

## CONFLICT IN ORGANIZATIONS – COUNTERPRODUCTIVE BEHAVIOR – CAUSES, CONDITIONS AND WAYS OF SOLVING IN POLISH CONDITIONS – HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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**Purpose:** The presented article is an attempt to compare methods of resolving conflicts in contemporary realities in Polish organizations based on their empirical justification in a time perspective.

**Design/methodology/approach:** The analysis is based on found empirical research put in perspective.

**Findings:** Homo sociologicus (collective actor - e.g., large-industry workers) began to give way to individual-achievement logic and changes in the labor code. An orientation toward mediation as a means of resolving organizational conflicts is beginning to dominate.

**Research limitations/implications:** A survival strategy in the organization becomes the phenomenon of organizational withdrawal, which corresponds to the perception of work in the hierarchy of values. The expectation of a kind of "task instruction" allows to avoid conflicts and at the same time opens a new field of research on the shape and nature of organizational culture - the dominance of collectivist or rather individualistic values.

**Practical implications:** Changing employee behavior from a collective to an individualistic orientation makes it possible to identify the sources of employee anomie.

**Social implications:** The analysis and conclusions raise the importance of the social dimension of the organization's functioning and the impact of the external environment on its functioning.

**Originality/value:** The author emphasizes the importance of shifting attitudes toward the workplace in the formation of organizational culture.

**Keywords:** organization, social conflict, industrial conflict, trade unions, labor anomie.

**Category of the paper:** Research paper.

### 1. Introduction

Conflicts in organizations are an interesting exemplification of a special case of social conflict. They manifest themselves through the taking of collective forms of action, as well as in less spectacular - though equally severe for the organization as a whole - individual behavior of employees (e.g. organizational withdrawal, ignoring the instructions of superiors, disrupting

the flow of information, etc.). The reasons for their formation are often complex in nature - the genesis lies in the subjective dimension (the nature of interpersonal relations) as well as the objective one, inherent in the sociological perspective. The latter can be co-created by internal factors (e.g., improper organization of working time, defectiveness of elements of the personnel process, discrepancy between the goals of the organization and those of its actors) or expectations of the external environment in relation to the inertia of management processes. One of these is the currently articulated demand for the realization of an innovation economy. I understand innovation as the creation of value through the ability to combine things, concepts, ideas, between which no connection was previously perceived. The adoption of the above assumption corresponds with the expectation of a progressive individualization of attitudes towards actors in organizational life. This process takes place in the cultural and social context co-creating the environment of enterprises in Poland - collectivism versus individualism. This also applies to the possible ways of resolving conflicts in organizations.

The presented article is an attempt to compare the ways of resolving conflicts in modern realities in Polish organizations based on their empirical justification in a time perspective. The author puts forward the thesis that the way of resolving conflicts in an organization is conditioned by changes in its environment and the nature of the company's ownership. The two variables indicated continue to be cognitively interesting inferential indicators of the relevance - from a scientific point of view - of the cultural characteristics that co-create the environment of the enterprise - collectivism versus individualism. Considering - in the context of conflict in the organization - counterproductive organizational behavior - it is necessary to take into account the importance of attitudes "brought" by employees from the socio-cultural environment. This is related to the issue of organizational culture.

A research problem of interest from the point of view of organizational life emerges: does the observed process represent a cultural-organizational redefinition of the organizational identity of Polish enterprises (cultural context - collective versus individualistic values) or is it a manifestation of the rationality of organizational actors corresponding to the game paradigm as defined by Michael Crozier and Erhard Friedberg (Crozier, Friedberg E., 1994)?

## **2. Organizational culture, conflict, social anomie – basic concepts – operationalization**

I assume that organizational culture can be treated in terms of (Konecki, Tobera, <http://qsr.webd.pl/KKonecki/publikacje/publikacja12.html>, Chapter in the book *Sketches from the sociology of management*, 27 09 2023):

1. Independent variable - an external factor that directly determines employee and managerial behavior in a country.
2. Dependent variable - an element of the organization that depends on the functioning of the other organizational elements (e.g., property rights, transaction costs and the activity of the entrepreneur or organizational leaders oriented towards creating positive attitudes to work or building an organizational strategy in which, for example, the company's mission is defined influencing the values and norms recognized throughout the organization).
3. Autonomous entity - not determined by the culture found in the environment of the country and other factors of the internal environment of the organization independent of it.

For the purposes of this analysis, I assume that organizational culture is a derivative of attitudes and commonly accepted values, norms and modes of behavior inherent in the broad tradition and culture of a given society" (Hampden-Turner, Trompenaars, 1998; Rapacki, 1995, pp. 115-25). It is formed by values and patterns that regulate individual behavior, but are crucial for the functioning of the organization. Patterns and values that determine, among other things, people's attitudes toward saving, ownership, propensity to borrow, understanding of work in the hierarchy of life values, and preference for egalitarian or elitist views (Hryniewicz, 2007, p. 19).

Psychology - one of the management sciences accepts that, self-actualization is the constant pursuit of realizing one's potential, developing talents or abilities. Management science emphasizes the process of becoming "who you are". It is a process of individuation in opposition to the process of individualization - the liberation from traditional power structures (forms, ties), the loss of traditional beliefs about action knowledge, beliefs and prevailing norms - leading to a new kind of social ties (Beck, 2002, p. 193). Is there a process of individuation or individualization in an organization?

The hallmark of an organization is the existence of formalized procedures - patterns of mobilization and coordination of activities of specialized groups that aim to achieve desired goals. However, it should be remembered that the behavior of the participants never fully corresponds to the official rules, the goals pursued by them may differ from those of the organization, while the cooperation itself is often disrupted by emerging conflicts. Is it, therefore, a place of rational and conscious type of cooperation between the individuals and groups that make it up, pursuing common goals? Thus, I accept the assumption of "domination of the community over the individual" but do not underestimate the influence of the individual on the community to which he belongs. Choices, preferences and definitions of social behavior situations evolve in the process of social construction of reality (Berger, Luckmann, 1983). According to Gareth Morgan, organizations can be viewed as (Morgan, 1997):

1. A realistically existing place of identification and realization of goals, in which the behavior of its members and the effects of their aspirations are subject to rational description.
2. An area of competition among groups operating within its boundaries (competing for access to internal resource distribution mechanisms to pursue their own interests).
3. A kind of "cybernetic system" that processes what the environment provides.
4. Cultural reality - emphasis on the cultural dimension of creating organizational reality.
5. Political system - participants belonging to various political groupings seek to control decision-making processes in order to strengthen their positions.
6. Instrument of domination - the implementation of tasks requires entering into a process of interaction, which gives rise to the desire to be the best in the group and dominate over other members.
7. Productive system - the creation of a place for the realization of goals and intentions of individual participants. Its activities are symbolically created and sustained by subordinates and management.
8. Loose system - independent individuals perform different roles pursuing goals that do not necessarily correspond to the goals of the organization as a whole.
9. Mental prison - hierarchical structure of power and division of labor, selection and selection of members and precise definition of accepted and unaccepted intra-organizational behavior. Their acceptance leads to voluntary reduction of one's own behavioral choices.
10. Social contract - mutual agreements and expectations generate the realization of certain behaviors in exchange for certain gratifications (remuneration).

The metaphors cited above point to two complementary logics of organizational order: the logic of integration and conflict. Conflict and cooperation are two phases of the same process (Marcinkowski, Sobczak, 1985, p. 16). Difficulties related to the operationalization of the concept of conflict arise from the fact that there are many synonymous terms (e.g. aggression, aversion, domination, antagonism, rivalry) and the lack of unanimity as to its essence: whether we are dealing with a certain state or process. The diverse cognitive perspectives of conflict theory have been analyzed in detail in the literature (Turner, 1985; Baltaziuk, Kotowska, Lipnik, Pajestka-Kojder, 1999, pp. 59-70; Masłyk-Musiał, 1996; Klusek-Wojcieszke, 2020). As Janusz Mucha notes, attempts to unequivocally define conflict are not necessary because in the literature of the subject, understandings of this issue can be separated only analytically (Mucha, 1999, p. 65). In summary, three research perspectives can be distinguished:

- Structural orientation - the objective incompatibility of interests existing in the structure, the exclusion of group goals generated by a limited supply of goods.
- Behavioral orientation - interactions (relations) between two or more parties based on the belief that their goals are irreconcilable.

- Psychological orientation - a state of hostility, a situation/process in which two or more parties are linked by an antagonistic relationship.

We can identify the sources of conflict in (Stoner, Wankel 1992, pp. 332-334):

1. The way resources are distributed;
2. The dissimilarity of goals;
3. Interdependence resulting from the division of labor in the execution of tasks);
4. Differences in values, attitudes or views;
5. Differences in attitudes toward work, age, education and accompanying organizational ambiguity.

I assume that the study of conflict in the organization, as a special type of social conflict, should take into account a comprehensive approach. Its specificity is determined by the subject of the conflict (labor relations), the degree of involvement of the participants, and the institutionalized course of the conflict (patterns of behavior and legally defined ways of resolving it.).

Robert K. Merton (1982, p. 196) defined the concept of anomie by linking it to an emphasis on the importance of two elements of social and cultural structure:

- culturally defined intentions, or interests that take the form of sanctioned life goals,
- customarily or legally institutionalized ways of achieving these goals.

According to Merton, cultural goals and institutionalized norms that shape the spectrum of dominant behavior need not be closely related because cultural pressure for certain goals is evolving, leading to independence from institutionalized means of achieving them. Possible strategies of action are: **conformism**: acceptance of goals and institutionalized means; **innovation**: acceptance of goals while rejecting means to achieve them; **ritualism**: rejection of goals and acceptance of means; **disengagement**: negation of goals and means; **rebellion**: rejection of goals and means and proposal of their alternatives (Merton, p. 203). The socio-cultural changes taking place in the organization's environment are also related to the transformation of the value system and its consequences. E.g., data from 1999-2021 show an increasing number of economic crimes committed - 1999: 60,393, 2020 - 198,163, 2021 -224,775 (<https://statystyka.policja.pl/...>, 27.09.2023). Between 2013 and 2021, the indebtedness of Poles aged 18-25 increased (rising from PLN 42.8 million to PLN 453.9 million). The total indebtedness of Poles increased more than 3 times (an increase from PLN 13.7 billion to PLN 44.1 billion). At the end of 2021, there were nearly 2.4 million bad debtors aged 18 (<https://ciekaweliczby.pl/dluznicy...>, 22.09.2023). Between 2013 and 2022, the number of suicide attempts by children and adolescents in the 13-18 age group increased about 6 times (in 2013 - 348 attempts, in 2022 - 2008 ([https://ciekaweliczby.pl/proby\\_samobojcze...](https://ciekaweliczby.pl/proby_samobojcze...), 30.09.2023). In 2013, people in this age group made 348 suicide attempts, while in 2022 - 2008 ([https://ciekaweliczby.pl/proby\\_samobojcze...](https://ciekaweliczby.pl/proby_samobojcze...)).

In light of the data cited (according to the assumptions made), the empirical data on the sense of organizational justice seem interesting. Organizational justice is the sum of the perceptions of organizational actors about the methods of decision-making, the quality and results of these decisions and the treatment of those affected by the decisions. In other words - a subjective, descriptive assessment of the level of ethical behavior of individual members of the organization and the organization as a whole, which co-creates the attitudes and behavior of employees (Colquitt et al., 2001, pp. 425-445). They most often concern distributive, procedural, interactional and informational justice (Turek et al., 2014, pp. 113-139). 61% of respondents believe that the value of their competencies is higher or definitely higher than the value of the salary they receive, 29% of people felt that the value of their competencies is comparable to the salary they receive, while 10% believe that the market value of their competencies is lower or definitely lower than the salary they receive. Is the salary fair: 50.35% - definitely yes or rather yes, 49.63% - definitely no or rather no, 12% - definitely unfair, 4% definitely fair (<https://wynagrodzenia.pl/artukul/...>, 25.09.2023). Doubts about the issue of specific material gains derived from work - the amount of wages and the quality of social security - are confirmed in other surveys (Research Communication, 2021). 80% of executives declare that they have used or continue to use negative motivation and/or have also been subjected to it themselves in their careers (Klimkiewicz, Cierpis, pp. 219-234).

The data cited above also explain the growing phenomenon of employee anomie - which manifests itself, among other things, in intentional and systematic behavior resulting in widely defined losses for the organization (Kowalewski, Moczydlowska 2020, pp. 28-29). The phenomenon of social anomie, co-creating the environment of the organization, is reflected in the organizational dimension: employee anomie. Its manifestations are counterproductive behaviors, e.g. abuse of co-workers, theft, deviant production, organizational sabotage and withdrawal (Turek, 2012, pp. 20-21).

### **3. Conflicts – ways of resolution – a historical perspective**

Tadeusz Szawiel, while analyzing the attitudes and social orientations of Polish Catholics, confirmed the opinion of the culturally conditioned collectivist attitude of Poles (Szawiel, 1996). It can be concluded that the trade union in the social consciousness of the 1980s and the beginning of the period of change in Poland went far beyond the statutory duties inherent in such corporations in stabilized market systems. It satisfied not only the requirements of participation in decision-making, but also the need for action and group identification. It exemplified the fulfillment of cultural values. Values that differentiate the impact of culture on organizations: collectivism - individualism. Considering the ways of resolving organizational conflicts, there was a reevaluation of the opposition between individualism and

collectivism? The labor union, which is a formula for collective action, ceased to be an important element of collective organizational identity. Members of labor organizations were more often those employed in state-owned enterprises - least often in the private sector. In other words, the highest percentages of those working in enterprises with labor unions can be found in economic sectors characterized by the highest share of state ownership (Research Release, 2019).

The decisive factor driving union activity was the form of ownership and size of industrial organizations. Already in 2001, it also turned out that trade unions were no longer perceived as an adequate representative of workers' interests - 68% of respondents were convinced that no one represents workers' interests well. The hitherto traditional formula for defending the interests of the organization's participants (the strike) did not find recognition in the eyes of the vast majority of respondents - a negotiating orientation dominated, with 47% of respondents (Research Communication, 2001). An important differentiating variable in this case was education: the higher the level of education of the respondents, the higher the percentage among them who perceived the possibility of asking for and obtaining help. Among respondents who said they had someone to turn to for help, more than half (55%) pointed to their immediate supervisor, while only 6% said they could count on trade unions for help if they got into trouble at work. Workers with secondary and higher education were almost twice as likely to rely on their immediate supervisor for help than the least educated. Workers with primary and basic vocational education were relatively more likely to turn to trade unions for help (Research Communiqué, 2001). The social perception of the role, function and importance of the trade union in enterprises (a form of collective action) has been corrected. In the opinion of the respondents, it is primarily the direct superior who is the person who can be trusted. Relationships - superior - subordinate - are beginning to refer, as it were, directly to the archetype of the patriarchal model of the family with an authoritarian structure. Corresponding with the above thesis are the results of Lukasz Sulkowski's research on identifying the most common configurations of organizational cultures in a given society (Sulkowski, 2001). The indicated cultural trait correlates positively with familialism, signifying the strength of an individual's connection to family in the organizational field. Polish companies were characterized by the dominance of a communal orientation and an ambivalent attitude toward authority. Respect for strong authority began to be accompanied by distrust, distance, criticism and passive resistance. Subordination and formalization involved roles rather than procedures or organizational rules. There was an apparent focus on interpersonal relationships, not on the ease of economic transactions. However, negotiating the most profitable terms of participation in the organization was still done under conditions of strong group identification. According to the Polish Central Statistical Office, in 2017 there were 1,556 strikes in Poland, involving 29,700 workers. Their participants accounted for 0.3% of the total number of salaried workers in Poland (34.3% of employees of organizations where protests took place). 1520 of the 1556 strikes (97.7%) involved the education sector. In 1991, one in five Polish adults (19%) belonged to trade unions, and in 2017 only one in 20. In 2003, 41% of workers

declared that their workplace had at least one union organization. In 2017, it was 31%, while 12% of respondents were unable to say whether a union was active (6% in 2003) (<https://praca.gazetaprawna.pl/artykuly/1419534...>, 28.09.2023). In 2021, 5.5% of Poles - about a tenth of wage earners (10.5%) - declared union membership. They mostly belong to unions that are part of large organizations: NSZZ "Solidarity," the All-Poland Alliance of Trade Unions and the Trade Union Forum (Research Communication, 2021). Homo sociologicus (collective actor - e.g., large-industry workers) began to give way to individual-achievement logic and changes in the Labor Code. Labor relations in Polish small and medium-sized enterprises are characterized by strong individualism of entrepreneurs - which generates low potential for self-organization of the environment and paternalistic relations - the dominant style of management is autocratic. The working environment is characterized by a relatively low level of social capital, a consequence of which is a limited ability and willingness to create networks of business cooperation. There is a noticeable reluctance on the part of entrepreneurs to have organized employee representation (Czarzasty, 2014, pp. 135-153). The already signaled orientation to mediation as a means of resolving organizational conflicts is also beginning to dominate (Kozina, Malkus, Pieczonkanka, 2019, pp. 11-19; Cichobłaziński, 2019). As early as 2007, Janusz Hryniewicz noted that the desirability of peace at work is linked to intellectual activity. "The attitude to tranquility at work shows a very strong connection with an aversion to intellectual activity. The greater the demand for tranquility at work, the stronger the acceptance of the thesis - "I prefer a manager who does not require the disclosure of his own opinions, and tells exactly what to do and how to do it". Thus, for example, among those who believe that calmness at work is definitely not important, only 18% would like to have such a supervisor, while among those who believe that calmness at work is very important, the demand for such a style of leadership rises to 70%. Attitudes toward calmness at work are related to education. People with higher education value calmness and constancy slightly lower than the rest of the population" (Hryniewicz, 2007, p. 141). Employees expect emotionally positive colleague-family relationships and stability. Individual achievements are valued low - acceptable as long as they do not violate informal hierarchies of prestige, popular opinion, etc. One does not show to the environment that one is doing something better than others, while achievements have the character of internal experiences (e.g., the opportunity to learn something new (Hryniewicz, 2007, p. 57). Currently, this takes the form of so-called organizational withdrawal. Although involvement in current duties is declared by 79% of respondents, only 39% of working respondents are convinced that in their work additional involvement pays off for the employee. 37% of respondents declared focusing solely on formal duties (<https://www.proto.pl/aktualnosci/...>, 27.09.2023). Employees perceive themselves as reliable professionals, although for some of them this is not combined with a readiness to carry out additional tasks - to go beyond the rigid framework of the daily schedule. Appreciation in the current workplace is declared by only 48% of respondents, 53% that they feel such appreciation of their work duties from family and friends. 73% are not afraid of losing their current job although a quarter (23%) reckon with such a possibility

(<https://biznes.interia.pl/praca/...>, 27.09.2023). Therefore, it is not surprising that work (good job, job security, stable employment) in the hierarchy of values gained 8% of indications (Research Communication, no. 160. CBOS 2020). Thus, organizational withdrawal becomes an individual strategy of conflict avoidance, although remaining in the organization and at the same time "next to it" constitutes counterproductive legal behavior. This is a kind of reconciliation of the logic of integration and conflict.

## Summary

The presented article indicates the importance and evolution of attitudes to a special case of social conflict - organizational conflict. They are manifested through the taking of collective forms of action as well as the individual behavior of employees. The actions of the collective actor give way to individual-achievement logic, changes in the labor code and individual expectations of the workplace. The phenomenon of organizational withdrawal becomes a survival strategy, which corresponds to the perception of work in the hierarchy of values. The expectation of a kind of "task instruction" avoids conflicts and at the same time opens a new field of research into the shape and nature of organizational culture - the dominance of collectivist or rather individualistic values.

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