

HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES: BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN STAFF DIVERSITY AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

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Abstract: *This study aims to review a range of theoretical approaches and practical solutions offered by the literature on the concept of organizational conflict. The paper refers to the economic, political, social, cultural and security in which the contemporary organization operates and especially the military organization. One of the fundamental characteristics of the military organization is the diversity of human resources that make it up, leading both advantages and disadvantages in terms of management. In the final part of the study, we present some options for solving problems of cultural diversity within the military system, with emphasis on the idea of flexibility and adaptation techniques in the exercise of managerial leadership.*

Keywords: staff, diversity, conflict, management

1.1. Introductory issues: the aims of the study and the organisational context

This study attempts to analyse the concept of organisational conflict both from the theoretical perspective, that is, the way in which management literature defines it and identifies its sources, manifestations and implications, as well as from the practical point of view, in the sense that the conflict will be examined in a particular organisational context, namely, the military system.

The interest behind this is the necessity of examining particularities of military organisations functioning in a post-communist country such as Romania, a field which unfortunately has not benefited from significant attention despite its strategic importance in the current context of the NATO enlargement and the profound changes which it entails in terms of national and international security and stability.

Consequently, the first chapter of the study will present the military organisation's profile with an emphasis on the elements pertaining to conflict occurrence. Next, various conflict theories will be critically discussed with regard to the organisational characteristics, as well as other related management concepts such as change, power, and politics since management literature acknowledges the interdependence existing in terms of these concepts, as it will be illustrated. Then, the final part will attempt to offer suggestions and recommendations concerning the possible management approaches meant to improve the military system's organisational performance.

A dual aspect of the military organisation's managerial activity is determined by the fact that some of the staff are civilians, an aspect requiring a flexible management behaviour in order to harmonise the working environment, for the various educational backgrounds, that is, civilian and military, lead to different work behaviours. More explicitly, the notion of flexibility used in this context and associated with the idea of diverse working styles describes the necessity of approaching the two categories of staff differently: whereas the military are educated in the spirit of following orders and superior-subordinate hierarchy, the civilians may perceive this working style as an obstacle to their professional autonomy and even as a sign of disrespect, which means that the management need to shape their behaviour in order to accommodate the staff's individual expectations.

The third category of impairing elements is represented by Romania's social, economic, and political conditions dominated by numerous constraints and contrasts due to the difficult transitional process that started in December 1989, after the collapse of communism. This raises significant complexity since the military organisation's environment should consider not only national issues and implications, but also regional and global security aspects.

Thus, in order to achieve a more accurate picture of the challenges which the Romanian military system faces, one should take into consideration the background factors affecting this organisation. They refer to the deep restructuring process of the Romanian Armed Forces due to social democratisation and NATO orientation, which started in the early '90s. This

involves a complex change process stemming both from internal causes, that is, Romania's transition from communist totalitarianism to modern democracy, and from external causes, that is, the necessity of meeting the NATO and EU integration criteria.

In this respect, the extent of change is wide and profound, and entails a shift in the military mentality: whereas the Cold War era was threat-oriented, the current conditions require that the Armed Forces should be more security building-oriented, which results in the gradual dissolution of the differences between terms such as commander and manager (Maior and Matei 2002). Also, a significant facet of this problem is the necessity of bridging the classical civil-military gap and enforcing the civilian control over the military forces in the light of the present NATO orientation. However, the success of this enterprise depends on the management / leadership characteristics of the decision-making factors at every level within the Romanian military system for "there is inevitably greater adaptability within the civilian culture to new processes as military establishments' inertia relies very much on a specific culture of loyalty, tradition and corporateness" (Maior and Matei 2002, p. 24).

Each element of the military organisational profile must be examined in terms of civilian-military compatibilities and discrepancies, both internally and externally. It thus becomes evident that a reciprocal transformation and adaptation process is in progress, in which the key roles are represented by the military system and civilian institution. As Donnely (1997) emphasises, "the army has to get used to the idea that its entire basis for operation and even existence has changed fundamentally. In the meantime, society has to understand that it has to build up and nourish a new kind of army" (p. 28).

A more in-depth examination of the military restructuring will reveal even more complexity. For the purpose of a better understanding of these contextual circumstances, one should adopt a more general view of the Romanian Armed Forces, notwithstanding that this study does not focus on this particular topic.

Thus, according to Zulean (2002), the first step towards the democratisation of the civil-military relations and the democratisation of the society as a whole consists of creating professional military bodies, a process involving three main steps: changing the role, missions and defence planning; restructuring the military organisation; and changing the system of the military education and training, which can be translated into structural and mentality changes that have resulted in tremendous reform efforts. Among these, the most painful has been the drastic personnel reduction, followed by the creation of a re-conceptualised education system meant to train the

military personnel according to new concepts such as combat interoperability, flexibility, or C4I (command, communication, control, computing, and information) system operations. Therefore, one should not assume that Romanian Armed Forces' transformation has been smooth despite the broad public support it has enjoyed since this political trend was first formulated at the beginning of the last decade – 86% of the population, according to the data included in the Central and Eastern Euro-barometer survey cited in Kostadinova's (2002) study on East European public support for NATO membership. In this respect, Marin (2000) considers that the transitional process has been perceived negatively due to factors such as the lag between actions and expected results, corruption phenomena, flawed management, or drastic staff reduction.

So far, some organisational elements have been considered in order to illustrate that the military organisation offers propitious conditions for conflict regarded as negative or dysfunctional. However, these aspects represent only one facet of the problem for the civilian personnel also play a pivotal organisational role despite its relatively low representation. From this point of view, one can identify sources for several types of conflict among which one can mention the inherent difference in values (Hatch 1997) brought by the military and civilian personnel, respectively, or gender (Cheng 1995). The latter aspect is illustrated by the fact that the Romanian military system still has a poor female representation (approximately 20% of the employees) in a traditionally male-dominated environment.

Thus, the organisation displays two particular categories of groups: civilian versus military; and female versus male. However, this paper argues that gender is not a significant source of conflict, for the same idea is sustained by other studies concerning Romania's military system and society as a whole (Cristian 2002; Miroiu 2002).

Besides the two personnel categories mentioned above, one might identify another distinct group based on age criteria. One should not consider this remark as a sign of ageism for it does not intend to label the more senior staff as obsolete or inadequate to the current organisational realities. On the contrary, their knowledge and experience are regarded as a useful foundation for the organisation's future success. However, within the military organisation this group might raise some particularities. The rationale behind this statement refers to the transformational process in which Romania and especially the Romanian military system have been involved for more than two decades. Although this phenomenon has been unfolding at a national scale, the pressure upon the military is even greater due to the current security implications. As a result, Romania's Armed Forces have been subjected to

both types of change processes: first, the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989, which was “the sort of thing that alters completely the business landscape, the nature of whole industries and economies” (Kitchen and Daly 2002, p. 19), and, subsequently, the inevitable shifts occurring in any contemporary society.

In the wake of the previous ideas, the question naturally arising is the following: is it possible to change the people born and educated in the ideology of the Warsaw Pact so that they can function efficiently in the NATO spirit? To illustrate some of the entailed difficulties, let us consider two of the priorities formulated by the Romanian Ministry of National Defence when envisaging Romania’s NATO accession approximately ten years ago: redefining the status of the non-commissioned officers as junior leaders of the military hierarchy; and the personnel’s English language training according to the NATO STANAG 6001, which is the NATO standard for evaluating foreign language knowledge (Costea 2002). Translated into actions, the former means reducing the number of senior officers, and the latter refers to the necessity of reaching the level of the English knowledge necessary to participate in NATO missions. Arguably, the less significant barrier would be the linguistic one although some of the senior military are reluctant to begin learning English shortly before retiring. The fundamental change, however, must take place at the behavioural and attitudinal level for at least two reasons: first, the senior military personnel must accept that the traditional, autocratic, order-based working style is no longer acceptable unless it is accompanied by the subordinates’ empowerment and participation; and second, the military commanders must develop new leadership skills such as flexibility, adaptability, communication, risk-taking, decision-making, and creativity in order to face the current security challenges. According to Monahan (2001), “the military environment has altered out of all recognition since the end of the Cold War”, and consequently military leaders must be able “to look at chaos with the intellectual confidence it takes to explore it from unexplored angles and discover patterns” (p. 1). Given the depth of this change, it is not surprising that thousands of Romanian senior officers have opted for voluntary retirement due to either inability or reluctance to engage in the change process (Zulean 2002).

It is in the above context that the question regarding the ability to change and adapt senior staff’s mentality and behaviour to the new requirements has emerged. In order to answer it, this paper argues that a flexible approach must be used acknowledging that individual characteristics play an essential role in a person’s ability and/or willingness to embrace change. Thus, it would be equally dangerous both to conclude that the entire senior staff obstruct the

change process on the one hand, and to minimise the conflict potential which may arise from such mentality-based clashes on the other hand. An additional issue to examine is the type of conflict that may occur depending on the standpoint adopted. Although it might seem a hazardous stereotyping, one may assume that senior officers, and implicitly senior management, are likely to manifest difficulty in accepting and adapting to the challenges posed by the new working environment, which may result in negative conflict situations generated by the more junior staff's rejection of the traditional management style. Such circumstances may lead to low cooperation, poor communication, or lack of commitment, which impacts negatively upon organisational performance (Dolan and Garcia 2002). From a structural standpoint, this may be labelled as vertical conflict as it affects the superior-subordinate relationship.

1.2. Summary of the social, political and economic context in which the military organisation functions

The conclusion of the presentation above is that this organisation is subjected to various tensions dictated by external factors, that is, deep social and political changes on the one hand, as well as internal factors, that is, its unique and innovative role in terms of providing a new type of service in a new type of environment facing a new type of challenges on the other hand. As a consequence, it faces a complex change process, which has been regarded as a significant source of disruptive conflict due to its associated phenomena such as resistance (Appelbaum et al. 1998; Rothberg 2000; DiPaola and Hoy 2001), fear (Bechtel and Squires 2001), and dissatisfaction (Waddell and Sohal 1998; Pelzer Hudson 1999).

Taking into consideration the previously stated circumstances in which the military system functions, it may be useful to mention the importance of some cross-cultural studies carried out in the field of management. For instance, Kelemen (1995) states that Romanian and British managers are facing similar behavioural challenges generated by the current globalisation tendencies despite the differences in the cultural settings, education and experience, whereas Lee (1998) identifies significant discrepancies between the ways in which conflict is perceived in Western countries compared to Eastern European countries: the former view conflict as a win-lose game in which there can always be a return match, whereas the latter regard conflict as a fundamental threat. According to Lee (1998), a superficial explanation would be that the perception of conflict as negative is the product of the fifty years behind the Iron Curtain, but she continues to say that this may be a gross stereotyping since similar attitudes towards conflict can also be encountered

in cultures that have not experienced communism. A more plausible explanation, on the other hand, is proposed by Obeyesekere (1990) in the form of our cultural psyche and family myths that shape our mindsets and inherently lead to a certain way of perceiving environmental phenomena.

The previous paragraph aims to raise an aspect relevant to the Romanian military organisation's activity: how can it function in an Eastern European country, applying Western working procedures, and facing global security challenges? Therefore, the following sections will attempt to use Western theories of conflict in order to examine this Eastern European organisation.

1.3. Theoretical approaches to conflict and their relevance to the military organisation's realities – literature review

The conflict theories analysed in this study concentrate on the following areas of interest: conflict perceived as negative and disruptive (Fayol 1949; Mintzberg 1973; Oyebade 1995; Johns 1996), conflict as positive and functional (Pascale 1990; Darling and Walker 2001), conflict as overt, covert, and latent (Hatch 1997), and conflict as vertical and/or horizontal (Hatch 1997).

This selection of approaches is underpinned by the environment in which the envisaged organisation operates, in the sense that the tensions to which it is subjected require a holistic examination involving a threefold analysis. Thus, conflict as positive/negative refers to the perception level of the phenomenon or "the cognitive perspective", which tries to explain why people do what they do (Appelbaum et al. 1998). The overt/covert/latent ramification relates to conflict manifestations or "the interactional perspective", which attempts to clarify how people do what they do (Appelbaum et al. 1998), whereas the vertical/horizontal dichotomy offers the structure-based mechanisms to explain conflict occurrence in the organisation, which is a pyramidal structure par excellence. A reverse approach could argue that the most straightforward examination of conflict relies on the organisational structure (for it involves the use of "hard" or descriptive data concerning the organisational formal hierarchy such as the organisational departments, number of employees and their position, etc.), gradually moves to a combination of both concrete and abstract aspects (depending on how visible, manifested, or perceived the conflict is), and culminates with the mental level, where the "soft" aspects such as organisational and individual culture occupy the central position in the process of conflict phenomena.

Formulated six decades ago, Coser's (1956) classification of conflict is pragmatic yet very general as it encompasses the two main views on conflict, that is, disruptive versus functional. Thus, Coser advances the idea of realistic conflicts, which reflect disagreements over the means to an end or over the ends themselves, and non-realistic conflicts, whose sole purpose is defeating or hurting the opponent. Notwithstanding the difference in terminology, one can equate realistic conflict with positive conflict, and non-realistic conflict with negative conflict, respectively. This identification relies on the resolution techniques used in each type of conflict: whereas the former involves a wide variety of behaviours ranging from coercion and threat to negotiation, voting, joking, and relaxation in order to reach an acceptable solution, the latter is less flexible and makes extensive use of aggression and force. On the other hand, since Coser's view mentions the liaison between means and ends, one may connect it to the ethical side of business and management conduct, an aspect which ensures its modernity, considering the increasingly great emphasis placed on ethics in the present business environment (Key and Popkin 1998; Driscoll and Hofmann 2000; Zairi 2000).

Returning to the founders of management, let us consider a classical definition of conflict as "an element that compromises organisational coordination and success" (Fayol 1949). How valid is this definition in the context of the military-civil ambivalence specific to the military organisation's activity?

This approach can be viewed from various perspectives. Thus, the historical circumstances when Fayol developed his management theories play an important role in the sense that one may argue that a managerial model developed at the beginning of the last century may not be applicable to an organisation functioning in the 21st century. The most plausible argument in favour of this opinion would be that the world's social-economic conditions have changed dramatically over the last century, which has impacted upon organisational behaviours. In this respect, Cook (1995) points out the necessity of permanently adapting work attitudes to the requirements imposed by today's continuously changing environment, whereas Recklies (2001) describes the contemporary business world as "chaotic" and dominated by "turbulent change" and "diversity in opinions, impressions, experiences" (p. 3). Given the particularities of Romania's communist and post-communist experiences, the discrepancy between the stated framework and the military system's organisational realities seems even more obvious. However, one may identify ways to bridge the gap between the theoretical background of Fayol's approach and the actual managerial behaviour displayed within the system. Paradoxically, the very military nature of the organisation may plead for the applicability of some of his concepts in spite of the fact that Fayol developed his theories in relation to civilian organisations. Thus, his

managerial roles of commanding and controlling, which have been regarded as authoritarian and obstructive to the current tendencies towards delayering and staff empowerment (Newman DiPadova 1996), appear to be relevant in the hereby context, which is a military organisation structured according to strict rank-based hierarchies and chain of command. To enforce this idea, it is worth mentioning that “the commanding or directing role must be done, however euphemistically or surreptitiously” (Fells 2000, p. 347), therefore it would be erroneous to label Fayol’s view as obsolete, especially in the context of our organisation.

As a result, the discussion on conflict should focus on the exercise of power seen from the military perspective and manifested in a mixed environment, where the potential clash between two types of culture, namely, military and civilian can materialise: as Hatch (1997) and Darling and Walker (2001) point out, a significant source of negative conflict is the difference in values, issues, or concerns of various groups. To illustrate the potentiality of this conflict, one should emphasise the features of a civilian educational institution, which must foster creativity, autonomy, and independence because “a classroom including a group of students and their class teacher is in itself a small social organisation, in which the class teacher is often assumed to be the leader and students the followers” (Cheng 1994, p. 54). When/if these tendencies are obstructed by the system’s rules and procedures, it is obvious that a disruptive conflict occurs and undermines organisational cooperation (Hatch 1997).

Mention should be made that such a conflict may be viewed both as vertical conflict because the pressure can be exerted top-down, from the military superior to the civilian subordinate, and as horizontal conflict if the pressure comes from the peers, whose perceptions and task-approaches vary according to their education, experience, and personal characteristics, for instance: military versus civilian, junior versus senior, male versus female.

On the other hand, it is worth noting that horizontal conflict should not be restricted to antagonisms between the members of the same departments, but it may be manifest between various departments of the same organisation due to factors such as operative-level goal incompatibilities, task-interdependence, rewards and performance criteria, common resources, status incongruity, unclear delineation of responsibilities, communication obstacles, and individual differences (Hatch 1997).

Pooled task interdependence, which demands little interaction and, consequently, little conflict.

- *Reciprocal task interdependence*, on the other hand, facilitates conflict due to almost continuous interaction.

- *Sequential task interdependence*, characterised by unilateral dependency between two departments, fosters chronic conflict due to the asymmetrical distribution of power.

Another source of conflict noticed by Hatch (1997) refers to status incongruity, which is not uncommon in “total institutions” (Goffman 1961) such as military academies and training facilities, in which instructors “may often feel that many of the demands placed on them... run counter to their professional ethos, and as a result, experience role conflict” (Bamberger and Hasgall 1995, p. 69).

The type of conflict described above might also be viewed from another angle, namely, as a conflict originating from individual differences. The assumption underpinning it is that “not all people get along with each other” (Hatch 1997, p. 313), but this can be labelled as simplistic because it is unlikely that organisations employ people on subjective criteria such as personal affinity. It would arguably be wrong to include the aforementioned criterion in the recruitment procedures that focus on the employees’ personal features, for instance psychometric tests, whose purpose is to facilitate the “psychological contract” (Roehling 1997) between the employee and the organisation. Although such a perspective may be an oversimplification, one could notice the thread of specificity, whether it is linked to groups or individuals.

Centred on the same concept of group as an organisational entity, another approach to conflict has been developed by Johns (1996), who regards as conflict any process during which a person, a group, or a department prevents their counterparts from achieving their goals. The most significant conflict triggers that the author identifies are group belongingness and bias, task interdependence, differences in power, status, and culture, role ambiguity, and insufficient resources. One may notice the high degree of similitude between Johns’ and Hatch’s approaches in terms of the identified conflict triggers; however, Johns appears to place greater emphasis on the natural tendency of the individuals to include themselves in a group, and, more significantly, to become suspicious when dealing with other groups. The criteria on which these groups are constituted range from gender to profession and position. Whether this group emphasis is beneficial or detrimental to the organisation is debatable: if one considers the current management techniques oriented towards team-building as a means to improving organisational performance (Esquivel and Kleiner 1996; Appelbaum et al. 1998), this trend is positive and desirable. Conversely, such an attitude can close communication channels between departments or individuals, which impacts negatively upon

organisational effectiveness (Gent et al. 1998; Steiner 2001; Kitchen and Daly 2002).

An approach that may be regarded as a corollary of Hatch's conflict stemming from individual differences and Johns' group emphasis has been advanced by Appelbaum et al. (1998), when examining the interrelationship between group formation and normative conflict starting from Robbins' (1989) view on conflict. While the importance of each aspect is being acknowledged, the combined effects of the two components are analysed using a twofold perspective: process and structural.

Thus, according to Robbins, the former model views conflict dynamically as a sequence of events, as follows:

1. frustration, which involves a unilateral accumulation of dissatisfaction and is caused by factors such as poor communication, flawed structure, or individual incompatibilities;
2. conceptualisation, which consists of conflict realisation and behavioural alterations;
3. interaction, which may lead to either conflict manifestation or resolution;
4. outcome, which may range from agreement to long-term hostility.

The structural framework, on the other hand, deals with the conflict parameters:

1. behavioural predisposition, which refers to personal abilities and characteristics;
2. social pressure, which is exerted by the public or peers;
3. incentive structure, which is linked to relationships manifested in competitive matters;
4. rules and procedures, which determine and shape conflict behaviours.

In order to explain how the above theory bridges Hatch's and Johns' approaches, one should notice that both the process and the structural models are built around the individual as the main component, which is placed in the organisational environment and given a dynamic role in the sense that individual traits and behaviours manifest according to the internal (for instance, organisational structure or communication) and external (for instance, social requirements) pressures. The human dimension is thus viewed individually, as an element that determines conflict intrinsically, according to its characteristics (hence, the commonality with Hatch's approach), as well as collectively, as an element that influences and is influenced by a group or team (which bears resemblance with Johns' framework).

Notwithstanding the difference in emphasis displayed by the process and structural models, respectively, several commonalities can be pointed out. Thus, the former seems to be more concerned with the dynamics of conflict manifestation, whereas the latter appears to place greater emphasis on the individual perception of conflict. Nevertheless, the dimensions and implications of the two models are not as different as they may seem: personal variables, for instance, can be assimilated with behavioural predisposition; conceptualisation might be equated with incentive structure; structure and interaction may materialise in the form of rules and procedures. However, regardless of the differences in terminology or emphasis, these models highlight the idea of “a work force characterised by people with different human qualities who belong to different cultural groups” (Appelbaum et al. 1998, p. 217). Last but not least, this approach does not explicitly label conflict as negative or positive, but rather pleads for acknowledging cultural diversity and using it in order to produce new ideas and optimum solutions.

As already mentioned, numerous theorists such as Mintzberg (1973), Oyebade (1995), or Johns (1996) have regarded conflict as negative and disruptive. Furthermore, one cannot ignore that these approaches have been developed more recently compared to Fayol’s definition, which emphasises that to regard conflict as dysfunctional is still valid. Within the military organisation, this idea is even more plausible considering that this institution could be included in the category of “rule-bound systems” (Clayton and Gregory 2000), in which “who has the final say is externally determined by the rules governing the system’s area of function” (Clayton and Gregory 2000, p. 141). Consequently, the likelihood of conflict resulting from the exercise of power and related concepts such as decision-making and organisational politics increases due to the organisation’s pyramidal structure, which Reis and Peña (2001) consider to be a major obstacle to organisational effectiveness in contemporary conditions, dominated by constant changes at every social and economic level. Again, this also opens the way to vertical conflict (Hatch 1997), which characterises hierarchy-based organisations, in which power runs the risk of being “abused rather than used judiciously and responsibly” (Butcher and Clarke 1999, p. 10).

In the previous paragraphs, some internal organisational aspects connected to the exercise of command, control and power have been mentioned as potential sources of disruptive conflict. Nevertheless, one cannot ignore that power manifestation should not be restricted to legitimate power, which results from one’s position within an organisational hierarchy (Johns 1996), for an organisation’s power exercise can be viewed from numerous perspectives in

terms of its sources (Buchanan and Huczynski 1997; Edelman 1993), that is, reward, coercion, expertise, legitimacy, and reference.

Another issue worth noting is the similar classification of the two management concepts, namely, power and conflict, which illustrates the tight connection between them. Thus, Lukes (1974) identifies three categories of power: overt (defined as power openly and explicitly exerted due to its being vested in an individual or group and supported by rules and/or resources), covert (implying a more subtle form of exercise derived from less visible attributes such as personal qualities, expertise, or social networks), and latent (expressed by means of one's gaining control over valuable information, knowledge and resources, and waiting for the favourable circumstances to display the exercise of power).

Despite examining a different management concept, that is, conflict, Hatch (1997) reaches an identical classification, namely: overt (a visible struggle between two or more groups or organisations); covert (a hidden state of opposition between two or more groups or organisations); and latent (a gradual accumulation of tension between two or more groups or organisations). Considering this classification similitude, one can hardly regard it as coincidental. Conversely, this paper argues that there is a strong connection between power exercise and conflict manifestation, as theorists such as Fincham and Rhodes (1992) have pointed out.

In order to analyse this interdependence, a problem worth considering is the employee perception of power, which has been studied by Elangovan and Xie (2000). In the light of their approach, there is a tight connection between the management's power bases and the employees' behaviours. An aspect to examine is whether there is a direct correspondence between each type of power and each type of conflict, respectively, or not. In other words, does overt power vested in the senior management lead to overt conflict? Does covert power result in covert conflict? Does latent power open the way to latent conflict? Furthermore, one should consider the possibility that this correspondence may be contradicted in the sense that certain types of power may not lead necessarily to their corresponding conflict manifestations, thus breaking the apparent symmetry of the two triangular classifications, namely, power and conflict, respectively.

As far as overt power is concerned, one may use Hatch's approach in order to examine the relationship between it and the conflict manifestations which it generates. Thus, if both conflict actors have overt power, the likelihood of overt conflict increases because both parties may feel entitled to express their opinions openly and fearless of coercive consequences. However, when

examining this type of conflict, one should also consider the interdependence existing between the two parties, that is, pooled, reciprocal, or sequential. As previously stated, each relationship may lead to various degrees of conflict probability. On the other hand, a different conflict analysis is required if the two conflict parties do not enjoy similar distributions of power. In this case, one may infer that the occurrence of overt conflict is low for it is likely that the conflict exponents will react differently: the subordinates may feel intimidated and unwilling to air their grievances, whereas the superiors may feel entitled to exert their coercive power.

In terms of latent power and conflict, one may argue that their manifestation is more perceptible horizontally in the sense that they display a dynamic, though gradual, unfolding within one or more organisational groups. This type of conflict may be fuelled by limited resources, which foster competition and organisational politics, and, in turn, require effective use of power as well as leadership skills on the top management's behalf, whose responsibility is to balance between individual/group interests and organisational interests (Armstrong 1999; Butcher and Clarke 1999).

To deepen the connection between power exercise and conflict manifestation already pointed out when mentioning the similar classification of the two concepts, Ropers' (2003) taxonomy of conflict highlights the role played by the amount or type of power which the conflict parties exert within the organisation. Thus, Ropers distinguishes two categories of conflict: symmetrical, in which the parties involved in the conflict have equal degrees of power; and asymmetrical, in which the conflict parties have different degrees of power. Once this distinction has been acknowledged, the further steps should take into consideration the remaining two aspects: measuring the "quantity" of power allotted to each side, that is, performing a "hard" analysis of the power distribution; and then, examining the "quality" of power gained by each exponent, that is, determining the "soft" features of the power displayed in the conflict process.

Apparently, Ropers' classification of conflict may be considered as pragmatic as other dichotomies such as positive versus negative, or vertical versus horizontal. However, a thorough analysis of his approach reveals more subtle implications in the sense that it combines elements of other theories on power and conflict viewed from various perspectives. Thus, the quantitative aspect of power may be linked to overt power, but one should also consider the situation when an individual or a group has covert power or accumulates latent power. This means that simply examining an organisation's hierarchical structure does not offer a clear idea of the power distribution within that organisation. On the other hand, people occupying lower hierarchical

positions might enjoy significant amounts of covert or latent power, which imposes a careful analysis of the power phenomena inside the organisation. Consequently, the conflict events that take place at and/or between various organisational levels require significant knowledge and understanding of the organisation's structural and cultural realities. Therefore, accepting Ropers' conflict classification without considering its implications in terms of power would hardly lead to an accurate picture of events, and ultimately to an effective management of conflict.

To conclude in respect of the above internal and external organisational facets, one may infer that an organisation can undergo conflict both internally, due to its various categories of staff, and externally, due to the complex changes experienced by the environment in which it operates (Olorunsola 1997).

Under these circumstances, it is clear that organisational characteristics may foster the appearance and growth of negative conflict unless these seemingly antagonistic elements are properly addressed by the management team either by preventing their manifestation or by transforming them into creative conflict. We thus reach the opposite end of the scale, represented by the theorists that adopt a positive view of organisational conflict, namely, conflict as functional and "creative tension" (Pascale 1990) or an excellent opportunity for "growth for both the organisation and the individual" (Darling and Walker 2001, p. 230).

Notwithstanding that such a phrase as "to win without fighting" (Ma 2003) may seem an oxymoron, one can find good reasons to embrace this vision for it represents another (and brighter) side of the same coin, that is, organisation viewed from a positive perspective, in which potential sources of conflict may be transformed into rewarding and invigorating experiences. Moreover, Ma is not the only theorist who opts for this arguably ideal, conflict-free organisational environment. Thus, Banner (1995) acknowledges three levels of conflict manifestations: the traditional or physical level, which sees conflict as bad and its elimination as desirable; the interactionist or modern view, which regards conflict as functional and in need of being managed effectively; and the transcendent or transformational approach, which emphasises "an expanded sense of personal identity and an awareness of the interconnectedness of people in their organisational culture, and of organisational cultures to each other in the larger environment" (p. 32). What this approach brings new is the existence of grey areas in managerial perceptions, that is, the idea that conflict is not necessarily bad or good, negative or positive, but the result of the larger context in which businesses function. This is a valuable contribution for this study argues that effective

conflict management requires flexible and nuanced management behaviours rather than pre-established recipes. Thus, Banner sustains his theory by applying the “immutable laws of life” to organisational existence, and suggests that conflict can be eliminated if we adopt a synergetic view of organisations materialised in the form of several principles:

1. *Stop judging other people and situations*, which should prevent people from applying negative labels to surrounding phenomena.
2. *Take 100 per cent responsibility for your reality*, which encourages personal accountability.
3. *Live in the present moment*, which fosters personal involvement in the current unfolding of events.
4. *When something appears to be conflictual, there is a message for me in that situation*, which enhances the idea of conflict perceived as an opportunity for learning and personal growth.

However, a closer analysis of the above principles reveals that their application can be interpreted as steps towards a positive perception of conflict for they contain the elements encountered in functional conflict, such as personal responsibility and conflict perceived as an opportunity for personal or professional development. Consequently, one may consider Banner’s view as unrealistic since his theory only apparently delineates the coordinates of a conflict-free environment, when in fact it is based on tools used to sustain the positive perception of conflict.

Moreover, although a conflict-free environment may seem the ultimate goal of any business, it can also be a dangerous situation, both from the organisational point of view, and from the employees’ perspective. Thus, the former idea is illustrated by DiPaola and Hoy (2001), when pointing out that “in schools in which there is little conflict there is no sense or urgency, no necessity to look for alternatives, and no incentives for conciliatory overtures” (p. 241). In other words, the lack of conflict is assimilated with the lack of organisational growth, which may signal negative symptoms such as complacency or disinterest. The latter aspect points to the staff’s dissatisfaction and demotivation manifested in the form of reduced creativity and innovation. Consequently, the key to effective conflict management, according to DiPaola and Hoy, is suppressing the occurrence of social-emotional (or affective) conflict, that is, negative or dysfunctional conflict, which reduces performance and satisfaction, while enhancing task-related (or cognitive) conflict, that is, positive or creative conflict, which influences positively decision quality and overall group performance.

To return to the positive perception of conflict, the diversified staff structure can be regarded as a fruitful source of different opinions and experiences,

which can enrich the organisation's life provided that these differences are constructively used to find innovative solutions to improve organisational effectiveness rather than foster "the contradiction between professional ethos and administrative requirements" (Bamberger and Hasgall 1995, p. 68). In other words, the employees' diversity can impact positively upon the organisational environment provided that every category of personnel participates in decision-making and problem-solving, thus applying concepts such as empowerment and delayering, which have been considered crucial success factors in modern organisations (Waddell and Sohal 1998; Bechtel and Squires 2001; Cook 1995; Burdett 1994; Kitchen and Daly 2002). In this respect, methods such as formal and informal meetings, daily reports, Intranet postings, or suggestion boxes are possible methods to foster staff's contribution to problem-solving and conflict prevention or resolution.

Tightly connected to concepts such as empowerment and participation in decision-making and problem-solving is the creation of a team-based organisational culture. Despite being widely regarded as a key element of any modern organisation's success (Esquivel and Kleiner 1996; Appelbaum et al. 1998), a team-based culture can also pose a series of obstacles towards effective conflict management. Thus, DiPaola and Hoy (2001) refer to the formal aspect of a team and state that "the larger and more diverse the group, the greater the potential for conflict because diversity among members of groups results in differences in goals, perceptions, preferences, and beliefs" (p. 238), which reflects significant resemblance with Hatch's view of individual differences as a source of disruptive conflict. A much more pessimistic approach, however, has been formulated by Bagshaw (1998), who links concepts usually regarded as positive trends, that is, delayed or less hierarchical organisations, to negative outcomes resulted from unclear definitions of collaborative effort, shared learning, or self development: "This can lead to a self-protective attitude where knowledge is jealously guarded, with the assumption that to share it would be to lose it" (p. 207). One is thus warned against the danger of accepting concepts usually bearing positive connotations without adopting a critical standpoint that should consider each organisation's particularities rather than generalise and apply labels without questioning their relevance to a certain management situation.

However, the benefits of applying the previously mentioned methods for enhancing organisational communication and cooperation cannot be overstated since they can determine the type of conflict manifested (Esquivel and Kleiner 1996): if the employees' disagreement results from issue-related differences of opinions that tend to improve team effectiveness, the positive or C-type conflict occurs and fosters creativity and the utilisation of individuals' skills and abilities; conversely, if the disagreement is fuelled by

personal feelings or agenda, the negative or A-type conflict emerges and deters the members from the group objectives. Assuming that the organisation can provide its staff with the material and technical means to facilitate communication, one may conclude that it is the managerial exercise that ultimately decides upon the best course of action meant to nurture positive conflict and inhibit disruptive conflict.

In terms of conflict resolution methods, communication should be the most effective tool if it is used adequately (Appelbaum et al. 1998). However, managers must adopt a critical standpoint when assessing the conflict situation in order to identify its source, exponents, manifestation, and eventually resolution method. In other words, discriminating between various types of conflict is essential when developing a strategy for a particular conflict situation. According to Johns, the following conflict management styles have been identified:

1. *conflict avoidance style*, whose effectiveness is low due to the parties' reluctance to face and change the issues causing the conflict;
2. *courtship style*, manifested by cooperation with the opponent without sustaining personal interests, which can be effective when one of the parties wants to compensate for a mistake that he/she has committed;
3. *competitive style*, based on maximising one party's interest and minimising cooperation level, may be useful when the party is certain of his/her power, influence, or rightness, in win-lose situations, or when it is unlikely that the parties will meet again in the future;
4. *concessive style*, which combines cooperation and own-interest protection, can be effective in conflicts caused by insufficient resources, but it is less likely to function when the conflict parties have asymmetrical power;
5. *collaborative style*, which emphasises both own interest and cooperation, aims at obtaining a win-win outcome, and appears to be effective when the conflict is not intense as well as when each party possesses information that the opponent may need.

Regardless of the approach used in order to solve a particular conflict situation, the mechanism on which all the five conflict management styles are based is communication. However, one cannot ignore the thread of commonality that these resolution techniques share, namely, the degree of power possessed by the conflict exponents: the more power one party has, the less democratic or participative the resolution process is. As a result, one may infer that conflict management should rely on at least two components in order to be successful: communication and symmetrical power distribution. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that power distribution can be determined extrinsically due to the intrinsic organisational structure and mechanisms,

which leads to the conclusion that it is the communication component that may play a decisive role in effective conflict management.

Unlike Johns' view on conflict management, which emphasises individual reactions to conflict, Darling and Walker (2001) approach this issue from a behaviour-based group perspective, and identify four basic behavioural styles: the people person (relater), the thought person (analyser), the action person (director), and the front person (socialiser). The responsibility for effective conflict management in an organisation, the authors argue, lies with all members of the team, thus shifting the focus from the manager to the team. This view is sustained by the idea that the manager as an individual is unlikely to display all these behavioural traits, whereas the team (or the group) will almost always consist of a combination of these styles although they may not be evenly distributed.

Darling and Walker's perspective may be regarded as more realistic in terms of achieving conflict resolution due to more individuals sharing the responsibility for the conflict outcome, whereas Johns' attributes an arguably too complex role to a single individual, that is, the manager. However, if one considers that it is the manager's duty to build the team and coax its efforts towards achieving a common goal, in this case conflict resolution, Johns' perception appears to gain credibility. As Knights and McCabe (2002) point out, "management can enrol and mobilise, or coerce and control their employees" (p. 241).

Also, a significant obstacle posed by Darling and Walker's approach is that not all the team members may have the necessary skills to distinguish between the various behavioural styles, which means that they should rely only on personal experience or empirical observation in order to delineate the adequate course of action. On the other hand, the same difficulty might occur when the manager must deal with a conflict, which raises additional doubts regarding the practical applicability of the behavioural styles approach to conflict management. Hence, one may conclude that the framework advanced by Darling and Walker may have solid theoretical foundations, but it requires equally solid behavioural knowledge in order to be successfully used, which significantly reduces its practical utility.

1.4. Summary of the literature review

Organisational characteristics can be viewed from various perspectives and pertain to numerous interpretations in terms of identifying the conflict definition which best suits each particular context. Depending on the

standpoint adopted, one may find arguments to underpin different approaches to organisational conflict, which cover a wide range of frameworks and perceptions.

1.5. Conflict and ethics *or* winning wars without fighting battles

The previous study of this analysis presented an overview of the theoretical approaches and practical manifestations of the concept of organisational conflict in the military organisation. In the hereby study, I would like to focus more on the solutions one may envisage in order to constructively solve conflict situations in a win-win manner. Therefore, I will assume that the conclusions of the previous parts of the study are already known, so that we shall concentrate on the practical side of this investigation.

1.6. Building upon the previous literature findings – practical solutions

Therefore, in the wake of the critical examination of the literature review outlined in the prior parts of the study, the following conclusions may be drawn:

1. The individual differences leading to negative conflict stem from cultural discrepancies between civilian and military staff as well as from junior versus senior antagonisms, which confirms the applicability of the theories advocating the negative or destructive nature of conflict phenomena.
2. The pyramidal structure of the military organisation opens the way to vertical conflict, which impacts negatively upon the communication process at the team level regardless of the size of the organisation, which illustrates that the conflict triggers identified by Hatch and Johns are correct.
3. If the organisational pay policy is unsatisfactory, it must be accompanied by alternative reward schemes in order to represent a significant motivating factor to the employees, which proves that Johns' conflict management styles should be used extensively and flexibly. More explicitly, the management team must treat each organisational group, whether professionally or socially established, according to its background, needs and expectations.
4. If the relationships between peers are good within the organisation notwithstanding the staff diversity, the probability of functional conflict increases, thus resulting in creativity, innovation, and learning

opportunities; this proves that the positive and constructive perception of conflict is realistic.

As a result, the hereby study argues that the military organisation's management team should proceed to improving the managerial practices related to organisational communication at lower levels, especially bottom-up collection of information and feedback as well as enhancing the subordinates' participation in decision-making. In this respect, Johns' conflict management styles may be effective provided that each conflict situation is treated separately on the one hand, and the appropriate resolution techniques are involved in each situation. Ideally, the collaborative style should prove most effective for it aims at obtaining a win-win outcome, but it may not be applicable in the case of the military-civilian antagonisms if the conflict existing between the two groups is too intense. This situation pertains to at least two interpretations: either the conflict actors focused on using the competitive style if each party perceived it as a symmetrical power, as Ropers suggests; or the top management failed to perform the roles which Darling and Walker regarded as crucial in solving a conflict, that is, relater, analyser, director, and socialiser. Whereas the former interpretation suggests a mistaken management technique, the latter suggests the individual's incapacity to approach the situation. The conclusion of this assumption may be that optimum results in conflict management require a combination of resolution tools, that is, both objectivity in choosing the procedures and subjectivity in selecting the appropriate mitigating agent.

Then, another conflict trigger, namely, the organisational hierarchical structure, may be overcome by counterbalancing aspects such as applying simpler reward and reporting procedures as well as increased people-orientation and flexibility, all of which being connected to organisational size and regarded as facilitators in terms of organisational effectiveness and smooth running, as Ghobadian and Gallear point out. In order to enhance reporting procedures, the top management may put in practice the open-doors policy, which provides the employees with the opportunity to communicate vertically, that is with their superiors, which supposedly should minimise vertical conflict, as Hatch's defines it, or asymmetrical conflict, as Ropers labels it. This management technique could be considered detrimental in some respects as it is time-consuming on the one hand, and may result in undermining the middle managers' authority and credibility on the other hand. Nevertheless, the benefits of this policy can compensate for such shortcoming because they also facilitate the manifestation of leadership skills that include employee involvement in decision-making, innovation, and teamwork, which ultimately are expected to increase organisational effectiveness (DiPaola and Hoy 2001). This approach is particularly important in military

educational institutions, where leaders have to reach a compromise between the administrative and formal aspects of their activity on the one hand, and the necessity of ensuring a working atmosphere that fosters collaboration and professional autonomy on the other hand. As DeDreu (1997) emphasises, “administrators who seek to create a homogeneous faculty and suppress minority dissent are reducing creativity and innovation” (p. 240). As a consequence, such an attitude may be regarded as an illustration of the theories according to which conflict is a positive phenomenon based on a diversity of group and individual cultures which thus take the opportunity to express their creativity and imagination.

However, the challenge that the top management faces is that the middle management represent the main hindrance to organisational cooperation and subordinates’ participation. In order to attenuate these possible mentality incompatibilities, one should view the senior/junior dichotomy constructively in the sense that the senior staff’s experience combined with the junior staff’s enthusiasm can ensure organisational success. This idea is supported by Ford (2002), who regards it as a prerequisite for effective management: “a joint forward-looking and backward-looking approach was superior in terms of enhancing organisational fitness than was either approach used independently” (p. 638).

Nevertheless, this positive view may not be enough in order to persuade the middle management to change their behaviour, and consequently the top management must embark on a process of sharing information and enforcing communication by means of setting a personal example in order to win the middle managers’ trust and ensure the process credibility across the organisation. In other words, the military top management must act both as a gatekeeper and as a process promoter in order to avoid being “hampered by those passively affected by and those actively engaged in the process” (Hauschildt and Schewe 2000, p. 99).

Time-consuming as this endeavour may appear, it hopefully benefits from the subordinates’ trust in the top management, and as a result it has to concentrate on enhancing the middle management’s willingness to communicate. However, if the top management uses motivating tools such as participation and empowerment in order to secure the middle management collaboration, the enterprise can be successful. Also, it is important that the entire process is conceived and applied holistically, according to a cohesive strategy that emphasises the necessity of creating and retaining an educated workforce as a prerequisite for organisational success. As Gunnigle and Moore (1994) note, “even in cases where the adoption of a certain strategy is not appealing to those required to implement it, the articulation, communication, and

championing of a well-constructed strategy is more likely to lead to successful implementation” (p. 69). Given the literature review conclusions, the effectiveness of this method cannot be overlooked.

On the other hand, this study argues that the transformational endeavour that the military system’s top management must accelerate is facilitated by the high level of staff commitment, which represents a valuable advantage because it allows the management to concentrate its efforts on one main direction, namely, enforcing vertical communication and particularly bottom-up feedback and participation. The subordinates’ contribution to the organisational improvement cannot be overstated, especially considering that “more than 80% of quality problems are caused by management and fewer than 20% are caused by workers” (Ho and Fung 1994, p. 27).

Nevertheless, the top management’s degree of involvement in enforcing the transformational process should be carefully applied as it may convey contradictory messages: on the one hand, it can be perceived as a hands-on approach which proves commitment from the top and impacts positively on the staff’s motivation (Elangovan and Xie 2000). On the other hand, it may trigger the employees’ frustration resulted from constant control and supervision (Elangovan and Xie 2000). Therefore, a balance must be reached in the sense that top-down message reinforcement should not compromise the subordinates’ freedom and initiative, which represent the very goals of these efforts.

An argument connected to the current military organisation being a relatively new entity whose staff, culture, and internal mechanisms are still in formation is the possibility that the negative conflict occurrences signalled previously may be attenuated gradually according to the principle of the “learning curve” (Daniels and Radebaugh 1996). In other words, in time both the workers and the management will gain experience, which in turn may result in various staff categories’ mutual acceptance of their differences in values and task approaches. One may argue that the dysfunctional conflicts are already deeply rooted, and as a result the top management should adopt a proactive attitude towards resolving them rather than rely on such time-based expectations. Nonetheless, the reconciliation process may not necessarily necessitate a cultural change in its classical form, for the Romanian military culture is not mature yet after the NATO and EU accession, and therefore the efforts’ focus should concentrate on persuading the conflict parties, that is, the identified distinct groups, to accept and respect their counterparties’ values and expectancies. This process could be described as creolisation, which Daniels and Radebaugh (1996) define as “the process of introducing elements of an outside culture” (p. 52). In this case, the “outside culture” can be considered

the civilian component, which must accept and be accepted by the military system. On the other hand, mention should be made that this process is doomed to fail unless all the conflict components agree to act as a synergetic team focused on reaching a reasonable outcome by using techniques such as: willingness to express opinions and feelings, active participation, careful listening, creative thinking, avoiding communication discontinuity, taking time to reflect, protecting the other parties' rights, and assuming responsibility for the outcomes (Harrington and Harrington 1995).

Connected with the previous idea related to the necessity of creating a synergetic team within the military organisation, it is essential that the middle management should understand that unless they inform and are informed by their subordinates, the overall organisational performance will be unsatisfactory, and the nature of negative conflict between individuals will persist (Gent et al. 1998). Instead, they must develop into "facilitators of the success of their colleagues" (Dolan and Garcia 2002, p. 103), by encouraging their teams to express their opinions, contribute to setting team goals, and experiment new ideas. Also, in the light of the subordinates' potential complaints related to the insufficient feedback provided by their superiors, a job evaluation programme would prove useful in order to ensure the clarity of each employee's responsibilities, performance, assessment, reward, or training needs. According to Armstrong (1999), such a programme should cover the following aspects: roles, briefing, procedures, training, pay issues, job evaluation, job analysis, communication and negotiation.

Last but not least, this paper sustains the importance of enforcing ethical behaviour as an effective tool of decreasing negative conflict and fostering functional conflict. As Moon and Bonny (2001) state, "ethically based management can shape an entire business" (p. 25). In a military organisation, which can be regarded as rigid and authoritarian, the ethical component becomes even more important, especially due to the role it can play in crucial business activities such as communication, decision-making, reward and training procedures, and ultimately power exercise: "Programme components such as training, reporting systems and feedback-gathering mechanisms must be accompanied by the development of a broader value-based culture that employees see as consistent and believable" (Moon and Bonny 2001, p. 37).

To conclude, this paper argues that, especially in the new political, social and economic environment, there is a call for a new and complex breed of decision-makers who, "if they are not themselves philosophers, are willing to trust the philosophical judgment of common citizens in the political arena" (Goulet 2002, p. 13). On a more pragmatic note, unless military managers at every hierarchical level are willing to assume genuine leadership roles and

value cultural diversity, conflict aspects such as the ones identified and discussed in this study cannot be constructively approached and solved, which will only result in dissatisfied employees and poor organisational performance.

1.7. Conclusions and proposals

In the light of the previous comprehensive examination of the concept of conflict in the military organisation, one may conclude upon the omnipresence of conflict potential and situations, given the staff diversity dominating the current organisational environment to a larger and larger scale. Therefore, resisting this trend will only result in poor organisational performance and dissatisfied employees, which is obviously an undesirable outcome. This is the reason why the present study argues that a constructive and productive approach to organisational conflict resides with ethics-based procedures combined with communication, empowerment, and motivation techniques meant to boost the subordinates' involvement in the organisational processes across the system.

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