

METHODS OF MANAGING CONFLICTS IN PROJECT MANAGEMENT

MIHAELA GHICAJANU *

ABSTRACT: *Conflicts occur daily in our lives. Some can range from a simple disagreement between individuals or groups to an extremely serious situation that can have negative business consequences. Conflicts can often arise within organizations and also within project work. The conflict in organizations and companies is a subject frequently treated in works, research studies and must also be in the concerns of the problems treated by the project managers. Therefore, in the following I will address an aspect that project managers should approach and treat with more interest, namely the management of conflicts generated within a project.*

KEY WORDS: *project, management, conflicts, communication, planning, controlling, stakeholders, collaborators, relationships.*

JEL CLASSIFICATIONS: *M12, M14, D74.*

1. COMMUNICATION IN PROJECTS

Communication represents an essential component in project management, starting from the planning and definition phase of the project, all the way through to its completion and closure. Effective and appropriate communication within a project can be a factor that influences the smooth progress and successful completion of the project, as well as strengthening relationships with external project participants such as partners and collaborators.. If these individuals are not regularly informed about the project's progress, the likelihood of encountering issues due to differing expectations may increase (Oprea D., 2011). In fact, in many cases where conflicts arise, the root cause is often deficiencies in communication and the unpreparedness of the client or manager for various emerging issues. In all projects, the status should be communicated, including project team reports to the project manager and the project manager's reports to collaborators and project participants.

*Assoc. Prof., Ph.D., University of Petroșani, Romania, ghicajanumihaela@yahoo.com

2. THE PROJECT MANAGER

In recent years, in the industrial and business environment, the profession of project manager has evolved, tasked with managing and leading the project team. The project manager must be present in all phases of the project life cycle, from initiation, planning, execution, monitoring/control, to project closure. Throughout the other phases of the project (planning, execution, control, and closure), the manager must navigate roles and responsibilities that involve the following leadership or management categories (Ghicaianu, 2021):

- *Integration management*: developing a project management plan; directing and managing all project work; monitoring and controlling project activities and managing any necessary changes; closing all project phases;
- *Scope management*: defining and managing the project scope, creating a work breakdown structure and collecting requirements; validating and controlling the project scope;
- *Time management*: planning, defining, and developing schedules, activities, estimating resources, and activity durations; controlling schedule adherence.
- *Cost management*: planning and estimating costs and determining budgets; controlling project costs;
- *Quality management*: planning and identifying quality requirements; performing all aspects of quality management; controlling the quality of delivered results;
- *Human resource management*: planning and identifying human resource needs; Selecting, developing, and managing the project team;
- *Communication management*: managing all communication aspects; controlling all team and stakeholder communications;
- *Risk management*: planning and identifying potential risks, conducting qualitative and quantitative risk analyses, and planning risk mitigation strategies;
- *Procurement management*: planning and identifying necessary acquisitions; taking measures to ensure necessary acquisitions; controlling acquisitions; closing all project acquisitions;
- *Stakeholder management*: planning for stakeholder expectations; managing all stakeholder expectations.

Efficient project managers need more than just technical knowledge. The role also requires a strategic business mindset, team-building and conflict resolution skills, expertise in change management, among many other necessary abilities. At a basic level, project managers must demonstrate leadership, be able to motivate team members, set priorities, and solve problems. Adaptability is another key non-technical skill that project managers need to succeed. Soft skills, such as effective communication skills of efficient project leaders, can also help project managers excel in this highly sought-after role today. Practice has shown that in large projects, to be a highly effective project manager, one must think strategically and be able to manage very large and numerous resources within the project. They must also be able to navigate inevitable failures with quick decisions, take risks and uncertainties, and at the

same time, adapt to the constantly changing dynamics of a project, prioritizing the needs of stakeholders above all else. Complemented with the necessary technical skills, a project manager with leadership qualities provides a solid foundation and assurance in the implementation and success of the project.

3. CONFLICTS IN PROJECT MANAGEMENT

The concept of conflict refers to both negative (unproductive) and positive (productive) conflict, with beneficial effects on the individual, group, or organization (Baros&Rizescu, 2005). Positive conflict can stimulate creativity and lead to the development of innovative solutions to certain problems.

According to the Oxford dictionary, conflict is defined as:

- "Struggle, quarrel, disagreement, difference of opinions";
- Conflict is generally defined as "a collision between elements or ideas that are hostile or opposed";
- "It can range from a mild disagreement to emotionally charged confrontations" (Guan, 2007, accessed at <https://www.pmi.org/>).

Project management brings together people with distinct personalities, education, experiences, skills, and, not least, different roles and responsibilities within the project team. Therefore, maintaining perfect harmony is difficult to achieve. In project management, depending on the stages of its development, various conflict situations can arise and manifest themselves (Ion, 2015):

- Within the project team;
- Between the project team and the managers of functional departments of the parent organization (so-called internal conflicts);
- Between project teams involved as direct partners;
- Between the project team and beneficiaries, suppliers, consultants, etc. (so-called external conflicts).

Next, we will present a situation analysis of external conflicts that arise between the main project contractor, collaborators, and the beneficiary.

4. CASE STUDY

4.1. Research conditions

The case study is presented without identification data of the parties involved in the project to protect personal data.

The project objective involves the execution of an electrical installation at a plant, with a project duration of 2 years. Three important parties are involved in the project: the company executing the project objective - an electrical installation at a plant (referred to as P1); the second company (P2), a collaborator in the execution of certain project works (assembly and implementation of the electrical installation); the project beneficiary, who has made the payment – (referred to as P3). Given the complexity of the analyzed project and the fact that the general contractor P1

subcontracted part of the project execution works to another company P2, there were several instances of misunderstanding during the project execution.

4.2. The purpose of the research

The main purpose of the study is to present the key aspects such as:

- The causes that can generate conflicts within a project involving multiple collaborators;
- The forms of manifestation of conflicts;
- The management and resolution of potential conflict situations;
- The effects on the project execution.

Thus, the research aimed to provide information and conflict management solutions to prevent such situations in future project implementations.

4.3. Research Methodology

To analyze the causes that generated these misunderstandings, their effects on the project and the involved parties, the implications on the beneficiary, and the methods, techniques, and solutions to resolve the misunderstandings, a questionnaire-based research was conducted. This questionnaire was adapted from another study for the presented situation (Manolescu & Prodan, 2006). The research was based on an analysis obtained from interviews with each involved party and the responses to the questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed to the project manager and project stakeholders - 6 people who were involved in all stages of the project: from development to implementation and completion. The questionnaire consisted of four main items, highlighting: 1) causes, 2) forms of manifestation, 3) conflict resolution methods, and 4) actions/measures taken, using a scale from 1 (never), 2 (sometimes), 3 (regularly), 4 (often), 5 (very often). For some items, elements characteristic of both projects and the organization were presented (e.g., group abandonment/resignations, review of activity/job descriptions), due to the strong interdependence between projects and current activities in some cases.

1). The causes of conflict manifestation or perception, assessed on a scale from 1-5

Table 1. Possible causes

Cause/Scale (1-Never, 2-Sometimes, 3-Regularly, 4-Often, 5-Very Often)
Lack of efficient communication
Deficiencies in managing human resources and required skills
Personality differences
Financial and budgetary issues (budget overrun)
Inadequate project management
Technical issues: lack of personnel
Non-compliance with deadlines and commitments
Differences In project priorities and objectives

2). **Forms of conflict manifestation**, rated on a scale from 1-5:

Table 2. Effects of causes

Form/scale (1-Never, 2-Sometimes, 3-Regularly, 4-Often, 5-Very often)
Communication breakdown and problem-solving difficulties
Dissatisfaction expressed through verbal violence and tensions
Demotivation of groups involved in the project
Team/project group abandonment
Refusal to perform certain tasks or work
Non-compliance, tense atmosphere

3). **Techniques or conflict resolution approaches used by the project manager or involved parties**, rated on a scale from 1-5:

Table 3. Intervention methods

Style, technique/scale (1-Never, 2-Sometimes, 3-Regularly, 4-Often, 5-Very Often)
Withdrawal (avoidance)
Open communication/Smoothing
Accommodation
Competition
Negotiation/Compromise

4). **Actions or measures taken to improve the situation**, rated on a scale from 1-5:

Table 4. Solutions

Action/scale (1-Never, 2-Sometimes, 3-Regularly, 4-Often, 5-Very often)
Periodic meetings
Discussions/Improving communication
Short briefing for information/coordination
Periodic reports/communications
Review of the activity list
Establishment of ethical and behavioral norms

4.4. Calculation method for results:

The frequency range for categorizing the calculated values (calculated through weighted averages) of the responses expressed by the 6 project managers.

$$\text{Weighted Average} = (1xfr1 + 2xfr2 + 3xfr3 + 4xfr4 + 5xfr5)/6 \quad (1)$$

Where:

1; 2; 3; 4; 5 = represents the scale from the questionnaire.

fr1, fr2, fr3, fr4, fr5 = the frequency of the response given for the values (ratings) 1;2;3;4;5.

The condition is for the sum: $fr1+fr2+fr3+fr4+fr5 = 6$ (the value of the 6 interviewed managers).

Table 5. Interpreting the frequency range

Minimum frequency interval(low)	1.0-2.5
Maximum frequency interval (high)	2.6-5.0

4.5. Interpretation of results

The results of the questionnaire can be systematized in the form of elements with maximum frequency (with average values between 2.5-5.0) and minimum (with average values between 1.0-2.4) within the analyzed project, indicating the average score obtained (Table no.6).

Table 6. Average score obtained of processed results

Item chestionar	Frequency range Min (reduced) 1.0-2.5	Frequency range max (high) 2.6-5.0
Causes	Technical issues:lack of personnel-2.4 Deficiensies in managing human resources and required skills-2.2 Non-compliance with deadlines and commitments-1.8 Inadequate project management-1.3	Lack of effective communication -4.1 Financial and budgetary issues (budgetary overrun)-3.8 Differences in project priorities and objectives-3.2 Personality differences-2.6
Manifestation frequency	Tense atmosphere and lack of trust-1.4 Team or project group abandonment-1.3 Misunderstandings and disputed regarding objectives,strategies, or decisions-1	Verbal confrontations and tensions among team members and partners-3.1 Refusal to collaborate or perform certain tasks-3.0 Communicatin breakdowns and difficulties in problem solving-2.6
Conflict resolution style frequency	Negotiation/compromise-finding common ground through negotiation and compromise-2.3 Accommodation-adapting to others' needs through accommodation and flexibility-2.2	Open communication/smoothing-promoting open communication and cooperation among all involved parties-4.2 Withdrawal/avoidance-avoiding conflict through withdrawal or avoidance-3.7 Smoothing and mediation for finding common solutions-3.5

Frequency of actions taken	Regular checking and updating of the activity list-2.2 Establishing rules and principles of ethical behavior-1.6	Improving dialogue and communication-4.6 Periodic reporting to keep involved parties informed about project developments and updates-3.8 Regular meetings, short briefing sessions for information and coordination.
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1. Causes that led to the emergence of conflicts:

Lack of effective communication - Score 4.1. Participants consider the lack of effective communication a frequent cause of conflicts. Possible reasons for this assessment may include incomplete or insufficient information, misinterpretation of messages, difficulties in expressing ideas clearly, or challenges in listening and understanding others.

Financial and budgetary issues(budget overrun)- 3.8. This score suggests that cost overrun can contribute to a considerable extent to the emergence of conflicts. Possible reasons for this result could include inadequate budget management, different prioritization of expenses, or difficulties in allocating financial resources.

Differences in project priorities and objectives – Score 3.2. The result indicated that disparities in individual priorities and objectives can contribute to the emergence of conflicts. Reasons for this response may include different perspectives on the importance of certain tasks or objectives, competition for limited resources, or difficulties in aligning the team's visions and values.

Technical issues:lack of personnel - Score : 2.4. The low score indicates that technical issues, such as a lack of personnel, have a limited influence on conflicts. Possible reasons for this result could include the availability of alternative solutions or reserve resources, a well-prepared technical team to handle issues, or the efficiency of existing technical systems and processes,.

Deficiencies in managing human resources and required skills-Score 2.2. The low score indicated that deficiencies in managing human resources and skills have a limited influence on conflict. Possible reasons for this result could include the proper selection and training of staff, active involvement in developing necessary skills.

Non-compliance with deadlines and commitments – Score 1.8. This score suggests that delays and non-compliance with commitments are considered frequent causes of conflicts. Possible reasons for this result include time pressure, resource overload, incorrect task prioritization, or a lack of individual responsibility in fulfilling commitments.

2.The way conflicts unfolded were:

Verbal confrontations and tensions among team members and partners - Score 3.1. This score suggests that verbal confrontations and tensions among team members and partners are quite frequent. Reasons: differences in opinions or perspectives, conflicts of interest, difficulties in managing emotions, or a lack of effective communication skills.

Refusal to collaborate or perform certain tasks - Score 3.0. This score indicates that refusing to collaborate or perform certain tasks is a frequent

manifestation of conflicts. Reasons: disagreements regarding responsibilities and duties, lack of motivation or commitment to the project, or personal conflicts among team members.

Communication breakdowns and difficulties in problem-solving - Average Score: 2.6. This score suggests that communication breakdowns and difficulties in problem-solving are relatively frequent within the team. Possible reasons: lack of clarity in information transmission, lack of problem-solving skills, deficiencies in communication processes, or communication conflicts among team members.

Tense atmosphere and lack of trust - Score 1.4. This score indicates that a tense atmosphere and lack of trust are low manifestations of conflicts within the team. Possible reasons: healthy and trusting relationships among team members, a positive working environment, and open communication.

Team or project group abandonment - Score 1.3. This score suggests that team or project group abandonment is a low manifestation of conflicts. Possible reasons: increased commitment and involvement of team members, proper conflict management, or the availability of alternative solutions for disengaged members.

Misunderstandings and disputes regarding objectives, strategies, or decisions. - Average Score: 1.0. Suggests that this manifestation of conflicts is very rarely encountered within the surveyed team, possibly because objectives are established from the beginning of the project.

3. *What were the techniques and conflict resolution styles used by managers and parties involved in the project?*

Promoting open communication and cooperation among all involved parties - Score 4.2. The score indicates that managers and involved parties place special emphasis on promoting open communication and cooperation among all project stakeholders. This suggests that they recognize the importance of efficient communication flow and active collaboration in conflict resolution, encouraging open dialogue and cooperation among team members and partners.

Avoiding conflict through withdrawal or avoidance - Score 3.7. The score suggests that avoiding conflict through withdrawal or avoidance is a technique or style used to some extent by managers and involved parties. This may indicate a preference for avoiding direct confrontations or tense situations to maintain harmony and balance within the team and the project.

Smoothing and mediating for finding common solutions - Score 3.5. The average score indicates that managers and involved parties resort to smoothing and mediation in conflict management to find common solutions. This suggests that they take on a mediator role and seek to facilitate dialogue and negotiations to reach consensus and solutions accepted by all parties.

Finding common ground through negotiation and compromise - Score 2.3. The score suggests that finding common ground through negotiation and compromise is used to a lesser extent in conflict management by managers and involved parties. This may indicate difficulties in reaching agreements or making compromises that satisfy all parties involved.

Adapting to others' needs through accommodation and flexibility - Score 2.2. The score suggests that adapting to others' needs through accommodation and

flexibility is used to a limited extent in conflict management by managers and involved parties.

4. What measures were taken to improve the situation?

The indicated scores suggest that the team took measures to improve dialogue and communication within the project. By assigning high values to these measures, the importance of open and effective communication for conflict management and improved collaboration among the involved parties is highlighted. Additionally, periodic reporting was used as a measure to keep involved parties informed about project developments and updates. This can contribute to clarity and transparency regarding project progress, reducing the possibility of misunderstandings and conflicts generated by incomplete or inaccurate information. Short briefing sessions for information and coordination were also implemented as a way to ensure that team members are informed and properly coordinated regarding project activities. Regular checking and updating of the activity list indicate attention to monitoring and maintaining a clear understanding of tasks and responsibilities, reducing the risk of confusion or misalignment regarding performed activities. Establishing rules and principles of ethical behavior highlights the importance of a working environment based on ethics and mutual respect, aiming to create a healthy and collaborative framework.

4.6. Research results

Conflictual causes identified in the case study:

Within the studied project, the most common causes of conflicts between the parties involved in the project, particularly between the general contractor and the main collaborator, were primarily: faulty communication; differences in personality; different priorities in pursued objectives; non-compliance with deadlines; technical issues; inadequate staffing; faulty project administration; cost overruns.

Furthermore, conflict sources varied, occurring at different stages of the project, including the planning, implementation, and completion phases, especially during the project's implementation phase.

Forms of conflict manifestation identified in the case study:

The main manifestations of misunderstandings between the project-involved parties, as identified in the research, included elements such as communication breakdown – verbal violence, disobedience; demotivation of involved groups; tense atmosphere; likelihood of group members leaving; refusal to perform certain activities.

Conflict resolution approaches identified in the case study: The primary conflict resolution styles and approaches between the project-involved parties, as identified in the research, were largely and frequently categorized as compromise, avoidance, and competition, with a lesser extent of accommodation and collaboration

Actions taken to resolve or mitigate identified conflicts in the case study:

The main actions taken to resolve or mitigate conflicts and misunderstandings among the project-involved parties, as identified in the research, were largely: discussions in the presence of the project coordinator; information and coordination

briefings; new forms of communication (regular meetings, periodic announcements); as well as: reviewing the activity list or establishing behavioural norms.

Significant negative consequences of conflicts within the studied project may include: loss of credibility in front of foreign partners; loss of funding; loss of credibility and collaboration with partner institution abroad; refusal to be part of teams with the same composition or to collaborate with the same partners.

5. CONCLUSION

In the context of projects, there are numerous factors that can lead to conflicts and tensions. These can arise between various stakeholders, including among project team members, between the project team and managers, internal conflicts, or between the project team and external parties such as clients or suppliers, external conflicts.

The causes of these conflicts can vary from issues related to deadlines and priorities to problems related to human resource management, technical issues, personality differences, and cost-related problems. Additionally, these sources of conflict may have different significance depending on the project stage. For example, during the project's conception and organization phase, conflicts may be more frequent concerning costs and technical issues, while at the project's completion, conflicts may be more frequent regarding project outcomes and completion deadlines.

Overall, the measures taken suggest a clear concern for improving communication, clarity, and collaboration within the project, essential aspects for the efficient management of conflicts and achieving desired results.

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