MANAGING CONFLICT IN MULTICULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS

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Summary

The actuality *of the topic is determined by the factors "diversity of cultures" and "conflicts", which are problem areas in organizations nowadays. They have a significant impact on the performance and efficiency of employees, as the success of the organization is highly dependent on their performance. Multicultural organizations are exposed to different national cultures, norms, attitudes and behaviors that affect each individual team member. Organizations where employees come from different nationalities should take these factors into account, as multicultural teams in them are gradually becoming more popular in the corporate world and are part of the competitive advantages they can use. However, in a multicultural environment, conflicts may be more likely to occur than in homogeneous teams. The role of the manager is crucial when working in multicultural organizations to anticipate and resolve conflicts.* ***The object*** *of research in this article is conflicts in modern multicultural organizations.* ***The purpose*** *of this development is to present some features of conflicts in multicultural organizations, based on literary sources, and to outline possible strategies for dealing with conflicts in these organizations.* ***The research methods*** *are gathering opinions on conflict management in a youth multicultural organization through online questionnaires from members of such a multicultural organization and analyzing the results obtained.* ***The results*** *show that conflicts can be managed and directed to resolution and mediation if there is good management in the organization.*

Keywords: *conflict management, multicultural organization, teams, opportunities.*

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Introduction

"Cultural diversity" and "conflict" factors are problem areas in many organizations today. They have a significant impact on the performance and effectiveness of employees, as the success of the organization is highly dependent on their performance. Multicultural organizations are exposed to different national cultures, norms, attitudes and behaviors that affect each individual team member. Organizations where employees come from different nationalities should take these factors into account, as multicultural teams in them are gradually becoming more

popular in the corporate world and are part of the competitive advantages they can use. However, conflicts may be more likely to occur in multicultural environments than in homogeneous teams. The role of a manager is absolutely crucial when working with multicultural teams in multicultural organizations in general and with conflicts in particular. Here we must clarify that teams are a means, a way of organizing people in the organization for more effective achievement of organizational goals. This team works to achieve the goals of the organization, and when we talk about a multicultural team, we are talking about a part of a multicultural organization. The purpose of this development is to present some features of conflicts in multicultural organizations, based on literary sources, and to outline possible strategies for dealing with conflicts in multicultural organizations.

1. The conflict in multicultural organizations - definition, essence, features, types

A conflict is a serious disagreement and dispute about something important. If two people or groups are in conflict, they have had a disagreement and have not yet come to an agreement. The concept of conflict includes: conflict, competition, rivalry, battle, collision. Organizational conflict, or otherwise known as workplace conflict, is described as a state of disagreement or misunderstanding resulting from the actual or perceived disagreement of needs, beliefs, resources, and relationships among organizational members. In the workplace, when two or more people interact, conflict occurs when opinions regarding some task or decision are at odds. A conflict can be said to be a special case of the problem. In the specialized literature, there are many definitions of the concept of "conflict". We can point out the following as the most popular:

1. Conflict is a struggle of opposing tendencies in a system.

2. Conflict is defined as any situation in which incompatible goals, attitudes, and emotions or behaviors lead to disagreement or opposition between two or more parties.

3. The conflict is "a sharp clash between conflicting tendencies - interests, positions, attitudes, etc., giving rise to mutual negation between the opponents, in which each of the parties wants to monopolize the object of the conflict (Емилова, 2020).

Multicultural organizations are characterized by huge differences depending on the nature of tasks. Working in a multicultural organization is a dynamic process that must be carefully managed even between individual team members. Cultural differences add complications, such as differences in communication preferences, decision-making, and conflict management styles, to which members will need to adjust, find common processes to work effectively, and find job satisfaction. Conflict, both constructive and relational, can also be disruptive to work continuity. Cultural differences have been found to influence conflict management preferences, for example in terms of what is considered constructive and skill-building versus insulting and avoidant (Mickan, 2000). Thus, finding processes to ensure awareness of cultural diversity and their work preferences will help managers avoid conflicts in multicultural organizations. Conflict in a multicultural organization must be

resolved. This can lead to arguments and unresolved issues, or to learning from solutions and developing creative problem-solving skills. According to Ungerleider (Ungeleider, 2008), conflict is part of people's social existence, which is why it is inevitable. It arises from differences, negative emotions, competitiveness, misunderstandings and scarce resources in organizations. For example, team members with their own work histories have different ways of proceeding with work, perceptions of time, and ideas about teamwork. In addition, cultural background influences communication, behavior, and interpretation of the behavior of others. For example, Germans are very punctual people in their culture, whereas Australians are not, which can create a misunderstood sense of disrespect and confusion if not acknowledged in a team beforehand. Thus, conflict management is the use of behaviors that attempt to resolve emotion- and task-related differences.

Diversity, multicultural organizations and conflict have been found to be related. Diversity in multicultural organizations increases differences between team members, which increases conflict (Stahl, G. K., Maznevski, M. C., Voigt, A. and Jonsen, K., 2010). However, integrating teams to share values, goals and a common culture can lead to less conflict. Good relationships also reduce the amount of conflict in teams. Within the corporate system, intercultural conflicts can be classified according to the level of occurrence and course:

1) conflict of interest at the level of management structures (such as shareholder boards), for example, Americans often seek to increase profits or capitalization, Japanese are more inclined to expand the company in foreign markets;

2) conflict of goals at the top management level;

3) conflict of consumption of resources at the level of structural organizations, since many transnational companies use Bulgarian branches as platforms for raw materials, without seeking to increase the level of processing in the domestic market.

There are different causes of intercultural conflicts, according to the levels of culture:

- different socio-economic systems in countries (socialism or capitalism);
- different levels of business ethics and cultural richness, while culture is expressed not only as an exclusive national phenomenon;
- national characteristics, standards of behavior, residents of each country have a certain basic set of views on life and ideas about reality, which determine behavior;
- regional features in the country (for example, in the USA there are three dominant groups of the population: blacks, Hispanics, whites);
- Conflicts (as a result of incompatibility with organizational norms) generate new countercultures with a different value system that question the position of the dominant culture, as it has a new look and a new evaluation of the organization.

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The problems of the multicultural organization can increase if the conformity of the new employee or team with the established image of economic rationality is not properly diagnosed. Diagnostics includes a specific analysis algorithm for several positions:

1. Assessment of the potential impact of a new foreign employee to introduce new values, knowledge acquired in a different organizational culture, ways of organizing work processes, professional contacts.

2. Assessment of potential "damages" to the organization. A new employee can violate the established order in the organizational system, be an additional source of errors (as a result of non-compliance with the level of organization).

3. Assessment of the impact of the new multicultural community on the organization. The degree and nature of the integration of such a team into a mononational organizational system is assessed, whether it will be necessary to change the conditions, strategy, rules, what are the advantages and disadvantages of embedding such an element in the organization, their impact on other employees.

Conflict is a natural part of social existence and seems to be a reality for people working together. In a multicultural organization, disputes are inevitable and often based on fundamentally different needs, interests, perceptions or cultural norms. Conflicts in a multicultural organization can come from role confusion, poorly conducted meetings, private agendas, and conflicting personalities (Levi, 2001). There are two measured types of conflict, which can be defined as task conflict (allocation of resources, procedures, facts, etc.) and relationship conflicts or emotional conflicts, for example, feelings, preferences, values, style (De Dreu, C. K. and Weingart, L. R., 2003).

One of the main reasons for the great interest in the role of conflicts in management and economic activity in recent years is the failures of global companies in mergers and acquisitions. In summary, we can say: 30% of international joint ventures break up due to technical, financial or strategic problems, and in 70% of cases cross-cultural problems are a constant threat to further cooperation. These examples illustrate the challenges and difficulties of intercultural interaction in production and business (Fuchs, M., Apfelthar, G., 2002). Language misunderstandings, different beliefs and values, work and management styles, stereotypes and prejudices are barriers faced by management, employees and enterprises operating in an international and cross-cultural context (Безгулова,

2010). In the modern world, space and time cease to play such a limiting role. The key to success in a changing environment that is instantaneous, large-scale and covering vast territories is new competencies, experience and cross-cultural interaction. Leading global companies seek to open branches on the other side of the world, not with prestigious goals, but with the aim of organizing their own activities in an intercultural aspect. At the same time, the company works around the clock, because the moment the employees leave the workplace in one office, the doors of another branch open on the other side of the earth. Given the fact that digital information flows have no temporal, spatial barriers, the workflow does not stop. This gives the company a big advantage. In addition to numerous mergers of companies that complement each other with material and technological resources, there are increasingly such organizations in which one company is entrusted with the functions of technological equipment and solutions, and the other has the competence to work in a specific national market. The ability to build cross-cultural communication and business practice according to the canons of the target territory has become one of the strategic competitive advantages of international companies. Multicultural organizations form a differentiated portfolio of product offerings depending on local sales markets, thereby adapting products to the cultural needs of the target audience. Selling the same product in different markets requires compliance with certain conditions that increase the importance of cross-cultural aspects of human resource management:

1) standardization of economic activity on the scale of world practice or a certain category of countries;

2) opening of own branches, divisions and control offices in a foreign cultural environment;

3) search for employees related to the organizational culture of the company (Попов, 2005).

2. Strategies for dealing with conflicts in multicultural organizations

The development of international business and the emergence of a large number of offices with multinational staff in a multicultural environment urgently requires the development of effective management strategies that must take into account the characteristics of culturally diverse staff, the specifics of their development within the organization and the specifics of ethical management. Management theory recognizes the fact that national cultural characteristics determine organizational behavior, the place and vocation of the manager in the organization, the nature of communication with employees and the style of decision-making in the organization, the degree of interaction with other team members in subordination, collegiality and conflicts. Several areas of conflict management practice in cross-cultural organizations can be identified:

- Management of multicultural teams working on a permanent or temporary basis. In the approaches to the work process and form of work, the assessment of efficiency and productivity, the distinctiveness of many state and regional cultures can be found;

- Management of multicultural organizations (multinational companies, holdings, etc.). Most joint ventures represent an integration of several corporate cultures. In such a clash of cultures, contradictions may arise, leading to the appearance of loss points in the formation of a single added value of the final product;

- Management of the negotiation process at the international level. In this case, we have to solve the problem of distinguishing the cultural level of the participants. Often, conflict situations can be a projection of different worldviews and mentality of the participants in the negotiation process.

- Project management. Each member of the team, having an understanding of the required final result, can interpret and decipher the objective substances through the prism of subjective-cultural meanings, which in a sense gives rise to misunderstanding and distancing, and sometimes resistance of the parties.

The effect of cross-cultural interaction can be achieved through cultural diversity, which helps an enterprise to gain a decisive competitive advantage in interconnected markets. Organizations note that the risk of inexperienced local management is lower than that of experienced and experienced foreigners who are not familiar with the local situation.

However, the risks associated with the multinational nature of teamwork are also felt. They are contained in two blocks:

- potential mistakes related to insufficient language skills, inadequate application of knowledge, lack of knowledge of foreign specialists about new activities, organization, team, host country, use of inadequate sources of information, inability to exchange information within the rules of the organization;

- potential conflicts related to the discrepancy between the expectations and knowledge of the foreign employee with the expectations and knowledge of the organization and the team, with the discrepancy between the values of the foreign and local employees, with the discrepancy between the opportunities, the potential of the advantages of the employees and the team at work.

According to P. Berstein (Vayrynen, 2001), we can unite around three main strategies:

1) "corrective actions", measures necessary to eliminate the consequences of past discrimination;

2) a "delicate balance" that helps minorities without harming the majority;

3) "aid without preferences", in fact no one should receive preferences based on belonging to certain groups.

Approaches to conflict resolution, according to John Ungerleider (Ungeleider, 2008), who proposed four main approaches to conflict resolution, offering different perspectives and interventions related to a wide variety of conflict situations: negotiation, third-party mediation, systemic transformation of conflict and peace building (Halverson, 2008, 224).

Negotiations: Intercultural negotiation principles that apply to communication in multicultural organizations include:

- Be flexible, get to know the other culture and use approaches that will create better conditions for communication, avoid what might irritate you.

- Be careful not to get stuck in stereotyping and characterization

- Be aware of language barriers, check understanding often, go slowly and ask questions. - Be careful attributing meaning to non-verbal behavior; non-verbal communication is important and can even contradict verbal input.

- Keep in mind that mistrust can destroy communication and communication is essential (Halverson, 2008, 225).

Mediation: In a multicultural team, it is sometimes necessary for a neutral third party to mediate a dispute between team members with culturally different conflict-handling norms. The mediator's mission is to interpret, buffer and coordinate conflicting linguistic or non-verbal messages and negotiation styles to avoid the loss of adversaries' self-respect and honor and to keep communication uninterrupted. A mediator working in different cultures needs to understand the relevant cultural behaviors, norms and wisdom that can be helpful in transforming a conflict. In traditional societies, a social leader or elder will be chosen as the mediator (Halverson, 2008, 226).

Conflict transformation and peace building: Conflict transformation involves situational analysis and strategic interventions that assess the sources and dynamics of conflict and attempt to transform it. Conflict transformation helps conversations or problem-solving processes between members of groups in conflict develop in a more positive direction.

Four main steps to transform conflicts are:

• Recognition;

• Reconciliation;

• Seeing;

• Strategy and maintenance.

All team members in a multicultural organization who are affected by the conflict must recognize that there is a problem and commit to working together to address the conflict. The root causes of conflict must be defined and reconciled collectively by team members. The team in the multicultural organization must agree on a common vision of what they can do together and how they can do it. Finally, managers determine what the team needs to maintain its ability to continue working with each other to eliminate the causes of conflict and build peace (Halverson, 2008, 227).

The effective application of management technologies in multicultural organizations is possible through the use of intercultural skills. To be able to distinguish cultural events that influence organizational behavior, to see the rational prerequisites for workplace behavior under the influence of cultural factors, to understand the organization of structures, systems and priorities in the organization in terms of cultural participation, to be able to successfully integrate the practices of one culture in another work dimension, understanding how deeply new elements can be perceived in a foreign cultural environment - all this forms an effective style of manager in a multicultural organization. Effective conflict management lies in being aware of cultural differences. With the knowledge of the influence of cultural

differences on the construction of work in a multicultural team, it is possible to form a set of typical activities within the framework of organizational conflict.

The area of conflict prevention includes the application of such managerial qualities as respect for employees, setting clear and achievable tasks, evaluating success based on the initial state of affairs, restrained criticism, avoiding extreme value judgments, giving employees the informal right to make mistakes by emphasizing intrinsic motivation rather than total control.

In our opinion, good communication is the best strategy for conflict management in multicultural organizations.

We can define the following barriers to intercultural communication according to Larey Barna (Barna, 1982):

• Language is much more than learning new vocabulary and grammar. It also includes cultural competence;

• Our culture has not taught us to communicate through unspoken messages;

• Stereotypes are a major barrier to communication with representatives of different cultures;

• Do not judge the representative of another culture according to the values of your culture until you get to know him and understand his cultural values;

• Like any other unfamiliar experience, cross-cultural contact is likely to involve some stress.

To deal with conflict situations in multicultural organizations, managers must be able to:

• to be able to identify their own cultural profile;

• to reflect the cultural level of employees, customers and partners;

• react adequately to them;

• consider cross-cultural aspects in business;

• to form a single cultural protocol for interaction;

• build business communication in a multicultural environment;

• to analyze problems of an intercultural nature in business interaction;

• solve management problems in a multicultural organizational environment;

• to apply methods of managing intercultural conflicts, to form a set of measures to overcome culture shock;

• evaluate and design management decisions in a strategic perspective;

• to develop intercultural sensitivity skills in other members of the organization (Зячиняев, 2014).

3. Research methods and results

The research methods are gathering opinions on conflict management in a youth multicultural organization through online questionnaires from members of such a multicultural organization and analyzing the results obtained.

Here I will give an example from studies conducted by the International Non-Governmental Organization Erasmus Students Network (ESN). Every year, the organization conducts such surveys, and some of them can also be applied to the topic of multicultural differences and conflicts.

The Project - ESNsurvey is the biggest regular European research project planned and carried out entirely by students for students. It is conducted annually and surveys students at higher education institutions. ESN shares the results with the main stakeholders in higher education and mobility programmes.

ESNsurvey aims at:

• Exploring current issues connected to academic and non-academic mobility and education.

• Getting a better insight into student issues in order to represent their real needs.

To view reports of ESNsurvey, visit esn.org/esnsurvey.

ESNsurvey 2008 - Exchanging cultures

Discovering foreign cultures, integrating with local people and adapting to new cultural conditions are key aspects of any exchange. The main aim of the survey was to investigate if such processes are really taking place during the time spent abroad – be it a short-term study abroad, a full-degree mobility or a working experience in a different country. Moreover, impacts of living abroad while studying or working were analysed, dealing with topics such as intercultural and social skills, cultural shock and its implication or integration in the local community.

Understanding better what students are experiencing during their mobility period will enable both them and international relations officers at universities to be prepared for possible difficulties related to the cultural diversity of Europe and prevent negative feelings or drop-offs. In the end, it is the international students who act as ambassadors of other cultures in their home environment and who may well spread the word of the richness and opportunities other cultures offer.

For ESNsurvey 2016 - How international-friendly are our universities?

Specifically, we sought to understand the role of mobility flows, host-university services, academic adaptation, social adaptation and home-country reintegration in the resulting satisfaction with a study abroad experience.

To compile this report, we surveyed 12,365 homecoming exchange students, 9,454 local students with no mobility experience, 2,176 current exchange students and 537 homecoming trainees for a total of 24,532 responses, the highest ever garnered by ESNsurvey.

Key Findings

Student migration in Europe

• Longer stays lead to more social interactions with members of the local community and therefore to better local integration.

• The destination itself doesn't play an important role in students' satisfaction.

• Only 10.2% of students considered that 80% or more of their expenses were covered.

• Mobility triggers mobility - 70% of the respondents were interested in pursuing a Master's degree abroad after their exchange experience.

Services for international students

• 87% of incoming exchange students were given an introductory presentation, while 83% were offered a local language course.

• Only 48% of the total number of respondents were actually assigned a buddy.

Academic adaptation

• 80% of respondents report experiencing no discrimination based on their status.

• 90% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that host professors gave useful support.

• Overall satisfaction with studies abroad was higher when respondents agreed that professors supported the interaction of students from different countries.

• Creating an international-friendly environment is very important for a positive exchange experience.

Social adaptation

• Exchange students whose host-universities offered more social activities made more friends in all the possible social groups.

• International students who were accommodated with locals had more local friends than students who were not.

• Both exchange students (33%) and local students (35%) believe there are not enough opportunities for the two groups to interact.

• International students that are more satisfied with the social programme, rate higher the satisfaction level of their overall stay abroad

Re-integration and post-mobility

• Close to 70% of the respondents believe that re-entry services should be offered to students after their return from abroad.

• 93% of the former exchange students would be interested in migrating abroad for work.

ESNsurvey 2019 - Active citizenship and student exchange in light of the European elections

There are two key aims of the report: firstly, to explore current issues connected to academic and non-academic mobility and education, and secondly, to get a better insight into student issues in order to represent their real needs.

Key findings

1. **Every four in ten respondents do not know what civil participation is**

According to the results of our questionnaire, 41.69% of respondents do not know what the term "civil participation" means. This apparent lack of knowledge translates into low rates of respondents who have expressed their views on public issues with their elected representatives and who have taken part in public debates, both forms of civil participation.

2. **Online participation is more prevalent among young people**

A total of 66.67% of women and 64.21% of men signed a petition (on paper or online). At the European level, according to the "Flash Eurobarometer 373", only 34% of the respondents (the highest number in that study) had signed petitions.

Additionally, 35.02% of respondents of our survey say that they have expressed their views on public issues on the internet or in social media, a number higher than the Eurobarometer's 28%.

3. **Students do not feel very informed about the work of civil society organisations on the European level**

While 35.34% of the respondents feel quite informed about the work of civil society at the local level and 37.80% feel quite informed about it at the national level, only 5.37% feel the same at the European level. Paradoxically, 67.56% agree or strongly agree that civil society organisations have the capacity to influence decision-making at the European level. This is a more optimistic perspective than the European average of 53% totally agreeing, according to the "Flash Eurobarometer 373".

4. **Students with an exchange experience are far more engaged in civil society organisations than the average European youth**

While, according to the "Flash Eurobarometer 455", 47% of the average European youth is not a member of any civil society organisation, this number is reduced to 19% in the population with an exchange experience. The respondents of our survey are also twice as likely to be engaged in a cultural or human rights organisation and three times more likely to be engaged in organisations active in environmental issues when compared to the average European youth.

5. **30% of respondents feel very or quite informed about the European Parliament's work**

When asked how informed they feel about the European Parliament's functions and responsibilities, about one-third of respondents considered to be very or quite informed about the work of this institution. This number is in line with the European average.

6. **Students who are on exchange vote less**

Students on exchange indicate procedural barriers as the main reasons for not voting in the 2019 European elections. Even though 70.54% intend to vote in the elections of 2024, only 51.19% expected to do it in 2019.

7. **Erasmus+ Alumni have higher interest and are more likely to vote in European elections than the European average**

Students who participated in an EU-funded exchange programme (Erasmus+ and its predecessor programmes) give higher importance to the European elections (60.69%), had higher intention of voting in the European elections 2019 (76.18%) and had a higher election turnout (71.20%) when compared to the European average of the younger population (18-39), as presented by Eurobarometer surveys.

8. **EU students with an exchange experience wish for more rights as EU citizens and for more European civic education in schools**

On the question "Which of the following things would do most to strengthen your feeling of being a European citizen?", 58.37% of our respondents chose "Being able to live anywhere in the EU after you retire and draw your pension there directly" and 55.55% chose "A European social welfare system harmonised between the member states (health, pensions, etc.)". This prioritisation is similar to that of average Europeans, according to "Eurobarometer 79.5". However, while 46.64% of our

respondents would also like to have “European civic education classes starting in primary school”, this is only true for 20% of average European. As all the information from these studies is available on the site: https://esn.org/ESNsurvey (https://esn.org/ESNsurvey,2022).

The results show that conflicts can be managed and directed to resolution and mediation if there is good management in the organization.

In the specific case, with these ESN studies, it is seen that young people wish to create a friendly intercultural environment in all social groups, to get to know foreign cultures, to learn foreign languages, to adapt to new cultural conditions, to show -great interest in European structures and organizations. No one mentions the existence of problems in communicating in a multicultural environment, but inevitably there are, and the role of universities is to prepare young people for this. Because only with a proper understanding of intercultural differences and local peculiarities can possible conflicts be prevented.

Conclusion

Conflict management in multicultural team has been found to be more complex compared to conflict management in homogeneous teams. Additional cultural competency awareness and training is needed for the initial stages of teamwork, as cultural differences are only learned on the job, making initial work less effective. Because members know each other personally, they are motivated to work more consistently and consider others. Coherence and shared team identity increase negotiation and constructive conflict and reduce relationship conflict and ambiguous processes. Team conflict in multicultural organizations is not mandatory, but very often managers are faced with the challenge of dealing with the resolution of such conflicts. In summary, we can say that the article examined possible conflicts in a multicultural organization, focusing on some features and types, some specific strategies for dealing with conflicts in a multicultural organization were proposed. Approaches to conflict resolution, according to John Ungerleider (Ungeleider, 2008), who proposed four main approaches to conflict resolution, offering different perspectives and interventions related to a wide variety of conflict situations: negotiation, third-party mediation, systemic transformation of conflicts and peace building This is precisely the role of the successful manager, to be able to deal with intercultural diversities, to seek and benefit from different opinions through good communication and respect for differences.

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