Conflicts - Crisis Management in Education Unit

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Abstract The adaptation of administration, in the context of an educational unit, has always been a hot argued issue and simultaneously it is an important aspect of its functioning. For the successful implementation of the education administration, it is necessary to involve several factors who offer help in their adoption and pose problems. The operation of each educational unit follows a set of operating rules defined centrally by the responsible ministry to which it belongs. Despite the importance of the concept of administration, until recently its application to the educational process is considered weak. There are quite a lot of black spots in clarifying the concept while there is confusion with the concept of management. In the context of the present study, the theoretical approach of the administrative science to the educational units is attempted in managing conflicts arising during its operation.

Introduction
Conflicts in Educational Unit
Defining the concept of conflict in the school unit
In each educational organization, people of different cultural and social strata, different sexes, different ages and different interests (students, teachers, managers) live and associate. Around each organization are parents, local community actors, senior executives. This coexistence leads to the creation of various interpersonal conflicts or conflicts manifested in the form of disagreement, aggression or passive resistance [1].

Conflict is defined as a situation in which elements (interests, attitudes, opinions, competencies) coexist or obstruct the existence of the other [2].

Usually, our first thought is how to avoid, since it is closely related to the stability and good functioning of the school and can have a devastating effect due to the indifference, the anxiety, the aggression and the lack of communication [3]. Conflict is perceived as a negative concept. Few understand that the conflict also has positive aspects, such as to improve the quality of decision-making, to explore alternatives, to increase team consistency, stimulate creativity, reduce tensions and dissatisfaction [4].

It is more realistic to consider that conflicts have both positive and negative effects.

Positive effects of conflicts
- New ideas
- They lead to innovations and changes
- Better decisions
- They stress the need to adapt administrative procedures
- The causes of a problem / subject become clear / understandable
- Increase participation
- They create spontaneous reactions (communication)

- Strengthen relations when they are positively resolved on both sides
- Likely to increase productivity

Negative effects of conflicts
- Waste of energy
- Reduce morale (less job satisfaction)
- Grow / deepen the differences
- Prevent co-operation
- They create irresponsible behavior
- They create suspicion and distrust among the conflicting ones
- They result in productivity reduction
- They lead to biased decisions

Conflict, either as a concept of honest disagreement or as a conflict of interests or personalities, is not only inevitable but also a valuable part of school life [5], because it guarantees that all the parameters of a problem and all alternative solutions will be examined, which will lead to new ways of action that might not have been explored without it.

Conflict manifests itself as a form of interaction between individuals who have relationships of dependence with one another, while usually manifests itself as opposition between objectives, values or goals [6].

Another definition of conflict states that the groups whose interests are conflicting try to achieve their goals and interests [7]. Also, an alternative approach to the conflict states that it is the real difference of opinion, which stems from the different attitudes and ways of action [6].

In every business or organization, when referring to the concept of conflict, the term of difference between the needs, objectives and interests of the different individuals is used as a common component. There is also a sense of distinction between one person's intervention towards another in order to achieve the organization's predetermined goals while at the same time satisfying their needs [8]. It is useful to note that there are many who argue that the phenomenon of conflict can be traced to any business or organization as a factor that helps to improve the efficiency of the operation of the organization [9].

In terms of a school unit it is worth stressing that the occurrence of a conflict does not always concern a negative phenomenon while its absence can create indifference and apathy in terms of human potential. The emergence of a conflict is able to mobilize the members of the educational unit to act in the direction of curtailing it. In such cases, a conflict can help identify problems that could have remained unknown. With the emergence of a conflict, it is possible to find new ways of action and deal with it, which assists in improving the efficiency of the organization or business.

Causes of Conflict

The ability to locate the causes of crises is the cornerstone for dealing with them successfully. The main causes of conflicts are categorised as internal or external, and are mainly addressed to the environment of the educational unit. As is well understood by the name of the causes, the internal causes concern the internal environment of the educational unit while the external causes concern the external environment [10].

In an attempt to analyze the internal causes, they can be divided into those of organizational structure, communication, and also those of personal influences. The first category of internal causes identifies those of the organizational structure where the interaction or interdependence of the members belonging to a unit is identified and the influence they exert is inevitable. Communication problems are usually created and prevent the smooth functioning of the exercise of power and the achievement of the goals set [6].

In the next category of internal causes, there are those of communication, which relate to discrimination that results from the way you perceive the reality, while any form of misunderstanding can negatively affect communication as a whole. Conflicts of this category are considered to be the result of inequalities or discrimination between human resources due to the allocation of roles, the assignment of innovative programs or the presentation of individuals with special needs or disabilities [8]. Also, with regard to personal influences,

they are often manifested in the context of the coexistence of many different personalities within the same educational unit or the same educational organization [6].

The lack of communication and trust, the different priorities of group members as well as the particular cultural characteristics or the lack of understanding and assimilation in the diversity group are considered causes from the internal environment from the education unit [11].

At this point, it is worth stressing that among these causes are also the negative feelings such as stress due to the many hours of work and the rhythms of everyday life, the confusion of roles with the uncertainty of determination of responsibilities, the varied organizational changes, the organizational culture, feeling of injustice and insecurity, competition and lack of job satisfaction [12]. It is also considered necessary to mention that an additional internal cause of the conflict is the admission of new teachers to an educational unit and the way in which they manage their administration [8].

With regard to the exogenous causes of conflicts, which originate from the external environment of the educational unit, the lack of financial resources is identified both on the part of the state and on the part of the educational unit itself. This results in deficiencies in the basic physical and technical infrastructure, including heating, educational materials and consumables, or even the lack of funding in order to carry out innovative actions that will contribute to the competitiveness and externalities of the educational unit [8].

Table 1 below summarizes some research that has addressed the issue of the causes of conflicts in educational units. By observing it, it becomes clear that all the reasons mentioned in the writing of this paper have been confirmed by the literature.

Table 1: A bibliographic review of the causes of conflicts in educational units

Title	Result	Reference
Gender and age differences in occupational stress and professional burnout between primary and high-school teachers in Greece	1. Not participating in the decisions taken by the school unit 2. Interaction with colleagues and students 3. Work load	[13]
The existence of collective - participatory administration and its effectiveness in the primary schools of Aegialia.	1. Lack of financial resources 2. Lack of logistical infrastructure 3. Lack of time	[14]
School Leadership, Culture and Conflict	1. Parental involvement of educational content (teaching methods) 2. On-call duty in the courtyard of the school 3. Replenishment of teaching hours for absent teachers	[15]

The outcome of the conflicts

The consequences of conflicts in the context of running an educational unit may be detrimental if they are not detected in time and not properly resolved.

According to Everard & Morris [5], the occurrence of conflicts in an educational unit can benefit it and improve its efficiency while also destroying it. Robbins & Judge [9] report that the effects of conflicts are represented in a pyramid where at its lowest point there are conflicts that can bring positive results to the educational unit while appearing in a mild form, and at its highest point there are those conflicts which are considered to contribute to the malfunction of the unit, and their result may be unpleasant.

Among the positive results arising from the emergence of a conflict are the creation of new ideas or proposals and the expression of interest, the proper functioning of decision-making, the development of creativity as a result of strong competition. The above impacts contribute to improving the effectiveness or efficiency of the educational unit [16]. A further positive contribution to the conflict is the stimulation of the unit's internal coherence while the creation of innovative goals and self-assessment are two more positive effects [17]. It is worth noting that some researchers believe that through the emergence of tensions in the proper functioning of

an educational unit, original alternatives may arise which will lead to the adoption of more effective ways of action [5].

On the other hand, with regard to the negative effects that emerge after the onset of a conflict, there is an upsurge in the existing communication problems amongst the individuals who form a group. This increases the malfunctioning of the unit and therefore no innovative action can be taken. Also, in the effort to cope with a crisis, the feeling of defeat is usually induced in the form of stress and anxiety [10]. There are few times when a conflict has taken very bad and dangerous dimensions, with the administration of the educational unit not being able to arrange it [5].

Conflict management modes in the training unit

Both the solution and conflict management, in the context of running a educational unit, is about a gradual process, and therefore those responsible must be very careful. The most suitable person for this process is the manager of an educational unit, so it is appropriate to ensure the smooth operation of the unit through conflict management. It should also be pointed out that the occurrence of a conflict is a defining element of the operation of the educational unit, which could have a positive effect on its functioning. The reason lies in the fact that it can contribute to the smooth functioning of the decision-making process due to the existence of different views while creating a mechanism that highlights the advantages of loyal cooperation [18].

According to the above, it is easy to see that the effective way of managing the conflicts that arise is considered important, while it can also affect its effectiveness [19].

This approach applies to the case of educational units as the probability of their occurrence is high in similar environments. The effective way of conflict management is considered necessary in the case of educational units, while it influences to a great extent the smooth process of teaching [20].

According to the international literature, the main ways in which conflicts are dealt with by school unit managers are avoidance, concession, the application of force of power, cooperation or compromise [5, 9, 21].

Regarding the strategy of avoidance, usually the members who are confronted are not interested in the interests of the opponent but also in the unit or organization itself. The ways in which avoidance can be accomplished may be sophisticated ignorance or partial ignorance where minimal communication between the two conflicting sides is allowed. In the case where sophisticated ignorance is applied, the unit's administration ignores the conflict that is taking place and does not deal with the reasons of its occurrence. On the other hand, if partial ignorance is applied, then the administration can not ignore the conflict between the involved sections without, however, wishing to understand the reasons that caused it. As the method of resolution the manager will adopt the partial separation of the conflicting sides by limiting the communication between them [22].

In addition, the concession method is applied in the case where the conflicting group is interested in the interests of the opposing team while its aim is to coexist in harmony. There is no keen interest in the realization of predetermined goals, while the director is accustomed to appreciating the similarities and common points of opposing sides and is indifferent to their differences. The dominant element of this method is the retreat, so that all the groups coexist peacefully. However, it is highly probable that there will be some risk under the concession regime that is being adopted. In that case, the conflict will occur at some other time, and any problem will arise in a much more aggressive way. This method of conflict management can only be considered effective over the short term [22].

Moving forward the presentation of conflict management techniques, the next one is the compromise method. The compromise is about a method that finds its roots in strategic management while aiming at the satisfaction of one opposing party. With the introduction of this method neither side can be satisfied as the satisfaction is given partially. The compromise pays particular attention to trying to find a solution that will resolve the conflict in a satisfactory way. It is necessary to refer to the fact that if a director chooses the compromise method to resolve a conflict, then he must identify the common points of the conflicting sides to find the compromising solution. It is useful to emphasize once again that neither of the two sides can be fully satisfied and that is why this method is not considered as efficient [23].

Furthermore the method in which power of authority is invoked in conflict management refers to the case in which it is the strong one who manages to impose their view on how to resolve the conflict. The view to

resolving the conflict can come either from power because of the position or hierarchies either from the personal authority imposed by a member [17].

The opposite is the method of cooperation where all possible alternative ways of action are controlled in the most objective way and at the same time taking into account possible reservations of the groups involved in the conflict.

For managing a conflict, particular reference is made to achieving the predetermined goals of the unit or organization while ignoring the personal goals that opposing groups may have [21]. In this case, the educational unit's management should act in the following way [22]:

- Make the unit's targets clear in human resources
- Convince the conflicting sides that neither side with individually be able to achieve the unit's goals and the only way is to cooperate.

However, in addition to the above conflict management methods, in the context of running an educational unit, there are other ways, such as the effort to create teams that are made up of qualified staff to train the human resources of the educational unit. It would also be possible to ensure that the unit's direction is to achieve a harmonious inter-group cohabitation, while encouraging conflict resolution is a way of solving them [24].

Everard & Morris [5] suggest clearer conflict management behaviors and analyze each one with objectivity.

The technique of avoidance, struggle, normalization, compromise, and resolution are addressed in a reflective way by helping the adversaries to see the conflict in its true dimension and to solve it using the most appropriate way, because there are no "good" and "bad" techniques, but there is the appropriate technique for each case.

If the conflict is resolved simply for the sake of balance and to the detriment of justice, anger, dissatisfaction and frustration can reinforce it and explode violently with other more harmful events.

So Evans [25] is right, in suggesting that awareness and conflict management seminars are necessary. In the USA, such programs had a national dimension in the 1980s and concern the directors, staff and students [10].

Several conflict management models have been developed that suggest strategies and advise in this direction [26]. A common component of all models is the mediation, which must be done by the Director.

School management and conflict management

There are three ways in which the Director mixes into a conflict situation [17]:

> **As instigator:** He wants to start a process of change. Invites a specialist to speak to teachers, which leads to controversy over the subject.
>
> **As defendant:** There is a rebellion against him or a critique of the policy he follows. The problem can be brough to the competent authority of the Ministry of Education or to push the confrontation team or ask for support from another team that "works well" with the reaction team.
>
> **As mediator:** Mediates the conflicts between teachers, students and parents by helping the conflicting parties to establish the basic rules by which the debate will proceed, to organize the issues that concern them, to define the facts, to understand the needs of each other and to propose possible solutions. The cornerstones of mediation are impartiality and confidentiality [26].

According to Everard & Morris [5] the Director must:

- have self-discipline,
- be able to contrast when there is a difference of opinion,
- convince that he is seeking dialogue, logical discussion and solving the problem,
- present his ideas and feelings clearly, concisely, calmly and honestly,
- know how to listen and show to his interlocutor that he understands him by repeating briefly what he has heard,
- knows how to make the appropriate clarification questions,
- assess all aspects of the problem in order to obtain an overall view of the problem,
- Understand the pressure the other party is feeling,
- formulate purely common goals that help the "conflicting" to overcome their methodological differences, to forget the frictions and to seek a solution to the conflict.

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