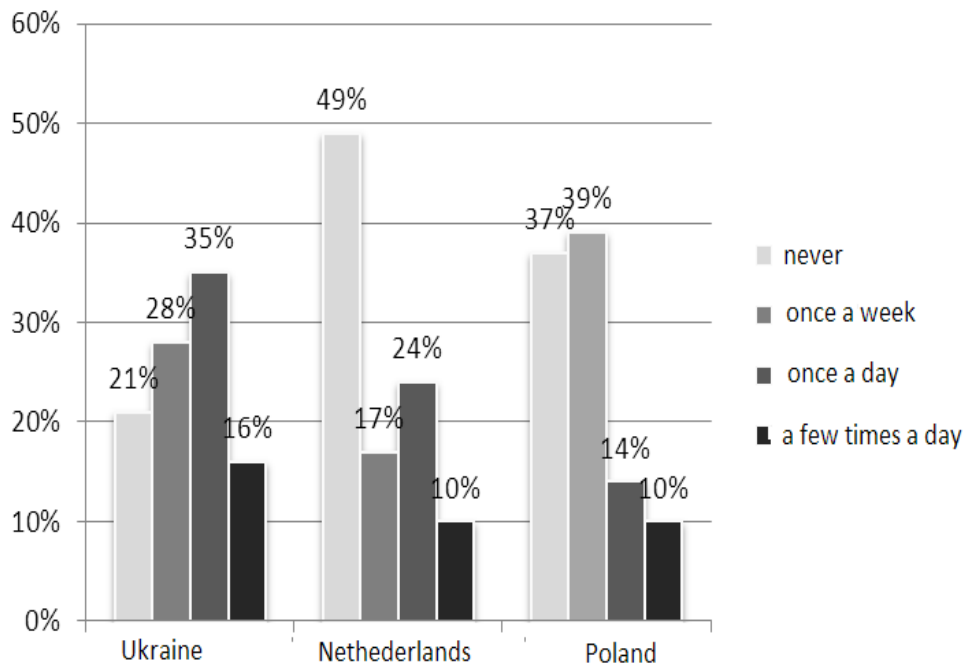
**Figure 3** Division of the respondents by age and place of origin



Source: Own research

In a group of the respondents from Ukraine, the biggest percentage were employees aged 26 - 35 (34%). In a group of people from Netherlands the biggest percentage constituted people aged 36- 45 (43%). In a group of people from Poland the biggest percentage were people over 46 years of age (54%).

**Figure 4** Frequency of the occurrence of conflicts by country of origin



Source: Own study

In the group of people from Ukraine the majority of the respondents experienced conflicts at work once a day (35%). Ukraine is also the country in which the biggest percentage of the respondents marked an answer “few times a day” indicating experiencing problems very often (16%).

In the group of people from the Netherlands the situation is totally different. The largest percentage of the respondents are people who never had communication problems at work (49 %) and only 10% of them faced problems few times a day.

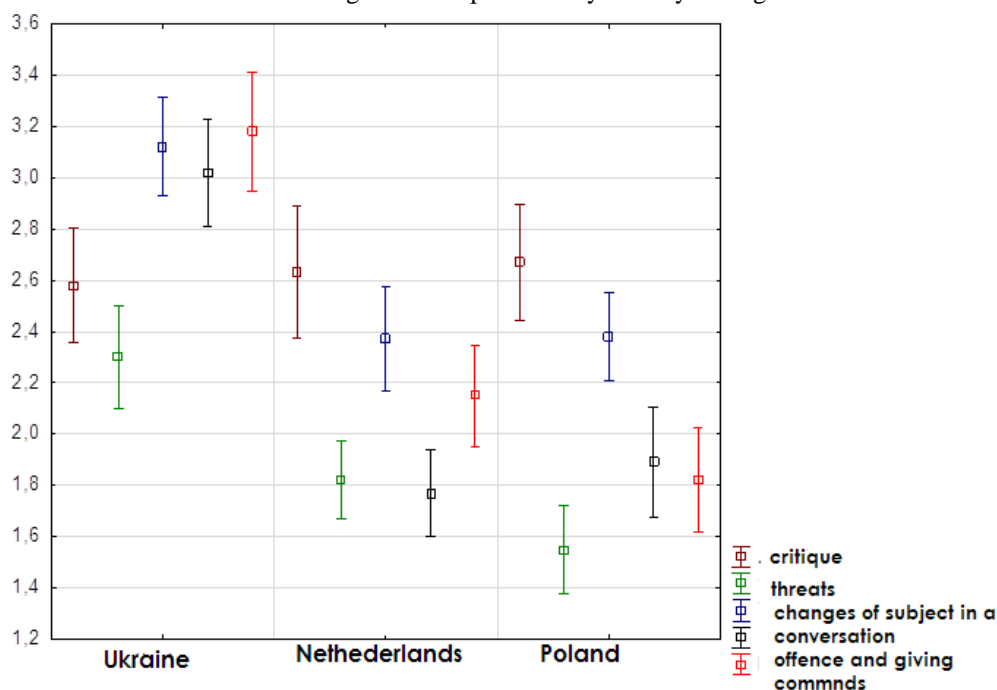
In Poland, there is also a huge group of the respondents who marked an answer “never” and “once a week”, respectively 37% and 39% percent. As small number of people, same as in Netherlands face conflicts “few times a day”. Next figure shows the frequency of the occurrence of critique, treats, change of subject in a conversation, insults and giving commands to employees.

In Ukraine, respondents most often have to deal with commands, less frequently they face a change of the subject of conversation and insults at work. Threats in this country are least likely to occur. In the Netherlands, the most common phenomenon at work is critique, change of subject and giving commands. Less frequently employees face insults and threats. In Poland, the most common is critique and change of the subject of conversation. Threats towards employees are rare.

It may be stated that conflicts and misunderstandings are inevitable and occur both in Polish and foreign companies. The empirical research indicate that despite various intensity of negative emotions, every company faces problematic situations irrespective of the country. Clashes between people occur everywhere and it is a natural phenomenon.

Taking into account that the companies in which the research was carried out are successful and well managed conflicts became the starting point for their growth and innovation. Respondents admitted that conflicts stimulated them, made them more engaged in the interest of the group and more motivated to perform certain tasks. Conflicts caused that people learned on how to be more creative, people started to search for solutions by themselves, discussed potential problems with others and talked about their anxieties.

**Figure 5** The frequency of the occurrence of critique, threats, change of subject in a conversation, insults and commands given to respondents by country of origin



Source: Own research

Moreover, respondents in each of the examined organization expressed opinion that interpersonal and group conflicts at a moderate level became a stimulator of innovation of an organization through:

- increase in motivation of employees – people put more energy and effort to realize tasks of the organization;
- increase in creativity – people had more ideas on how to implement new solutions what resulted from various points of view, the need of expressing themselves and recognizing the need to implement improvements;
- increase in knowledge level – conflicts forced people to learn more about their responsibilities, use correct arguments, substantiate facts;
- increase in self- awareness of employees – people started to be aware of what they can do and may achieve.

## V. Conclusion

Conflicts and disputes are impossible to get away with. They are unavoidable and have different causes. They occur irrespective of the fact in which country the company is located (proved by empirical research). Sometimes efforts to avoid problems are more expensive that attempts to solve them in a constructive way. Also, lack of conflicts, which is a stagnant situation does not mean that the organization is healthy. The hypothesis has been proved by the fact that the respondents of the organizations in which the research has been carried out learned on how to cooperate to turn a problematic situation into an innovation. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is always not just one solution of conflict, namely reaching an agreement, but conflicts may bring many more positive outcomes. Companies should avoid the lack of engagement and apathy of their employees. In modern organizations conflicts may be treated as a stimulator of innovation and progress.

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