

Historical, Theoretical and Methodological Aspects of Conflicts

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.61446/ds.2.2023.7399>

Article History:

Received 15 September 2023
Accepted 20 October 2023
Published 25 December 2023

Abstract

The present paper deals with the scientific assessment of the origin, prevention and regulation of conflicts as one of the challenging problems in the world.

It is common knowledge that conflicts are the concomitant phenomena of human relations and are defined by both subjective and objective attitudes. The study of conflicts dates back to ancient times. In Western science, it is also considered a means of development. Considering these facts, we have discussed and analyzed the opinions of the English philosophers and sociologists along with the standpoints of various scholars like R. Park, L. Coser, G. Simmel, R. Dahrendorf, A. Adler, Z. Freud, etc.

The present paper discusses the nature, types, and management techniques of conflict as well as the key influencing factors to be taken into account when diagnosing the conflict.

In addition, the papers emphasize the crucial importance of negotiations as the best means of communication and the contributing factor to conflict regulation, and draws a parallel between the two relationships - **conflict regulation** and **conflict elimination** (when talking about the ways of conflict resolution) that may lay the foundation for a new conflict in the future.

The paper provides examples of the development of violent conflict in a non-communicative, unstable, unjust, frightening and extremely negative emotional background that causes severe mental trauma and pain and is passed on to the next generation (For example, the Civil War in Georgia, Conflicts of Abkhazia and the so-called South Ossetia, Russo-Georgian War in August, 2008, etc.).

Within the framework of the paper, we considered it necessary to analyze **peace** as the opposite event of conflict and discussed the concept of “dynamic stability” based on the example of August War in Georgia. When approaching the issue of a conflict situation, we identified four types of attitudes: conflict management, resolution, transformation and complete elimination, where the specific conflict situation and environment must be taken into account (For example, the Kosovo conflict in 1999 that was an open conflict resulted in the death and displacement of lots of people). We have noted that such conflicts require both settlement and resolution.

Thus, scientific assessment of the conflict helps to identify optimal management options. Considering the situational analysis is an important factor for eliminating the local conflicts, so that it does not spiral into a conflict of systemic nature.

Keywords:

conflict, violence, regulation, elimination, transformation, peace.

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Introduction

Conflict is the disruption caused by differing thoughts, wants or ideas. This can be good or bad depending on the type of conflict. Conflict can be broken down into four types: interpersonal, intrapersonal, intergroup and intragroup³. These four types of conflict fit into two general fields: internal and external conflict.

The study of conflicts dates back to ancient times, and conflict as such is frequently considered a tool for development. For example, some of the English philosophers and sociologists regarded conflict as a phenomenon that contributed to the social development of society. In addition, both positive and negative role of conflict in society was identified.

We find the attempts of rational generalization of conflicts in the works of ancient and old-time scholars. Scholars of all times were interested in studying the conflict situations. Despite a long history of such interest and research, the process of “conflict” has not yet been fully studied and understood. The authors of the modern Chicago School of human relations believe that it is necessary to avoid conflicts and here, they emphasize the role of a manager as the principal resource of eliminating tensions between different groups. They also hold that effective organizational management and building healthy relationships prevent conflicts from spreading.

Main Part

One of the founders of the Chicago School and the author of the Social Psychology textbook **Robert Park** discusses the conflict among the basic forms of social interaction. American sociologist **Lewis Coser** considers conflict as an ideological manifestation. He is also the author of the theory of Positive Function of Conflict⁴.

In this regard, one should mention the work of **Georg Simmel** as the author of the functional theory of conflicts. In the 60s of the 20th century, the German scientist **Ralf Dahrendorf** came up with a discussion of social conflicts, which was later called the “Conflict Models in Society”.

Scholars distinguish between conflict and violence. In 1908, **Alfred Adler** formulated the theory of “aggression drive”. **Sigmund Freud** who also devoted his works to this issue later analyzed the “dual-nature” of human being and came to the conclusion that the individual combined two instincts - life and death instincts, i.e. love and destruction, aggression and violence.

After building the tribal and communal system along with the state formation, the manifestation of violence and aggression became stronger – in addition to subsistence needs, the need for leadership, power, etc. came into existence for human. In most cases, he fulfilled these needs by using forceful methods. A vivid example for this is considered to be the Spanish dynastic or Carlist Wars in the 19th century between the Spanish Bourbon dynasties.

Some of the scientists believed, that man was not considered an aggressor, but the concern for existence to fulfill his needs made him an aggressor. Over time, the population growth could not stand against this demand. Proceeding from this provision, conflict and aggression are inevitable concomitants of development. We can neither run away from nor avoid it. Hence, the main thing is to learn the techniques of how to manage, transform and turn it from a negative side into a positive one.

Conflict research is conducted deeply and thoroughly using the knowledge of various fields: politics, history, pedagogy, law, psychology, sociology, philosophy, military science, etc. Accordingly, there are several methods of conflict resolution: philosophical and social, organizational and social, individual, psychological, and so on.

When it comes to the conflict, the question of diagnosing it, i.e. which stage it belongs to, comes to the fore. Diagnosis involves sources of conflict, subjective and objective experiences of the parties, “fighting” methods, showing resistance, needs of contacts, interests, and so on. In conflict situations, crises are turning points since conflict develops and progresses. Conflict may involve a person, group or a system as a whole. The opposing parties can resolve the conflict themselves according to their hopes, expectations, and terms. It may be provoked by the party with a subjective reason that maintains the tension.

When defining the nature of a conflict situation, understanding the problem adequately by each party helps to eliminate this confrontation. When diagnosing a conflict, it is quite difficult to have a subjective factor involved. Here the main thing is to determine the key factors such as defining and identifying the conflict and its participants, interests, background, positions and their role in the emergence and development of the conflict as well as conducting the negotiations.

At the initial stage, it is important to take the nature of conflict emergence into consideration. It

³ <https://study.com/learn/lesson/what-is-conflict-sources-types.html>

⁴ Summary of “The Functions of Social Conflict”, <https://www.beyondintractability.org/bksum/coser-functions>

is not necessarily significant for it to be related to the basic essence of the problem. At the second stage, the key participants of the conflict are identified, including the entire groups or organizations, political party, government, opposition, outside forces, state, etc. In situations like this, negotiation is of crucial importance as the best means of communication and helps to handle the conflict since it covers many areas.

Scholars also talk about various methods of managing conflicts, and therefore there are many ways and methods to resolve them. Among them, we can identify intrapersonal, structural, personal and other methods that are used to resolve individual, social, ethno-political, military and other types of conflicts.

It is obvious that the problem of analysis comes first in this situation. In terms of emergence and development of the conflict, which incorporates a combination of political, economic, inter-ethnic, territorial and other interests, it may start from a regional level and, in individual cases, spiral into a global one. Accordingly, hidden, superficial and open conflicts are identified. The best example of this was Abkhazia, which, historically, was not a conflict-free region and was characterized by all the aspects mentioned above.

Hidden conflict may have deep historical roots. That is why it is essential to find its causes and prevent and avoid its external manifestations.

Superficial conflict is not the one characterized by destructive effects. It can be caused by misunderstanding of the goals. In such cases, the solution depends on the effectiveness of communication.

When we talk about the ways of conflict resolution, it is necessary to draw a parallel between two relationships: a) **conflict regulation** that involves a peaceful and negotiated settlement of the conflict, and b) **conflict elimination** that may lay the foundation for a new conflict in the future. A conflict situation implies the emergence of new, serious problems as much as it implies its resolution.

Violent conflict evolves in a non-communicative, unstable, unjust, frightening and extremely negative emotional background that causes severe mental trauma and pain and is passed on to the next generation. It is characterized by the Boomerang Principle (For example, the Civil War in Georgia, Conflicts of Abkhazia and the so-called South Ossetia, Russo-Georgian War in August, 2008, etc.).

Suppressing the conflict by violent ways prevents the members of society from thinking properly, establishing relationships and pursuing activities. For example, let's consider the conflict between Russia and Georgia. The majority of social groups believe that historically Russia has always treated Georgia illegally, oppressing and devastating the country. Similar precedents still exist today. Such injustice cannot be easily forgotten as it is determined by the psychological factor: fear and the will to take revenge. When such factors impede conflict resolution and the confrontation moves from the individual scale to the national one, force is likely to be used. Suppressed conflicts often provide fertile ground to different types of policy makers and adventurers. They try to use the support of the oppressed to gain influence.

There are some exceptions as well when suppression of the conflict is necessary if provoked by a certain group and threatens the national identity, the state constitution and the interests of wider population.

The use of force, without doing harm to people, is only justified to liberate them from authoritarian and repressive regimes. It is there where torture of people and restriction of rights take place. There are some social groups who believe that the use of force is not admissible in any situation. For example, the exiled Tibetan leaders who follow Dalai Lama are committed to the principle of the non-use of force and are thus adapting to China's occupation of Tibet. A similar situation takes place in an armed confrontation between Palestine and Israel where force is often used against people despite being seen as supporters. It is difficult to fully protect human life in a hostile environment, in spite of many international agreements.

The use of total force and total non-violence are both extremes. There is also a golden ratio between them - non-violent but active demonstrations: movements for human rights, women's rights, religious minorities, anti-nuclear, anti-global, environmental protection, etc.

As far as we are aware, peace is the opposite to force. In fact, there is no such thing as absolute peace. Various social, economic, and political changes are constantly taking place. Peace becomes valuable once we lose it. Conflict can take violent and non-violent forms, and in order to denote the latter the Oxfam (international development and aid organization in the United Kingdom) office established the concept of 'dynamic stability'⁵. Everyone ranging from the individual to the highest authorities of the government should try to keep, maintain and build peace. For example, in August 2008, various international and government organizations were involved to help the local government in building the houses for the population displaced as a result of the war. They were able to engage the population affected by the conflict into joint activities and contribute to peace building (ownership and maintenance of the houses).

⁵ <https://www.oxfam.org/en/what-we-do/issues/conflicts-and-disasters>

When approaching the issue of a conflict situation, we can identify four types of attitudes towards it: conflict management, resolution, transformation and complete elimination.

Out of the four types of approaches to the conflict listed above, the one will be considered effective if it takes into account the national, historical and current situation. **Conflict management** involves weakening the power and emphasizing and promoting the positive actions of the conflict parties. This is a kind of prevention to avoid similar conflicts in the future or to make it a long and manageable process.

Conflict resolution involves finding and likely eliminating the root causes of the conflict, showing each cause to the opposite parties and making them understand these sources. This process helps to resolve the conflict and establish long-term and desirable relationships. Essentially, it is associated with open conflicts.

Conflict transformation involves turning negative attitudes into positive changes, which requires long-term diplomatic efforts.

Complete elimination of the conflict is actually impossible. A specific conflict situation and environment should be taken into account here. After reconciling the positions and ascertaining the truth, the conflict may disappear completely. This type of conflict is primarily manifested in interpersonal relationships. For example, the Kosovo conflict in 1999 was an open conflict resulted in the death and displacement of lots of people. Such conflicts require both settlement and resolution. After the end of the Kosovo War, the transformation of the conflict continued through long-term investments. This fact confirms that conflict regulation addresses different types of attitudes.

The causes of the conflict may be identity, public attitude, religious belief, culture, etc. In order to eliminate this kind of conflict, we'd like to address different theoretical approaches such as methods of communication and negotiations. It is preferable not to use any specific theory but to create a general combination. Conflict transformation is advisable for negative attitude if any. It is about building long-term relationships and improving mutual trust. It is desirable that culture and human relations should be widely involved in it.

When analyzing the conflict, it is necessary to identify objective and neutral attitudes. Here, personal experiences are of great importance and it is advisable to use them when developing the methods of conflict analysis. Conflict analysis helps us identify optimal management options. Considering the situational analysis is an important factor for liquidating the local conflicts, so that they do not spiral into a conflict of systemic nature. The development of situational analysis is significantly related to the study of methodological issues of the conflicts. Systemic approach is preferable to be used to regulate the conflicts. It is the way to effectively achieve your goal.

There are theories on conflict resolution in which the authors talk about the levers and factors that can lead to the resolution of conflicts and various types of confrontations. Among these theories, Johan Galtung's Positive and Negative Peace is an interesting one. It was first voiced in 1964 by the author claiming that there is negative peace, which is the absence of direct violence, the absence of war, and positive peace that implies the integration of humane society. According to this theory, examples of negative peace include multilateralism, arms control, international conventions, strategies for balance of power, etc., while examples of positive peace are the improvement of human relations through communication, peace education, cooperation, arbitration, conflict management and so on⁶.

Admittedly, the theory of international conflicts identifies other effective methods of influencing the conflict parties, among which the following can be found:

- Humanitarian operations;
- Economic sanctions;
- Information operations;
- Settlement of the conflict by a peaceful political-diplomatic way with the involvement of a third party interested in conflict settlement;
- Conflict resolution by military intervention, etc.

Conclusion

Thus, the events throughout the world are rapidly changing, but the essential nature of politics remains the same. The struggle for order and justice as well as for power keeps going on.

In general terms, due to the nature of the conflict, its resolution and suppression is complicated by the fact that each party involved perceives the same problem in a different way. This is where a valid strategy should be developed to identify how the country should be engaged in order to prevent anticipated threats and conflicts. When developing a strategy, it is of paramount importance to involve qualified specialists to provide relevant recommendations.

It goes without saying that diplomacy played an important role in the development of the conflict

⁶ https://buildingpeaceforum.com/no/fred/Positive_Negative_peace.pdf

resolution strategy. In this case it was significant not to worry about the elimination of the conflict in general, but to find the root causes and prevent the conflict situation that reached peak level and entered a deadlocked state due to the failure of diplomacy.

Historically, diplomacy has never been a means of providing total victory or defeat. However, diplomatic course involves patience to win the hard-fought victory⁷.

Obviously, the political, economic and cultural changes in the world launched in the middle of the 20th century are the object of judgment by scientists, historians, political scientists, economists, sociologists, lawyers, philosophers and representatives of other disciplines. In this regard, special emphasis should be laid on the monographs, books, textbooks, letters, articles, etc. by the outstanding figures such as H. Kissinger, Z. Brzezinski, A. Giddens, J. Norberg, U. Beck, S. Helmer, P. Moreau, J. Rosenau, S. Huntington, H. Martin, I. Vasilenko, I. Wallerstein, F. Fukuyama, etc.

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