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The effects of interpersonal conflict on employee satisfaction and productivity in the workplace

**Bălașa Maria Adela¹, Sterghiuli Alexandra², Tănase Maria Alexandra³,
Matei Silvia Raluca⁴**

^{1,2,3}Independent Researcher, Romania, ⁴Ovidius University of Constanta, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Romania
balasamariaadela@gmail.com¹, alexsterghiuli@gmail.com²,
maria.alex2605@gmail.com³, ralum74@yahoo.com⁴

Abstract. This study investigates the impact of interpersonal conflicts on employee satisfaction and workplace productivity. The review of relevant literature revealed significant relationships between these variables, forming the basis for the current investigation. The research aimed to analyze the connection between interpersonal conflicts in the workplace and employee satisfaction, concurrently evaluating the consequences of these conflicts on organizational productivity. Hypothesis 1 assumed a negative correlation, indicating that an increase in interpersonal conflicts is associated with a decrease in employee satisfaction. Hypothesis 2 anticipated a positive correlation, suggesting that interpersonal conflicts among employees lead to an intensification of the reduction in organizational productivity. The Workplace Interpersonal Conflict Scale, Workplace Productivity and Disruption Questionnaire, as well as the Job Satisfaction Subscale from the Michigan Organizational Assessment Questionnaire, were utilized in a sample of 81 participants from Romania. Data collection took place online through the Google Forms questionnaire, adhering to ethical research principles and ensuring participant confidentiality. Statistical analysis confirmed Hypothesis 1, highlighting a significant and negative correlation between interpersonal conflicts and employee satisfaction. Participants reported a moderate level of interpersonal conflicts (mean 1.74) and relatively consistent satisfaction (mean 2.45), supported by distribution tests. Additionally, Hypothesis 2 was validated, indicating a significant and positive correlation between interpersonal conflicts and reduced workplace productivity.

Key-words: interpersonal conflict, satisfaction, performance, employers



1. Introduction

Interpersonal conflict in the workplace is identified as one of the main stressors in the workplace, strongly linked to the impairment of employees' psychological and physical health. In addition, interpersonal conflict has been identified as a determinant of workplace injuries and other costs related to reduced quality, loss of skilled employees, restructuring inefficiencies, decreased motivation and productivity, absenteeism rates, and employee turnover (Brockman, 2014).

Some may see conflict as a negative situation to be avoided at all costs, others may see it as a phenomenon to be managed. Still others may see conflict as an interesting opportunity for personal development and so try to use it to their advantage, seeing it as a good asset. Regardless of where one falls on this continuum of views of conflict, people rarely expect to be in a continuous state of conflict at work (Nebgen, 1978).

Dysfunctional conflict usually hinders organizational performance and leads to decreased productivity (Hagemeister & Volmer, 2018). This conflict orientation is characterized by competing individual interests that override the overall business interest. Thus, employees sabotage each other's work, either intentionally or through subtle conflict-driven disinterest in teamwork (Kinicki & Kreitner, 2008).

Conflicts can lead to sabotage in the workplace, psychological problems among employees, loss of market share of the service or product, and consequently loss of productivity. In addition, if organisations spend a lot of time dealing with conflict management, employees may not focus on the important goals they should be achieving. Conflict causes members to vent their frustrations, focus more on gossiping about conflicts they have had and initiated, and less on projects and goals that need to be completed at work.

Previous research has shown that these interpersonal conflicts in the workplace cost effort and cause stress in the workplace (De Wit et al., 2012). In addition, stress triggered by interpersonal conflicts at work has been found to result in deteriorating relationships, decreased job satisfaction, and a loss of productivity (Kidder, 2007). Furthermore, empirical findings have demonstrated that, unlike other stressful events, employees tend to be more psychologically impaired and less productive when workplace conflicts occur (Bolger et al., 1989). Another important issue that has gained organizational importance in recent years is that some workplace social conflicts are linked to various negative outcomes, such as higher intentions to leave the organization, decreased organizational and emotional commitment, and lower job satisfaction (Thomas et al., 2005).

However, in order to increase employee well-being, positively influence work-related attitudes (i.e. job satisfaction) and behaviour (i.e. productivity), as well as enhance performance, more and fully differentiated research is needed on social conflict at workplace, different individual outcomes and, in particular, personal resources. Given that workplace stress and workplace conflict are a key risk factor in lowering employee productivity and satisfaction, there is a need to determine the antecedents, potential mediators and moderators as well as different individual outcomes of social conflict (Hagemeister & Volmer, 2018).

1.1. Interpersonal conflicts at work

The most recognised and popular conflict is between two or more people. It is most associated by people with the notion of "conflict, and in an organization it can happen because of differences that arise between two people (Green & Charles 2012). This conflict can happen



between two managers competing for a limited workforce and capital resource or competing for the same promotion; moreover, they may disagree on the best marketing plan for their top client. In addition, this conflict may occur between the manager and his or her bosses, supervisor and subordinate, or between two employees. Moreover, it can happen because of differences about the organizations goals and objectives (Kinicki & Kreitner 2008). The causes that lead to this conflict are personality differences, perceptions (experiences, upbringing, background and education), clashes of values and interests, power and status differences, lack of information, role compatibility, stress and limited resources (Whetten & Cameron, 2012).

The negative effects of interpersonal conflict on employees include (Amason, 1996; Dana, 2001 et al.): absenteeism from work/projects, lack of interest in work, job dissatisfaction, workplace unrest. At the same time, the existence of interpersonal conflicts may force the individual to behave unusually, for example to smoke excessively, to consume alcohol in large and frequent quantities or to be hostile towards others, thus diminishing communication with others. Dana (2001) provided a comprehensive list of the negative effects of conflict, namely: conflict affects both the individual and organisational performance, so members of organisations dissatisfied with the level of conflict in their organisations may make the decision to leave their workplace.

On the other hand, interpersonal conflicts in the workplace can also have certain beneficial or positive aspects in terms of relationships between colleagues, namely: it stimulates individuals to work harder and work harder. In a conflict situation, individuals use their skills and talents. At the same time, the individual can satisfy certain psychological demands, such as aggression, self-esteem and pride, and consequently provides opportunities to manifest these aspects in a constructive manner and to release these aggressive impulses in an effective and controlled way (Hussein & Al-Mamary, 2019).

1.2. Job satisfaction

Employee satisfaction is critical to the success of any business. A high level of employee dissatisfaction is directly linked to lower turnover. Thus, keeping employees satisfied with their careers should be a top priority for any employer. While this is a well-known fact in management practice, economic downturns such as the current one seem to be driving employers to ignore it. There are many reasons why employees may become discouraged by their jobs and resign, such as: high stress, lack of communication within the company, lack of recognition or limited growth opportunities, interpersonal conflicts in the workplace (Gregory, 2011). Management should actively seek to improve these factors if they wish to reduce turnover.

Existing literature indicates that job satisfaction is crucial in explaining the relationships between interpersonal conflict and job performance (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003). As suggested by affective event theory (AET), employees' reactions to incidents (i.e. conflicts) in the workplace are the best predictors of job satisfaction (Mulki et al., 2015). In turn, employee job satisfaction indicates the likelihood of engaging in positive workplace behaviors (Ayodele & Olorunsola, 2012), which is an important predictor of job performance (Griffeth et al., 2000).

A long-held notion in the conflict literature is that conflict can be beneficial to job performance by allowing individuals to gain insight from different opinions and perspectives and to receive an increased understanding of the task. (Todorova et al., 2013) The greater the amount



of information employees gain from others' opinions and perspectives through work task conflict, the more likely they are to experience enjoyment and satisfaction at work. Disagreements over personal issues in relationship conflict often increase members' anxiety, which can cause job dissatisfaction, on the other hand (Meier et al., 2013).

1.3. Productivity at work

The level at which employees perform their tasks and responsibilities is defined as productivity, according to Shields (2016). However, productivity is related to the results achieved and performance-related accomplishments (Cardy & Leonard, 2014), while collective efforts and behaviors applicable to company goals are controlled by employees (Lepak et al., 2007). From a different perspective, Richard & Morrison (2009) studied the concept of productivity. Productivity cannot be defined in general performance criteria, according to their observation, and can only be described in the context of institutional perspectives and situations. Aguinis (2005) stated that a multidimensional construct is performance in which it is necessary to consider different types of behaviours to understand it.

Productivity can include quality of production, quantity of production, timeliness of production, attendance and cooperation (Gungor, 2011). According to Macky & Johnson (2000), improving individual employee efficiency could also improve the performance of organizations. Productivity is a performance indicator that encompasses both effectiveness and efficiency (Bhatti & Qureshi, 2007). According to Kline & Hsieh (2007), in terms of productivity, salary is an important decision factor to increase employee performance and influence decisions to stay or leave the organization.

Zheng et al. (2010), pointed out that productivity generally determines the policy objectives of the organization or the extent to which organizational goals are achieved. Productivity is sometimes used to replicate an organization's performance because it is broader compared to other concepts of organizational performance. The ability to perform a function with optimal levels of input and output determines the productivity of any organization (Amin & Shila, 2015). The business environment is extremely dynamic and constantly changing due to globalization, so any organization that wants to be relevant and gain a competitive advantage must improve its organizational productivity.

Productivity and employee morale are affected by performance and reward management from an organization's efficiency perspective (Yazici, 2008). Firms have a competitive advantage when a company maintains high levels of performance compared to its competitors (Harmon, 2014). Job satisfaction, commitment to the organization, compensation and rewards are factors that influence people's productivity at work (Khan et al., 2010). Employee motivation is the most influential factor of productivity (Kulchmanov & Kaliannan, 2014). Raza (2012) pointed out that it is essential that a way to improve productivity is found in order to increase employee performance.

2. The effects of workplace conflict on satisfaction and productivity

Numerous studies have investigated the complexity of the relationship between interpersonal conflicts and job satisfaction in various contexts. A recent study (Arafat et al., 2018) identified a significantly negative correlation between interpersonal conflicts and professional satisfaction ($r = -.538, p < .0001$). Another study conducted by El-Hosany (2017) confirmed a



significant negative correlation between interpersonal conflicts and job satisfaction ($r = -0.303$, $p < .0001$). These findings contribute significantly to understanding the impact of interpersonal conflicts on professional satisfaction.

Studies examining the relationships between interpersonal conflicts and workplace performance highlight a significant influence of these conflicts on employee effectiveness. A recent research conducted on a sample of 215 employees found that approximately 36% of the variation in performance can be attributed to fluctuations in interpersonal conflict (Khan & Azam, 2022). Additionally, the links between interpersonal conflicts and innovative performance were analyzed among another 235 employees, revealing a negative association between these two variables (Rahman & Yasir, 2003).

3. Methodology

3.1. Objectives and hypotheses

The objective of the research is to analyze the relationship between interpersonal conflict in the workplace and employee satisfaction, and the relationship between interpersonal conflict and organizational productivity

The hypotheses of the above research are as follows::

1. It is presumed that there is a negative correlation between the level of interpersonal conflict in the workplace and employee satisfaction
2. It is assumed that there is a positive correlation between the level of interpersonal conflict between employees and the level of productivity reduction in the workplace.

3.2. Participants

The investigated group consisted of 81 employed people from Romania, of which 29 male participants (representing 35.8%) and 52 female participants (64.2%), with more female participants, which may be a limitation of the research, that the population was not equally distributed. Also, from urban areas, 62 (76.5%) and 19 participants (23.5%) from rural areas participated. The results indicate a wide range of ages, ranging from 18 to 64 years. The mean age of the participants was 28.06 years with a standard deviation of 11.29. In terms of the last level of education completed by the participants, only 38 (46.9%) of the participants had completed their university studies and 5 (6.2%) postgraduate studies, the remaining 7 (8.6) had completed only post-secondary studies and 31 (38.3%) had only a high school diploma.

3.3. Instruments

Instruments used in the research include the Interpersonal Conflict at Work Scale (ICAWS) developed by Spector & Jex (1998), focusing on understanding relationships with co-workers. The Workplace Productivity and Activity Disruption Questionnaire, developed by Lynch & Riedel (2001), assesses absence from work and the impact on daily activities. Likewise, the Job Satisfaction Subscale of the Michigan Organizational Assessment Questionnaire, developed by Cammann et al. (2008), focuses on the emotional and affective aspects associated with employee satisfaction in the organization.



3.4. Procedure

The questionnaires were administered online via Google Forms with the consent of the participants without the need to disclose their identity. The three questionnaires were aggregated into a computer package with a user-friendly design. The responses received formed a database which was processed in the next step.

3.5. Ethical aspects

Questionnaire design - The questionnaires used are established instruments, already applied, tested and validated among the Romanian population. The research questions we wanted to address are direct and objectively addressed. Informed consent - participants were told of the nature and purpose of the research and any anticipated disadvantages of participation. In addition, explanations were provided in language appropriate to the target audience. Participants were also allowed to ask questions and, if they chose, to withdraw from the study. Confidentiality - The confidentiality of survey respondents is assured and protected as it is not possible to identify them.

4. Results

Testing and Verifying Hypothesis 1: It is assumed that there is a negative correlation between the level of interpersonal conflict in the workplace and employee satisfaction, in that employees who experience frequent interpersonal conflict will have lower satisfaction. In Table 1 made for the two variables interpersonal conflict and employee satisfaction the variable "Interpersonal_Conflict" has a minimum value of 1, a maximum value of 3 and a mean of 1.74. The standard deviation (Std. Deviation) is 0.703, indicating a relatively small variation in interpersonal conflict responses, suggesting that participants generally experienced a moderate level of interpersonal conflict. In terms of employee satisfaction, it has a minimum value of 1.00, a maximum value of 3.00 and a mean of 2.45. The standard deviation is 0.63343, indicating relatively low variation in overall satisfaction levels.

After applying the Skewness and Kurtosis skewness index to test the normal distribution of the data, we obtained that the distributions for both variables are not far from a normal distribution, in the sense that for interpersonal conflict, the skewness index has a value of 0.412 and a standard deviation of 0.267 which indicates a slight skewness to the right suggesting that the distribution may have a longer tail on the right side. However, the value is relatively small (close to 0), suggesting that the skewness is quite small. In the case of the Kurtosis index, it indicates a value of -0.896, and a standard deviation of 0.529 being a flat distribution, but the value is close to 0, so not far from a normal distribution in terms of flatness. In the case of the total satisfaction variable, the skewness index is -0.742, and kurtosis -0.424. Therefore, the data obtained are not far from a normal distribution. As a result of applying the two tests to test the distribution of the data, they suggest that the distribution of the data is a normal one for the variables below.



Table 1. Normality test

	Kurtosis		Skewness	
	Statistic	Std.Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Interpersonal Conflicts	-.896	.529	.412	.267
Satisfaction	-.424	.529	-.742	.267

N=81

Therefore, in order to test whether there is a relationship between interpersonal conflict between employees in a workplace and their job satisfaction, we used the Pearson correlation shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Pearson Correlation

	Interpersonal Conflicts	Satisfaction
Interpersonal conflicts	.	
Satisfaction	-.320**	.

** . $p < .01$ level

The research results indicate that there is a negative correlation, with a Pearson correlation coefficient of -0.32 and significant with a significance level of 0.004, indicating statistical significance at the 0.01 level, suggesting that an increase in the level of interpersonal conflict is associated with a decrease in the level of overall satisfaction, and vice versa. Therefore, there is a significant negative correlation between the two variables, thus confirming hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 2 testing and verification : It is assumed that there is a positive correlation between the level of interpersonal conflict between employees and the level of productivity reduction in the workplace. In the case of the variable Reduction_Productivity: (N = 81), participants report a mean level of productivity reduction, with a mean of 1.4691 and a standard deviation of 0.69077. The skewness coefficient of 1.163 indicates a significant skewness to the left, and the kurtosis of 0.052 suggests a slightly narrower distribution than a normal distribution. All these data are present in Table 3.

Table 3. Normality test

	Kurtosis		Skewness	
	Statistic	Std.Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Interpersonal Conflicts	-.896	.529	.412	.267
Productivity Reduction	.052	.529	1.163	.267

*N=81

Due to the fact that in the case of the productivity variable, we found a significant skewness skewness coefficient skewness to the left, we use the spearman correlation for normally undistributed data.



Table 4. Spearman correlation

	N	Correlation Coefficient	Interpersonal Conflicts	Productivity Reduction
Interpersonal Conflicts	81	.337	.	.002**
Productivity Reduction	81	.337	.002**	.

** . $p < .01$

The Spearman correlation coefficient (rho) between the variable "Interpersonal_Conflict" and "Productivity_Reduction" is 0.337. The positive sign indicates a positive correlation between these two variables. In other words, an increase in the level of interpersonal conflict is associated with an increase in the level of productivity reduction and vice versa. Also, the correlation is statistically significant, the significance value (Sig.) for this correlation is 0.002, which is lower than the significance level of 0.01 (indicated by **). This indicates statistical significance at the 0.01 level. The results suggest that there is a positive and statistically significant correlation between the level of interpersonal conflict and productivity reduction in the sample studied, therefore confirming the second hypothesis in that the more interpersonal conflict employees in an organization experience, the more they will experience a reduction in productivity.

Conclusions and final remarks

Această This research focused on the impact of interpersonal conflict on employee job satisfaction and productivity. The literature review revealed significant relationships between these variables, providing the necessary context for the current investigation.

The objective was to analyse the relationship between interpersonal conflict in the workplace and employee satisfaction, while assessing the consequences of these conflicts on organisational productivity. Hypothesis 1 predicted a negative correlation, indicating that increased interpersonal conflict is associated with decreased employee satisfaction. Hypothesis 2 assumed a positive correlation, suggesting that interpersonal conflicts among employees lead to an increase in reduced organizational productivity. This research used the Workplace Interpersonal Conflict Scale, the Workplace Productivity and Activity Disruption Questionnaire, and the Workplace Satisfaction Subscale of the Michigan Organizational Assessment Questionnaire applied to a sample of 81 participants in Romania.

Data collection was conducted online using the Google Forms questionnaire, respecting the ethical principles involved in the research and guaranteeing the confidentiality of participants. Statistical analysis confirmed Hypothesis 1, showing a significant negative correlation between interpersonal conflict in the workplace and employee satisfaction. Participants reported a moderate level of interpersonal conflict (mean 1.74) and relatively constant satisfaction (mean 2.45). The results were also supported by distribution tests, which indicated an approximation to a normal distribution.

Further, Hypothesis 2 was validated, showing a significant positive correlation between employee interpersonal conflict and the level of reduced productivity at work. This suggests that increased interpersonal conflict is associated with increased productivity reduction. Thus, both



research hypotheses were confirmed, but it is important to note that asymmetries in the distribution of participants may influence the generalizability of the results to the entire population. In conclusion, these findings underline the need for effective conflict mediation and prevention strategies in the work environment, with the potential to contribute to building a healthy and productive work environment.

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Annex 1
Normality test

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Conflict	81	1	3	1.74	.703	.412	.267	-.896	.529
Satisfaction	81	1.00	3.00	2.4568	.63343	-.742	.267	-.424	.529
Valid N (listwise)	81								

Annex 2
Pearson correlation

Correlations

		ConflictT OT	SatisfactieTo tal
Conflict	Pearson Correlation	1	-.320**



Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Interpersonal_Conflicts	81	1	3	1.74	.703	.412	.267	-.896	.529
Productivity_Reduction	81	1.00	3.00	1.4691	.69077	1.163	.267	.052	.529
Valid N (listwise)	81								

	Sig. (2-tailed)		.004
	N	81	81
	Pearson Correlation	-.320**	1
Satisfaction	Sig. (2-tailed)	.004	
	N	81	81

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Annex 3 Normality test



Annex 4
Spearman correlation

Correlations

		Interpersonal_Conflicts	Productivity_Reduction
Interpersonal_Conflicts	Pearson Correlation	1	.356**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.001
	N	81	81
Productivity_Reduction	Pearson Correlation	.356**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	
	N	81	81

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).