

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN AN EMPLOYEE TEAM IN MANUFACTURING ENTERPRISES IN THE BESKIDS REGION

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Purpose: The study addresses an important and topical issue of conflict in work teams. Reviewing the available literature and research in this area, no research was found on the impact of conflict on the work team in manufacturing enterprises. The article attempts to analyze and evaluate the impact of conflicts on the management of the work team in manufacturing enterprises in the Beskids Region. Conflict management is playing an increasingly important role in modern companies and is very important for the entire organization. Unfortunately, not all companies share this opinion. Traditional views, lack of knowledge or reluctance to change means that conflict is often a taboo subject. Companies waste time and money on hiding conflicts while focusing on achieving financial results, increasing production or introducing modern technology. Therefore, this study attempts to draw attention to the issue of conflict and to examine whether, with the development of theories, methods and tools of conflict management, the awareness of company employees in this regard in selected manufacturing companies in Beskids Region is increasing. The following research questions were defined: What types of conflicts are most common in a company? How are conflicts most often resolved in a company?

Against this background, the main hypothesis was formulated, which was that responsible conflict management has a positive impact on the realization of potential projects in companies.

Design/methodology/approach: The purpose of the study was to attempt to analyze and evaluate the significant impact of conflict on the work team and to characterize the main sources of conflict in manufacturing companies located in the Beskids Region. A diagnostic survey method was used for the study. A survey questionnaire was used as a tool.

Findings: The collected empirical material confirm the established hypothesis, which was that responsible conflict management has positively influences the utilization of the potential of the employee team in the surveyed companies.

Research limitations/implications: This research should be treated as pilot research. It is proposed to increase the number of surveyed manufacturing enterprises in the Beskids Region.

Practical implications: It is proposed to introduce systematic training of employees on perception and conflict resolution in the manufacturing companies in Beskids Region. It is necessary to conduct continuous observation and control of the results of conflict management.

It is suggested that the research be expanded to include interviews with executives in order to learn about their attitudes and approaches to conflict situations occurring in the surveyed companies.

Originality/value: New in the paper is a characteristic the main sources of conflict in manufacturing companies located in the Beskids Region.

Keywords: conflict, conflict management, work team, manufacturing enterprise.

Category of the paper: empirical researches.

1. Introduction

The study addresses an important and topical issue of conflict in work teams. Reviewing the available literature and research in this area, no research was found on the impact of conflict on the work team in manufacturing enterprises. The article attempts to analyze and evaluate the impact of conflicts on the management of the work team in manufacturing enterprises in the Beskids Region.

The study presents the sources and types of conflicts in enterprises and the issue of conflict management in the context of the impact on the work of the staff team.

The purpose of the study was to attempt to analyze and evaluate the significant impact of conflict on the work team and to characterize the main sources of conflict in manufacturing companies located in the Beskids Region.

The main objective is to study the relationship between conflict management and group work in selected enterprises in the Beskids Region. The following research questions were posed: "What type of conflicts are most common in the studied enterprises?" "How are conflicts most often resolved in the studied enterprises?".

2. The essence of conflict

An indispensable element of human relations is conflict. At its root, there is always a divergence of interests of the subjects in question (Ciekanowski, Nowicka, Załoga, 2019, p. 39).

Conflict is an ambiguous concept, different scientific disciplines are interested in its subject, so there are many different definitions.

In psychological terms, conflict is a contradiction of attitudes and interests, i.e. a situation in which an individual is subjected to the action of forces of similar power, but of opposite directions. In sociological terms, it is the same situation, only that a certain group is subjected to these processes. It pursues its own interests even by destroying the individual or eliminating him (Šmid, 2015, p. 142).

In management literature, conflict is a social process that occurs between individuals, groups, states or organizations, resulting from conflicting interests, goals, views or duties, causing hostility between them. Conflict is any manifestation of struggles or fights between people, the purpose of which is not only to gain possession of the means of production, a given social position, power, etc. (Kozlowski, 2017, p. 172).

Conflict in an organization refers to a dispute between two or more members of an organization arising from the need to share limited resources or work, or to take different positions on an issue, pursuing different goals. Conflict can arise from different value systems of the participants or divergent points of view. The phenomenon can also be described by the characteristics of conflict:

- is a situation in which there are, at least, two parties,
- the parties to the conflict are dependent on each other,
- conflict triggers specific behaviors toward the other party,
- the other party usually reciprocates the reactions,
- the conflict is generally accompanied by strong emotions,
- conflict begins when at least one party perceives that its goals, tasks, values or behaviors are in conflict with the goals and/or actions of the other party and the other party blocks, hinders their implementation (Kuc, Moczydlowska, 2009, pp. 216-217).

According to J. Kozielski, conflicts arise when external obstacles stand in the way leading to the satisfaction of needs, when there is a contradiction of interests between the goals of the individual and those of the social group (Lewicka, 2010, p. 214).

The essence of conflict is the lack of agreement between two or more individuals, groups or organizations. This disagreement can be relatively superficial or very strong. It can be short-lived or persist for months or even years, and it can be work-related or personal (Griffin, 2017, p. 639).

Underlying most definitions of conflict are several common ingredients. Conflict must be perceived by the parties involved. The existence of conflict is a matter of human perception. It can be said that conflict is always a relationship between two independent parties who harbor feelings of hostility toward each other and blame each other for the situation. In other words, by conflict is meant a situation in which there is a contradiction of interests, views or attitudes of individuals or groups coexisting and interacting at a certain time and place (Lewicka, 2010, p. 214).

3. Types of conflicts in the organization

Due to the multiplicity of conflict situations that have occurred in practice, their proper classification is much more difficult. This paper presents typologies of conflicts depending on the criteria adopted.

Taking the subject criterion, we can distinguish conflicts: political, cultural, social, economic, class, stratum, values and goals.

With regard to the subjective criterion, we can distinguish between individual and collective conflicts.

Individual conflicts (internal, intrapersonal conflict), that is, the parties are mutually exclusive needs felt by the same person at the same time. The individual is in specific conflict with himself. He is internally "torn", feels dilemmas, dilemmas. And although the place where the internal struggle is played out is a person's mind, this conflict negatively affects his behavior in the work environment (Kuc, Moczydlowska, 2009, pp. 219-220). We can classify collective conflicts as interpersonal, intragroup, intergroup and interorganizational conflicts. Interpersonal conflicts are tensions between two or more individuals or groups who have conflicting goals. This type of conflict can be divided into zero-sum conflict (conflict in which one party's win is always equal to the other party's loss) and mixed motive conflict, (in which both parties can gain by interacting, and an individual can gain even more by competing with his or her partner) (Aronson, Wilson, Akert, 1997, pp. 387-388). In the workplace, this type of conflict is usually played out on three levels:

- between a superior and a subordinate,
- between supervisor and superior (conflict between equal managers),
- between subordinate and subordinate (they have a variety of sources, often mundane, and usually expire quickly) (Kuc, Moczydlowska, 2009, p. 220).

Intragroup (in-group) conflicts occur between an individual and a group. Often caused by the way in which individuals respond to pressures exerted by the group to enforce conformity (Penc, 2001, p.127). Intergroup (intergroup) conflicts conflict occurring between two or more groups in an organization. In the case of this conflict, the causes lie more in the organization itself than in contradictions between people. Often they arise from differences in views, goals and also competition for too few resources. This is a conflict of great importance to the organization. Inter-organizational (inter-organizational) conflicts, that is, conflict between an organization and its environment. The conflict may involve different organizations or other elements of the environment such as, consumer groups or suppliers. Conflict of moderate intensity, resulting from competition, is normal, but sometimes it takes on more drastic forms and greater scope (Griffin, 2017, pp. 641-642).

Taking the effects of conflicts as a criterion, they can be put into two categories: constructive (functional) and destructive (dysfunctional) conflicts. Constructive conflicts support the goals of the group or organization, increase its efficiency, prevent stagnation, stimulate development, but this depends largely on three factors. These are the level of conflict, the structure and the culture of the organization (Stoner, Wankel, 1994, p. 336). If the conflict is potentially costly for all parties and these costs may prove to be greater than the gains, if the conflict drags on before any kind of agreement is reached and if all participants are dissatisfied with the results of the conflict and believe that they have lost as a result we are dealing with a destructive conflict. This conflict destroys the parties and the relationship (Wilmot, Hocker, 2011, pp. 42-57). From the point of view of the level of intensity, we can distinguish between weak and acute conflicts. While the dynamics of intensity (the course of changes in the emotions of the people involved in the conflict) allows us to distinguish three types of conflict. Progressive conflict, in which the level of intensity of emotions is initially low, but gradually increases. Degressive conflict, in which the level of intensity of emotions, after quickly reaching a climactic state, slowly and steadily descends. Wavy conflict is characterized by a high variability of intensity (Pawlak, Antoszkiewicz, 2000, p. 312).

4. Sources of conflicts in the organization

The conflict resolution strategy must be diverse and multilayered, it must include the entire enterprise and its various parts, both individual employees and their teams, enterprise goals and strategies, departmental tasks and their substantive problems. In resolving conflicts, a manager can use various techniques:

- extinguishing the conflict - alleviation through appropriate persuasion, non-reaction to the conflict,
- settlement of a dispute (coercion) - forcing one of the parties to surrender as a result of force, threat, pressure or the formation of a coalition or the mediator's judgment,
- compromise - resolving the conflict rather than resolving it, no winning or losing side,
- integration (consensus) - a solution that satisfies both sides, a technique in which both sides win, but the agreement does not have to be unanimous (Penc, 2001, p. 143).

According to J. Barton, the first method of resolving conflict is to prevent it from erupting, that is, to avoid it. In this regard, there are several ways, such as suppression, shifting interests to another object, bypassing the object of conflict, dismissing the resolution of the conflict. A method that, as a consequence, can aggravate the causes of conflict. The second method is to start an informal discussion on conflict resolution to clarify the differences between the parties. This is one of the more commonly used methods in resolving everyday difficulties. It may yield a more or less satisfactory solution for the parties to the dispute, or due to lack of interest or

skill, it may not even yield the least satisfactory solution. The third method is negotiation, understood as the arrangement of relations between parties who are in a state of conflict. The participants establish, by mutual consent, short-term contacts to give both parties to the conflict an opportunity to get to know each other, learn about each other's needs and interests, exchange comments, determine the nature of potential contacts or agree on the procedure they will take to resolve the problem. Negotiation is an intentional with a specific structure, a process of discussing conflict resolution (Adamus-Muszyńska, 1998, p. 61).

Another of the methods used in conflict resolution is mediation. That is, resolving disputes with the participation of a third party. Mediation is most effective when the participants care about finding a solution, the dispute concerns specific issues and there is a relative balance of power between the parties. The mediator's assistance is most needed during acute clashes accompanied by high levels of conflict and hostility (Stephan, W.G., Stephan, C.W., 1999, pp. 168-169).

We can still mention the strategy of conciliation, which involves using an outside expert in the conflict. The expert's task is to analyze and propose potential solutions to the conflict. The solution proposals are non-binding, the expert has no authority and his attitude remains passive towards the conflicting parties.

The last of the strategies is external arbitration. The method involves appealing to the verdict of a third party so-called arbitrator. This can be a person, a commission or a court. The verdict of the arbitrator is binding on the parties to the conflict, and the condition for successful arbitration is the voluntary recognition of this opinion.

5. The role of the staff team

In everyday life, the terms team and group are often used interchangeably, however, in the literature we can see a clear distinction between these categories. In this paper, the concepts of group and team are used interchangeably.

Some authors equate a team with a group and treat it as a collection of more than two people, subject to the same interactions, aware of the interactions taking place between them, perceiving themselves as members of the group and identifying with it, and having a common goal, common norms and forming a specific peculiar structure.

James A.F. Stoner, Edward Freeman and Daniel R. Gilbert also use the term team and work group interchangeably, where a team is two or more people interacting and interacting with each other in pursuit of a common goal (Stoner, Wankel, 1994, p. 481).

According to Griffin (Griffin, 2017, p. 627), a team is a group of employees functioning as a separate unit, often with little or no supervision, to perform work-related tasks, functions and activities.

According to Susan Cohen and Diane Bailey, a team is a group of individuals who are interdependent on each other when performing their assigned tasks, who are jointly responsible for the results of their work, who perceive themselves, and are perceived by others, as a distinct social unit, embedded within another, larger social system, or several such systems (for example, a company or corporation), and who, by forming relationships with each other, cross structural boundaries within the organization (Kohn, O'Connell, 2008, p. 38).

B. Kożusznik defines a team as a specific social group, linked by formal and informal "ties", performing specific tasks in order to obtain specific material and non-material gratification.

However, it should be noted that many phenomena characteristic of a social group also characterize an employee team - group norms, cohesion or group roles. To date, a complete and unambiguous definition of an employee team has not been established (Kożusznik, 2007, pp. 97-98).

Positive relationships not only increase employee satisfaction, but also stimulate their higher efficiency, creativity and loyalty to the organization; negative relationships are destructive and bring the opposite effect (Szostek, Glińska-Neweś, 2017, p. 11).

6. The impact of conflict on the work team in manufacturing enterprises in the Beskids Region

The purpose of the study was to attempt to analyze and evaluate the significant impact of conflict on the work team and to characterize the main sources of conflict in manufacturing companies located in the Beskids Region. The following research questions were defined:

1. What types of conflicts are most common in a company?
2. How are conflicts most often resolved in a company?

Against this background, the main hypothesis was formulated, which was that responsible conflict management has a positive impact on the realization of potential projects in companies.

A diagnostic survey method was used for the study. A survey questionnaire was used as a tool, which consisted of 16 factual questions and 5 metric questions that allowed characterization of the subjects. The questionnaire used 1 filter question, which avoided the logical and factual errors associated with asking questions of people to whom they do not apply. And, 8 closed-ended questions, which greatly helped to standardize and unify the survey material, and 7 semi-open-ended questions. The survey was conducted in 5 manufacturing companies operating in the Beskids Region in 2023. 254 employees participated in the survey. Verification of the correctness of the questionnaires allowed 250 questionnaires to be used, 4 questionnaires were rejected.

Based on the survey results obtained, it was found that employees' awareness of the existence of conflicts in companies is high (90% of respondents recognized that there are conflicts in the company).

The most common reasons for conflicts in the surveyed manufacturing companies were "incompatibility in perceptions of roles," 64%, and "difference of views regarding the goals that should be achieved." - 56%. 38% received the answer "differences in people's personality traits", 31% received the answer "incompatibility regarding the perception of facts by both sides", 29% indicated "transferring their frustrations resulting from family or health problems to the group forum", and 27% for the answer "intrigue and gossip". And the answers "Using the same resources" and "differences in worldview or adherence to different values, views and attitudes" were given by 20% of respondents. And the answer "promotion system that promotes excessive competition" was indicated by 18% of respondents. One person (0.4%) gave the answer "management's misunderstanding of the actual tasks to be performed by the employee".

Some conflicts in the company arise due to differences based on the type of job (physical and mental division). The reasons for conflict situations in the surveyed companies are presented in Figure 1.

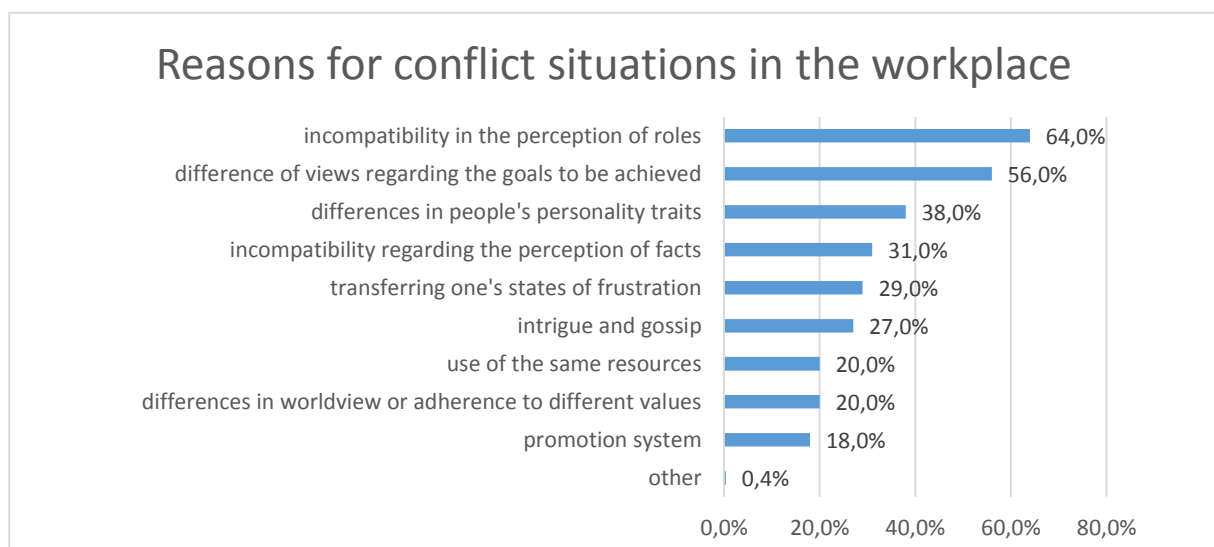


Figure 1. The reasons for conflict situations in surveyed companies.

Source: own research.

Analyzing the results of the survey, it can be noted that people in physical positions most often, as a cause of conflict in indicated "difference of views regarding the goals that should be achieved" 61% of indications, followed by "incompatibility in perception of roles" and "differences in human personality traits" 35%. In contrast, those in white-collar positions chose "incompatibility in perception of roles" (57%), "dissimilarity of views regarding the goals that should be achieved" 43% and "differences in human personality traits" 39% as sources of conflict. The other sources of conflict obtain a similar percentage pattern in relation to the position held.

The predominant attitude during conflict situations was "striving to clarify the situation" so indicated 80% of respondents. According to a small group of respondents, 9% mentioned "ignoring the problem". 7% of respondents indicated "waiting for help from managers or someone unrelated to the conflict". And 4% of responses referred to "an aggressive attitude towards the participants in the conflict". Attitude of respondents in conflict situations in the surveyed companies are included in Figure 2.

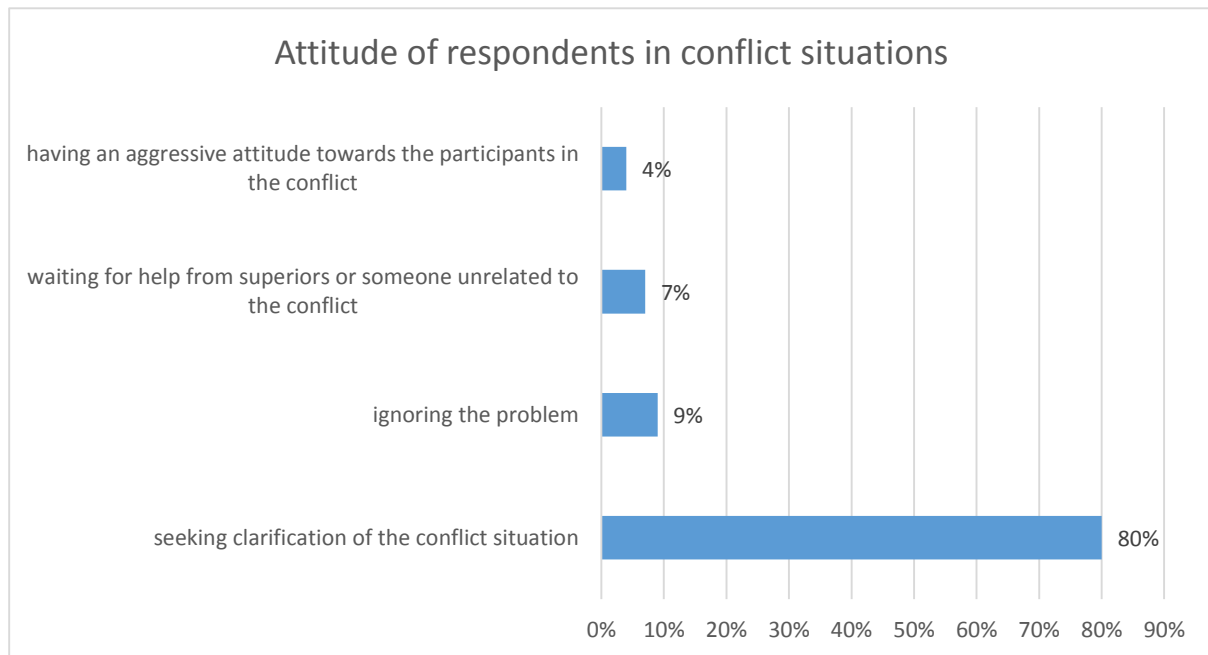


Figure 2. Attitude of respondents in conflict situations in the surveyed companies.

Source: own research.

The most common type of conflict occurring in the company was found to be conflict between groups 56% of respondents indicated this answer. Conflict between a supervisor and a group of employees was indicated by 20% of respondents, while 18% of respondents stated conflict between a subordinate and a supervisor. Only 7% of respondents indicated conflicts between an employee and a group.

The question of whether company managers adequately respond to conflicts that arise was answered in the negative by 53%, 31% of those surveyed said "yes", while 16% answered "don't know".

Conflict resolution methods are presented in Figure 3.

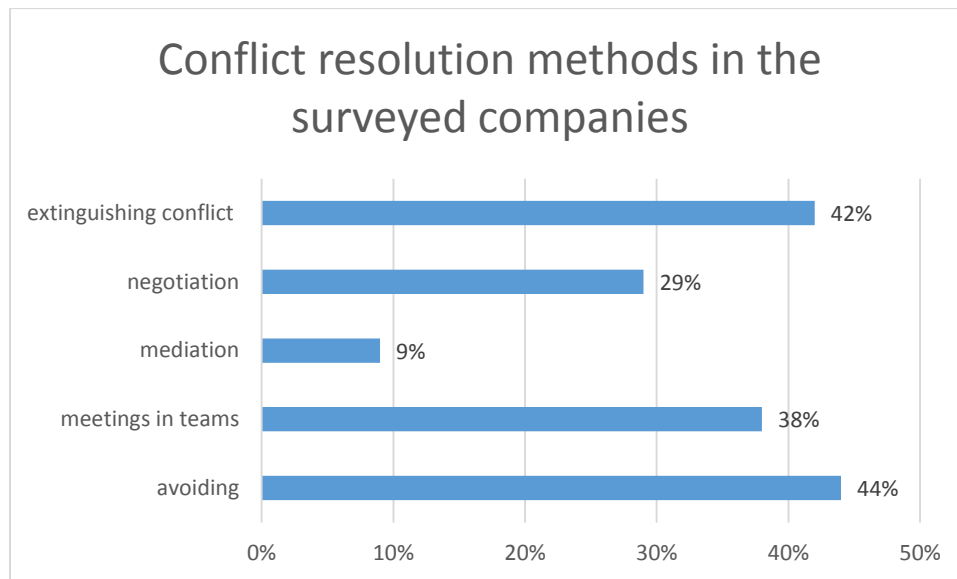


Figure 3. Conflict resolution methods in the surveyed companies.

Source: own research.

The survey showed that the preferred method of conflict management in the company is conflict avoidance, as indicated by 44% of respondents. Numerous respondents also mentioned: extinguishing - 42% of indications, discussing problems at departmental meetings - 38% of indications, and negotiation - 29% of indications. Mediation was indicated by only 9% of respondents. In an open question in which respondents could list other methods of conflict management, none of the respondents answered. Since the method of avoiding and extinguishing conflicts in the surveyed company are not among the responsible methods of conflict management, the main hypothesis was disproved.

It is not possible to clearly state how the company's management reacts when an employee is in a conflict situation, as 56% of respondents indicated that the supervisor ignores the conflict and waits for the conflict to resolve itself. In contrast, 40% of respondents said that the supervisor reacts immediately and seeks to resolve the conflict. Respondents were also allowed to give other ways of reacting two survey participants indicated that the supervisor's reaction "depends on the problem" and "if the problem directly concerns the supervisor, in other cases it varies".

Building a good atmosphere in the workplace is the type of support most needed by respondents 82% of indications. In second place, respondents marked integrating employees 48%. Slightly less 44% received the answer conflict resolution and substantive support 38% of indications. Next, respondents indicated conducting training 28% and emotional support 16% of indications.

Half of the respondents (50%) felt that those in management positions lacked adequate competence in the area of conflict resolution and prevention.

Respondents identified cooperation 66% of responses and compromise 58% of responses as the most effective method. 44% of respondents indicated negotiation and 32% of respondents indicated mediation. The least responses of only 4% were given to such methods as conflict avoidance and competition. In an open-ended question in which respondents could name other methods of conflict resolution, none of the of the respondents gave no answer.

7. Conclusions and recommendations for the studied manufacturing enterprises of the Beskids Region

Surveys conducted in manufacturing companies in the Beskids Region confirmed that there is a very high awareness among employees of the occurrence of conflicts, as many as 90% of respondents admitted that conflicts occur in manufacturing companies. Only 25 people (representing 10% of respondents) said that such situations do not occur in their company.

Employees in white-collar jobs most often chose incompatibility in role perceptions (57%) as the main source of conflicts, while blue-collar workers explicitly chose dissimilarity of views regarding the goals that should be achieved (61%). Relating the respondents' answers to one of the tools used to analyze the causes and sources of conflict, the conflict wheel of Ch.W. Moore's wheel, based on the results obtained, it can be seen that in the group of blue-collar workers there is mainly conflict of interest. In contrast, structural conflict is the main cause of conflict in the group of white-collar workers.

The thesis of the occurrence of interest and structural conflict is confirmed, as more than half of the surveyed employees identified intergroup conflict (56%) as the most common, and 20% of respondents believed that conflict occurs between a supervisor and a group of employees. Conflict between a subordinate and a supervisor was indicated in third place (18%). As the least frequent, respondents considered conflict between an employee and a group (7%).

More than half of employees (53%) were rather unfavorable about the company's response, while a third (31%) said that the conflict response was appropriate. 16% of respondents answered "I don't know," which may be due to employees' lack of knowledge about appropriate ways to resolve conflict. The most common methods used in the surveyed manufacturing companies are avoiding (44%) and extinguishing (42%) conflict in companies. 38% of employees said that problems are discussed in meetings. However, it is difficult to determine whether the problems are only discussed or whether an attempt is made to solve them.

Of the modern methods of conflict resolution, employees indicated negotiation (29%), mediation only 9% of indications, other ways were not given. Thus, it can be assumed that the ways of managing conflict in the surveyed manufacturing companies belong to the group of traditional views on conflict. Traditional approaches to conflict recognize that conflict hinders optimal efficiency, can be avoided, and management should eliminate conflict situations.

The level of knowledge that company employees have about conflict is similar to the knowledge that exists in organizations regarding conflict resolution and perception. Only 36% of respondents felt that conflict can increase the efficiency of the organization, while 14% of employees agreed that conflict can serve the organization in effective operation. In contrast, 56% of company employees believe that conflict always harms the organization.

56% of employees can count on the help of their supervisor if they are in a conflict situation, while 40% of those surveyed do not feel support from their supervisor are ignored and have to solve the conflict themselves.

Half of the employees (50%) felt that the supervisor should be responsible for resolving disputes, while 36% of the respondents do not see their supervisor in the role of conflict resolution. 14% of employees expressed no opinion on the subject.

Employees of manufacturing companies identified the following as the most effective methods of conflict resolution: cooperation (66%), compromise (58%), negotiation (44%) and mediation (32%). Avoidance and rivalry are not considered by company employees as effective ways to resolve conflicts.

The collected empirical material confirm the established hypothesis, which was that responsible conflict management positively influences the utilization of the potential of the employee team in the surveyed companies.

The conducted research and its analysis made it possible to formulate recommendations for the surveyed manufacturing enterprises of the Beskids Region.

It is proposed to introduce systematic training of employees on perception and conflict resolution in the workplace. To begin with, it is recommended to train managers in this area and organize a series of trainings for lower-level employees. In terms of information and education activities, all kinds of e-learning, team-building trips and the introduction of conflict management procedures are proposed - which will raise employee awareness, ensure transparency in the company's operations and also improve the conflict management process.

It is recommended that companies analyze the company's organizational structure and key processes to find out why intergroup conflict is the most common conflict in companies.

It is necessary to conduct continuous observation and control of the results of conflict management. Improvements should be made on an ongoing basis, as conflicts are a dynamic phenomenon and change frequently.

It is suggested that the research be expanded to include interviews with executives in order to learn about their attitudes and approaches to conflict situations occurring in the surveyed companies.

8. Summary

Modern manufacturing companies in Poland face intense economic development, competitive pressures, dynamic changes in the business environment, difficulties in attracting and retaining qualified employees and, above all, functioning in an environment characterized by high volatility and uncertainty. Therefore, it is reasonable for companies to constantly take care of improving the abilities of managers in business management. In the context of this study, conflict management should be a key skill of a manager. The ability and skillful resolution of conflicts open up new ways of thinking that can lead to new innovative solutions and healthy team performance, and thus efficient and effective business operations. The way conflict is handled often determines whether it works in favor of the team or will contribute to its downfall. Thus, understanding and appreciating the different viewpoints associated with conflict is a key factor in conflict resolution. It should also be remembered that effective methods of resolving disputes, bring significant financial benefits to the company by eliminating the waste of time that employees spend on conflict situations.

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