COLLABORATIVE DIMENSION IN CONFLICT MANAGEMENT WITHIN PRE-UNIVERSITY EDUCATION SYSTEM REGARDING HUMAN RESOURCE

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Abstract. In a society directed towards globalization, kneaded by crises on multiple plans, the educational conflict management is a complex and continuous process, its features being given not only by the amazing speed with which the society transcends space and time boundaries, but also by changes of impact on thought, conscience, attitudes and modes of action of human resources involved in the educational process. A critical view into the diachronism of conflict management theories reveals that on this plan the perspective has also changed; from the traditional conflict essentially negative, destructive to the positive, beneficial model.

For these reasons, the purpose of this research is to identify and analyse conflict situations in the pre-university education in Romania (particularly in Dambovita County) and also to highlight the main motivators, respectively de-motivators regarding teachers' work in pre-university education.

The collection of information was done by means of direct observation methods and documents study, the findings of this research indicating that currently, Romanian pre-university education undergoes a tense period. As a result, the teaching profession is characterized by many conflicts and low levels of motivation.

In conclusion, it is extremely important for us to realize the depth and nature of conflicts that education is facing. And in the process of trying to diminish or to solve the problems and challenges we face, we should ensure that we do not destroy teachers' motivation because this will have a negative impact on all stakeholders in the education field.

Key words: *human resources, conflict, pre-university education, motivation, communication*
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Introduction

Every day we face conflicts with our family members, colleagues or simply strangers. But how many times do we really resolve a conflict and how many times are we satisfied to get rid of the problem? (Kim S.H., 2012, p.105) And at the same time, given that teachers form the backbone of education, what impact

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do conflicts have at work on their motivation? Answering these questions will benefit teachers themselves, students, administrators and educational system in general (Kocabaş. I., 2009**, p.**725-726).

Considering that conflict case studies contribute to the enrichment and refinement of theoretical knowledge, but especially to the development of the applied side of educational management, this article aims to analyze the situation and the impact of conflict in educational organization dynamics from Dambovita County, using for this purpose a wide variety of methods for collecting and processing data (direct observation, document analysis).

Thus, we can say that this article has as fundamental coordinates: education, human resources and conflict in pre-university education, which are also permanent elements of human existence in everyday social life.

1. Theoretical framework

1.1. Conflict – a reality in any organization

Once Romania joined the European Union, the educational system crosses a profound transformation period in all its levels, the current socio-economic context threatening though the national capacity to achieve common European goals to expand and improve education. Under these conditions, the large number of conflicts represents a warning for the managerial behavior in the educational system where the specific line, drawn on prevalent human value losses on financial ones, requires close monitoring of conflicting tensions since the first signs of their occurrence.

An imperative requirement of modern conflict management necessary for the opportunity to settle it, but not sufficient, is to create a communication channel between conflicting parties: students, parents, representatives of authorities at different levels, managers of pre-school teams and pupils, managers of the school or educational authority departments such as inspectorates; in this context we add motivating the parties to communicate and not to escalate conflict by avoiding patterns of constraints and threats, considered to be wrong reflexes.

In a modern analysis, avoiding conflict appears as an "expensive option" (http://www.capital.ro. *Interviu cu Daniel Dana*, 2003) because the modern world is built on a complicated system of interdependence, and continuing professional responsibilities excludes such drastic measure to terminate the relationships within the organization. Alternative reflex of the coercive force, although it may appear useful on short term, is generating negative feelings and attitudes including humiliation, anger, revenge. Recession and intimidation, even disguised as modern, sophisticated forms, are approaches of the conflict designed to increase stress within the organization and exacerbate the tense especially in times of economic recession.

Conflicts arise in educational organizations regardless of their type: kindergarten, elementary schools, high schools and school groups, children's clubs and sports and so on, their size, their level: standard schools, European schools, national colleges, special schools, their age, but conflicts are influenced by organizational culture and tradition in reverse proportion.

Conflict management in educational space refers to the specific planning process of management activity meaning the probability of avoiding conflicts, of organization in order to reduce and/or resolve conflict emerged "in a quite quickly and correct way" (http://www.etu.org.za/toolbox – *Conflict Management*) and implementing positivity ways of its impact in the *learning organization*.

If the *conflict management* phrase is generally accepted, that of conflict resolution is under discussion, ranging between the concepts of *non-resolving problems* and *no conflict without resolution*. Therefore, solutions can be located at different points on the scale from positive to negative, including recession and coercion options, as well as solving type "avoiding the boulder out of the way"

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(http://www.capital.ro.*Interviu cu Daniel Dana*, 2003), although it is desirable for any conflict to find a "win-win" solution for all parties involved. Even if this is not happening, the result should not be considered in terms of gain and loss of each of the parties, but at the educational level of life as an improvement for all, focused on the things which there should be an agreement on, common values, the development of specific skills, the accumulation of experience.

Under these conditions, cooperation between all components of management is vital; by conjugating actions is recognized the importance of the work to develop and maintain the interrelationship system to a level that would prevent and minimize dimensional transformation of a dispute in destructive conflict.

Cooperation requires from this angle a professional behavior based on the communion of values, priorities and interests. Both within the management team and outside it, the educational organization, in partner and associated institutions may occur complaints, quarrels, mutual accusations, attempts to avoid responsibility, confrontation which must be prevented, monitored and resolved using methods and techniques designed to redress the impact on foundations that can provide adequate functionality of the institution providing education services; references are made in this regard, on the one hand towards the identification of negative effects on mechanisms of institution gears and the supervision of generating factors, on the other hand towards the mediation, conciliation, arbitration of human resources affected to return to a work environment favorable to achieve envisaged objectives.

1.2. Impact of conflict on teachers' motivation

The literature states that "the conflict is not a problem, but the poor quality of conflict management" (http://managementhelp. Org/interpersonal/conflict – Carter McNamara – *Clarifying Confusion About Conflict*) in case they obstruct the educational process in any of its components (teaching, consolidation, evaluation etc.), human resources involved are de-motivated and cause numerous escalations leading to improper conduct of high standards of a learning environment dedicated to his mission.

Although the employees' motivation is a critical element in terms of its influence on individual performance and capacity of the education system to achieve its objectives (Müller, K., Alliata, R., Benninghoff, F., 2009, p. 595), conflicting moods of the school, specifically intellectual labor consumption associated with reduced possibilities of promotion compared to the private sector, growing number of job tasks and a more hectic workday, misbehavior of directors and inspectors, have resulted in a major decline of teachers' motivation at work (Skaalvik, E.M., Skaalvik, S., 2011, p. 1031).

Also, teachers' dismissal due to budget constraints, low wages in education, discipline problems or disruptive behavior of students (Skaalvik, E.M., Skaalvik, S., 2011, p.1035), evaluation grids without objectivity, egalitarian motivation achieved not by employee performance, but according to the terms of service affects negatively teachers' motivation.

Under these conditions, a low motivation of teachers is reflected in a deterioration of standards of professional conduct, in major frustrations evidenced by negligence, carelessness, "avoiding responsibility" (http://managementhelp. Org/interpersonal/conflict – Carter McNamara – *Clarifying Confusion About Conflict*), absenteeism, misuse of teaching equipment, non-purchase or information distortion that do nothing but to perpetuate conflicts and determine sharper conflict cost share, thus creating a conflict spiral where motivation and conflicts are cause and effect, fueling each other (Bennell, P., 2004, pp. 8-9).

Considering that an efficient educational system cannot exist without a competent, well trained and dedicated teaching staff (Cicea, C., 2004, p. 102), and the formation of students' desired behavior is closely linked to teachers' motivation levels and also teachers' attitude and behavior, it is necessary to realize the depth and nature of conflicts in education and to limit their impact on the motivation of human resources involved in the educational process.

2. Findings and discussion

Analyzing the situation of Dambovita County pre-university education, in 2009-2012 we have noticed a restriction of the school network, due in part to the current socio-economic context and various demographic factors. Under these conditions, the total number of schools decreased from 654 to 614 educational institutions. Also, the number of students enrolled in school decreased from 81766 to 77296 students.

All these changes have imposed a downward trend on the number of teachers in Dambovita County, recording a decline of 6.61%. Thus, out of 5943 teachers in the school year 2009-2010 only 5550 teachers have continued in subsequent school years.

Performing an analysis of teachers in Dambovita County schools, we have seen that in the school year 2011-2012 is kept the same age structure as in previous years, teachers aged between 30 and 45 years being the most numerous (2519 teachers), and the opposite still hovering teachers under the age of 30 years (910 teachers). Also, the analysis of teachers depending on their teaching grades obtained show a predominance of 1st grade teachers (2265 teachers), while debutants and PhD teachers are the least numerous (only 548, respectively 35 teachers).

Analyzing the situation of petitions/complaints/intimations in the past two school years, there has been a reduction in the number of petitions (in 2009-2010 school year were 60 petitions and in 2010-2011 there were 57, with less than 3 petitions which represents a decrease of 5.3% of petitions/intimations). Also, for the first semester of school year 2011-2012 was monitored the settlement activity of a total of 23 petitions – 2 fewer than the first semester of the previous school year – which reported a series of failures in the pre-university educational system in Dambovita County.

Analyzed by the domain of activity the situation is as follows:

Table 1

Educational conflict situation in Dambovita County according to the domain of activity

Crt. no.	Contents	Addressed to I.S.J	Addressed to M.E.C.T.S.	Addressed to County Council/ Prefecture
1.	Managerial activity of principals	–	3	1
2.	Teaching, auxiliary and non-teaching staffing (restraints, transfers, detachments, competition) and labor rights complaints	2	2	2
3.	Relationship teacher – student/parent	9	2	–
4.	Complaints of local community	1	1	–
5.	Other issues	12	8	3
	Total	**23**		

Source: Report on education, available on the website of Dambovita County School Inspectorate – http://isj-db.ro/

Following an operative analysis of progress and dysfunctions occurred in order to stimulate, revaluate, resolve and eliminate them in time with effectiveness and objectivity we can draw the following ideas:

- Issues claimed by petitioners who addressed to the School Inspectorate are related to employment, job continuity, detachment, recognition of seniority within the department, misconduct of some principals and teachers, cases of violence between pupils or verbal and physical aggression on

pupils by teachers, school minibuses request, compulsory class attendance by students of foreign nationality, establishment of new groups of kindergarten, poor condition of school building.

- Petitioners who addressed to Dambovita County Council signaled issues regarding social grants, misconduct of some principals and teachers, compulsory class attendance by students of foreign citizenship, poor condition of school building.
- The resolution of complaints and petitions by Dambovița County School Inspectorate was made promptly. Progress/dysfunction occurred to stimulate, revaluate, resolve and eliminate them in time with effectiveness and objectivity was operative analyzed.

By cumulating the analysis results of human resources situation in the educational system with the results of conflict situation analysis in the pre-university education in Dambovita County we can highlight the main positive aspects and those that need to be improved in terms of conflict situations management.

Table 2

The main positive aspects and aspects that need to be improved in terms of human resources and conflict situations in pre-university education in Dambovita County

Pozitive aspects	Aspects that need to be improved
• Existence and observance of the procedure for resolving complaints; • Professional training of people responsible for resolving complaints; • Proper functioning of collective management bodies; • Effective communication; • Tenure teachers are the majority of all teachers in Dambovița County (about 83.74%) being distributed approximately equally between urban and rural areas; • Unqualified or ongoing qualification substitute teachers are less than 1% of all substitute teachers; • Educational programs and partnerships on conflict prevention among students and non-violence education prove to be not only frequent in schools but also in centers of interest for many school organizations and for organizations of polarization of community attitudes towards transformations of thought, attitude and action, oriented towards strength in dealing with the wave of verbal and physical aggression, differences and conflicts in the school.	• Due to the socio-economic context, the number of teachers in schools in Dambovita County decreased with 6.61% (from 5943 in 2010-2011 school year to 5550 in 2011) – drop that can have serious consequences on their motivation; • More careful management of potential conflicts; • High number of dropouts which can be a major source of de-motivation for teachers in the county – thus, only in the 2010-2011 school year were recorded 204 dropout cases; • Teachers aged 30-45 years represent the majority of pre-university teachers in Dambovita County (45.38% of total teachers), while teachers aged under 30 years are the least numerous (16.39%) which can be a warning sign for young people willingness to choose the pre-university education as a profession; • Also, teachers with less than 5 years of service represent the largest category of teachers (about 18.66% of the total 8 stages of seniority) which brings into focus the retention capacity of teachers in the education system.

Source: authors' contribution based on documents research

Also, as a result of direct observation of a sample of fifteen high schools in Dambovita County, we can highlight a number of motivational and de-motivational factors in relation to the work of teachers in pre-university education.

Table 3

**The main motivational and de-motivational factors in relation to the work
of teachers in pre-university education**

Motivational factors	De-motivational factors
• Relationship of respect and collaboration between teachers; • Positive results at examinations, seminars, competitions and school Olympiads; • Teachers participation in training courses; • Positive relationships with parents; • Pleasant atmosphere at the work; • Obtaining teaching degrees; • Participation in international exchanges; • Teacher involvement (as member or coordinator) in POSDRU projects, Comenius, etc; • Students interest in extracurricular activities; • Positive influence that teachers may have on students; • Partnerships with other educational establishments in the country or in other countries; • Recognition of teachers' credit from managers of some educational establishments; • Opportunity of using modern means of teaching – in some educational establishments; • Pleasure of working with students; • Modernization of some laboratories, classrooms; • Having a position of teaching committee responsible; • Positive results in school inspections.	• Misbehavior and disinterest from students; • Poor performance of students in national examinations; • Overload curriculum; • Multiple reforms of the national education system; • High frequency of inspections of CSI and the Ministry of Education; • Poor working conditions (cold in classrooms); • Giving gradations of merit and leadership positions on political criteria; • Not settling transportation; • High absenteeism of students, especially commuter students; • Differential treatment of some teachers from school management; • Lack of teaching support by local authorities; • Wage cuts; • Salary inequity to the effort – many teachers believe to be more motivated professionally if the salary would be higher in order to reflect the real efforts of teachers; • Feeling of powerlessness to change/improve teaching, the educational system; • Too many administrative tasks – to the detriment of effective teaching; • Damaging the image and social status of teachers.
Motivational factors	**De-motivational factors**
	• Lack of resources needed for developing the activity under optimum conditions; • Inconsistent disciplinary measures in some schools; • Professional promotion on criteria other than performance; • Involvement of political factor in pre-university education system; • Negative impact of media on students; • Disinterest of some parents of the pupils; • Lack of long-term safety of the job; • Insufficient involvement of teachers in decision-making.

Source: authors' contribution based on documents research

Synthesizing the results of the analyses conducted, it may reveal the negative trend regarding the school network and human resources in pre-university education, which is a warning for their motivation to engage in an educational quality process.

At the same time, these analyses bring into question the issue of conflicts in school institutions, various, complex and sometimes complicated issues which pleads for a careful attitude of managers providing constant care for environment (at the organization level as well as within each category of human resources), efficient communication and collaboration (Jinga, I., 2009, p.110). However, decreased number of conflicts is a first step towards an efficient pre-university education system in Dambovita County.

Conclusion and proposals

The situation analysis of human resources and conflicts in Dambovita County educational environment can provide a clear picture of the importance of teacher motivation. Thus, teacher motivation is the central element of their own performance and also of their students, the achievement of organizational goals and educational reforms and solving conflict situations and reducing conflict spiral.

Given the negative impact that the current socio-economic context exercises over the education system, school success depends – now more than ever – on the motivation of human resources working in these institutions.

Differences in attitudes, values, priorities, lifestyles, perceptions and interests arise in any important relationship at work, in family or in the community and generates many times conflicts affecting not only the employees of the educational institution, but also the one positioned in the core of the educational process – the student.

Issues raised in letters, complaints, appeals and intimations laid down at hearings were resolved in compliance with the applicable law and jurisdiction by inspectors appointed by the management of Dambovita County School Inspectorate.

It is a fact that not all conflicts can be resolved in a positive manner, but those where the intention of cooperation through negotiation, mediation, arbitration are present bring benefits to the educational organization. Argumentative and persuasive speech provides efficiency to the communication – fundamental element of the educational process with bipolar function: communication is repeatedly generating conflicts but also solving conflicts.

Considering the profound implications that conflict situations have on human resources involved in the educational process, each participant in a conflict learn or should learn something: to prevent, avoid, face, solve such a social "asymmetry"; mutually, members of any organization providing education, whether educated or educators, learn or should learn, both theoretical and practical, what conflict means and what are the benefits of cooperative solutions.

After analyzing the motivational situation of teachers in Dambovita County, it may reveal a predominance of demotivating factors (as identified 24 major demotivating factors) to the detriment of motivating factors (the research conducted revealing only 17 primary motivating factors). This situation may be explained in part by the many budgetary restrictions (restrictions due to the global financial crisis which, since late 2010, has made its effects felt in a steady pace in the economic, political and social Romanian environment) that the education system had to cross in recent years, and also by the sharp deterioration of social image of teachers in Romania.

The main motivating factors identified in this research were the positive results that students have acquired in competitions and examinations, the good atmosphere at work and also the teachers merit recognition by the head of school units.

Teachers surveyed appreciate that their professional motivation recorded a declining trend in particular due to the inappropriate behaviour and the apathy of some of the students, inadequate conditions of work in some schools units, the sense of not being able to improve the education system, as well as administrative tasks too numerous.

Quick changes in teaching activity and those determined by the educational reform represent a major demotivating factor and thus a potential source of conflict.

Most teachers members of the target group of this research states that are professionally demotivated and that only professional ethics, commitment and dedication to this profession and also the pleasure of working with students still motivates them to continue their work at educational standards imposed at national and European level.

Considering the socio-economic reality, school managers should place special emphasis on moral motivation of teachers (teacher merit recognition, participation in personal and professional training and so on) in an attempt to compensate, even partially, the salary situation unfair to them and their effort in order to avoid possible conflict situations.

In conclusion, managers of pre-university education institutions in Dambovita County must create a motivating learning environment in which the baseline to be the resolution and not the elimination, suppression or avoidance of problems because, essentially, a conflict is a difference of opinions or ideas and not an insurmountable obstacle (Kim S.H., 2012, p.106).

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