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CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES AND STYLES IN THE FUNCTION OF CREATING A CULTURE OF PEACE

Abstract

Conflict, violence and peace, as well as relations between them, are the basic axes of peace studies as an interdisciplinary field, which began to develop in the first half of the XX century as a reaction to the catastrophic consequences of World War I and II. As time went on, respecting the complexity of social relations and adapting to changes in the focus relating to social interests and concerns, the concept of negative peace (absence of violence and war) gave way to a more optimistic concept of positive peace, i.e. peace maintained by a preventive approach. In order to create peace with a positive approach, it is necessary to timely determine the presence of conflict, its nature and the possibility of causing violence, and accordingly, choose an appropriate way to overcome disagreements that produce conflict, i.e. calm the conflict and prevent its escalation into some form of violence. In this regard, the aim of this paper is to point out the significance of conflict management with the intention of creating a culture of peace, rather than imposing one's own interest at any cost, thus, exacerbating the conflict situation.

Keywords: *social relations, harmony, conflict situation, confrontation of interests, conflict resolution*

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INTRODUCTION

Peace studies is an interdisciplinary field that began to develop in the first half of the twentieth century in response to the catastrophic consequences of World Wars I and II. Accordingly, initial peace researches were focused on the military aspects of the problem. Relying on epistemological and methodological resources of various disciplines, peace studies have gradually entered segments of other social phenomena that carry conflicts in themselves and/or produce them – economy, public policy, education, gender policy and sexism, interculturalism, social development in general, and, markedly in the past years, sustainable development. Therefore, those studies are characterized by a systematic interdisciplinary analysis of the causes of violence and the conditions for establishing and maintaining peace. Conflict, violence, and peace, as well as relations between them, soon became the basic axes of this discipline, so the approaches and interpretations proposed through peace studies are basic for the analysis of a large number of problems. In the beginning, researchers focused on the negative definition of peace – negative in terms of the state of absence of conflict (war) and violence. It is more an approach to peace that is established after the conflict, and the process of establishing peace itself does not always take place peacefully. Recognizing the complexity of social relations and adapting to changes in the focus in terms of social interests and concerns, this concept has changed over time, gaining holistic features in greater amount. Thus, at the end of the sixties of the last century, the concept of so-called positive peace started developing on a more optimistic basis. It is a peace that is maintained by a preventive approach, and in that sense, it also means peace that is reached peacefully, by preventing and calming the conflict at the stage when there are indications of it or it has just started, before any use of violence occurs. Galtung believed that the focus of researchers should be positive peace, i.e. the pursuit of understanding "conditions for preventing violence", which "requires an understanding of the civilizations, development, peace and conflict studied eclectically." This necessity exists

because long-term solutions can only be achieved through a positive peace approach, while the effects of negative peace are short-term.[1]

In order to create peace with a positive approach, it is necessary to timely determine the presence of conflict, its nature and the possibility of causing violence, and accordingly choose an appropriate way to overcome disagreements that produce conflict, that is, calm the conflict and prevent its escalation into some form of violence. Conflicts are a part of everyday life, coexistence, and social interactions. Tendencies to present them as a negative social phenomenon in itself are not justified, given that conflict can also have positive aspects, such as a driver of interest, personal and social changes and identity establishment.

In this regard, the aim of this paper is precisely – to point out the significance of managing conflicts with the intention of creating a culture of peace, rather than imposing one's own interest on others and thus exacerbating the conflict situation.

UNDERSTANDING CONFLICT - THE FIRST STEP TO PEACE AND HARMONY

"An eye for an eye will only make the whole world blind."

Mahatma Gandhi

Knowledge and understanding of the problem precede any reasonable decision on choosing the way it is solved. Likewise, when talking about conflict management styles and strategies, before accepting and implementing them, it is necessary to understand the essence of conflict not only in specific circumstances but also in general meaning and sense.

Regardless of the area of life, it concerns, conflict represents a lack of agreement between two or more people, and if such polarization lasts for a long time, the intensity of the conflict increases, spreading it to social

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[1] Grewal, B. S. (2003). Johan Galtung: Positive and Negative Peace, pp. 4–5.
http://www.activeforpeace.org/no/fred/positive_negative_peace.pdf.

groups, which is when we can talk about social conflict.[2] In everyday speech, the terms clash and conflict are used interchangeably. However, there is a difference in intensity, so a conflict can be considered a clash of interests that are so opposed that it is impossible to fully satisfy both sides. The existence of inequality in society, primarily economic, and in accordance with it all others (political, social, racial, gender...), is an eternal source of conflict. Even in an imaginary communist society, which is still a pure utopia, there is inequality between those who contribute to the community "according to their abilities" and those who take "according to their needs", which at some point may cause dissatisfaction among those with "greater abilities" and produce serious social conflicts. Thus, inequality is inevitable, and according to the Marxists, to avoid dissatisfaction one ought to reach a certain level of social consciousness. In the 21st century, mankind is getting farther and farther away from that ideal, so the polemics on eternal inequality as a source of social conflicts ends there. Therefore, given that they grow out of inequality, social conflicts are "struggles between and within a social group to pursue conflicting interests and values"[3]. The nature of conflicting interests may be different, but it always comes down to striving for economic and/or political domination, conquest or defence of territory, revolutionary changes in social relations or preservation of the existing situation, etc.[4]

Regardless of the social context in which the conflict occurs, it can be conditionally divided into four phases. In the first phase, the conflict is hinted at from the attitudes taken by the opposing parties, and those attitudes are built on certain beliefs and established interests. In the second phase, there is a conflict, the third phase is a reaction, and in the fourth, we get the result as a product of polarized interests and reactions.

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[2] ACNUR Comité Español (2018). *Qué es un conflicto social y qué efectos puede tener.* UNHCR/ACNUR – conciencia social y económica.
 https://eacnur.org/blog/conflicto-social-que-es-y-efectos-tc_alt45664n_o_pstn_o_pst/.

[3] Vidojević, Z. (1993). *Društveni sukobi od klasnih do ratnih*. Beograd: Radnička štampa, p. 79.
[4] Đukić, S. (2018). Uzroci društvenih konfliakta i upravljanje konfliktima u uslovima krize, *Vojno delo* br. 3/2018, p. 196.

A favourable result strengthens the belief system and thus draws a pattern of future action.

For the outcome to be favourable, it is necessary to apply a strategy that best suits the circumstances of the conflict situation and the interest that is to be achieved. There is no predefined "best" strategy, but there are appropriate styles of conflict management on which concrete strategies can be built.

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT – CHOICE OF A STRATEGY

"Peace is not the absence of conflict but the presence of creative alternatives for responding to conflict – alternatives to passive or aggressive responses, alternatives to violence."

Dorothy Thompson

In everyday life, conflict is considered a big unpleasantness, a hint of evil much greater than itself. Because of that, when a conflict arises in private life, people tend to minimize its existence or even ignore it entirely. In an individual's public life, wherein we consider the sphere of politics, minimizing and/or ignoring a conflict can only occur due to the lack of authorities' and competent persons' abilities to recognise it, i.e., to timely discern the adverse effects it may have. Of course, adverse effects may happen as a result of a conflict simply existing, but this only shows how important it is to manage it so it would not become more aggravated or escalate into violence with inconceivable consequences. Bearing in mind the nature of social relations, one may claim with certainty that conflicts are unavoidable in modern society, which is why conflict management "has become the centre of gravity of human activities".[5] The inevitability of conflicts' existence propels the need for their nature to be studied in each individual situation so their dynamics could be predicted, and therefore adequate measures could

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[5] Alimba, C. N. (2018). Conflict Management Styles: Historical Evolution, Perspectives and Rationalisation, *Review of Public Administration and Management*, Vol. 7(1), p. 24.

be taken, which would result in curbing and transforming conflicts into "positive force for the growth and development of the society"[6].

Nowadays, within different scientific disciplines (law, sociology, psychology, philosophy, military and security sciences, political sciences, et al.) there is much effort to find and offer solutions to conflicts, that is, strategies for conflict management that can achieve a state of balanced security and peace. Life is so diverse and full of unpredictable circumstances that it would be difficult to keep facing conflict situations using just one unique strategy. Besides, since conflict implies the existence of at least two opposing parties, oftentimes a solution to a conflict is good for one side, yet not so much for the other one. Precisely because of that, the main goal of conflict management is mitigating disagreements that cause conflicts, specifically, removing or at least allaying its causes. Depending on the angle from which a conflict is observed, who is offering a solution and with what interest, numerous conflict management strategies are being developed. In theory, there is a generally accepted Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI) (Figure 1)[7] that serves as a starting point for creating different approaches to conflict management. This method distinguishes five basic styles that can be used in different areas of human life for situations with incompatible goals or contradictory opinions:[8]

(1) Competing

If assertive behaviour is used as a reaction to conflict circumstances, with the goal to satisfy personal needs without understanding the other side and cooperating with them, at the cost of damage to the other side, then we are talking about the so-called "win-lose" approach. This is always a confrontational style where at least one-party acts from the position of

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[6] *Ibid*.

[7] This method of management was developed in 1974 by Kenneth Thomas and Ralph Kilmann, which identifies five different reactions based on two main axes (affirmation and cooperation) in the circumstances of conflicting or incompatible interests, ie the choice of strategies for overcoming conflict.

[8] Mossanen, M. et al. (2014). A Practical Approach to Conflict Management for Program Directors. *Journal of Graduate Medical Education*, Vol. 6(2), pp. 345-346.

power, and the final outcome always has a winner and a loser. Still, this approach need not have a negative connotation if the objective circumstances require urgent action and decisiveness with the understanding of the other party. In less urgent situations, one side will be unsatisfied, maybe even indignant because of the unfavourable outcome, which may cause a new conflict after some time.

(2) Collaborating

If it is estimated that the significance of relations transcends the current state of misunderstanding, a way to show preparedness to harmonise the interests of all parties included is found. This applies particularly in cases when there have been conflicts before between the same sides, or if the circumstances are such that achieving a simple compromise would not correspond to the importance of the situation. The purpose of this approach to conflict resolution is to connect sides with different perspectives on a joint road toward satisfying bilateral (multilateral) interests. Here there is no desire to win, nor is there yielding, which is why this style is considered a "win-win" approach. This is precisely the advantage of this style – different views are merged with the aim to find the best solution that would make everyone a winner. On the other hand, its drawback is the length of the road towards that goal, because it depends on the level of mutual trust, which certainly is not high at the very beginning, otherwise, there would have been no conflict.

(3) Accommodating

If the other side is in a more favourable position and with better solutions and resources for resolving the conflict to their advantage, or if for one side there is a more significant goal in the long run compared to the ongoing conflict situation, it may take the line of least resistance, yielding to the other side and adapting to the new circumstances while suffering a certain amount of damage. That side suppresses its assertiveness in favour of cooperation, often believing that peace is more valuable than "victory". Still, it is completely obvious that in the future the side that suffered damages

would feel dissatisfaction with such an outcome, which may possibly cause a new conflict.

(4) Avoiding

Reaction to a conflict situation by avoiding confrontation with problems may manifest as completely turning away from the conflict, i.e., as denying the existence of the problem or postponing the response for a more suitable time. Having in mind that this is practically non-dealing with the conflict on any visible level, one may pose the question of whether this is a style of conflict management or a style of behaviour in a conflict situation. Complete avoidance of confronting the problems related to the conflict is basically unproductive and shows submissiveness and uncooperativeness. Turning your back to the problem, and unawareness of the existence of the conflict, will in no way help the problem disappear. On the contrary, the conflict can only strengthen and grow to an unmanageable level. On the other hand, avoidance with the aim to postpone giving an adequate response for a more suitable moment is a style of conflict management. Such an approach makes sense when emotional tensions are running high[9] and we are in an unfavourable situation with small chances of a favourable outcome, as well as in conflicts of smaller intensity and lesser importance where there is no real risk of the conflict escalating. However, even in such cases, it is unrealistic to expect the problem to disappear all on its own, so the strategy based on postponing is not a good solution in the long run.

(5) Compromising

Looking for a compromise is one of the possible ways to resolve a conflict, which implies balancing the relations by making concessions to find an average solution, satisfying and acceptable to all sides included. The possibility of finding such a solution is conditioned by the preparedness of all parties to make certain concessions, which can be facilitated by knowing that escalation of the conflict would be much greater. Comparing it to the other abovementioned

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[9] Bajalski, B. (2017). Power in the Process of Negotiations, *Nauka i društvo*, Vol. IV, Issue 1(7), p. 65.

approaches, it is easy to notice that this one is the most moderate. In comparison to competing and accommodating, searching for a compromise represents the middle way because competitiveness is mutual, and concessions are brought down to a rational level. Striving to reach a compromise is more direct than avoiding or ignoring a conflict, but on the other hand, it does not delve into the problem too deeply and requires more concessions to one's own detriment than the collaborating approach.

With a comprehensive insight into the abovementioned styles of resolving conflict situations, one may discern two key determinants based on whose relation it depends on which style would be applied (Figure 1) – from decisiveness and persistence (assertiveness) to fulfilling one's own aspirations, as well as from the preparedness to meet others' aspirations (cooperativeness).

The purpose of the conflict management styles and strategies is to increase the efficiency of interventions designed to lessen exaggerated conflicts, and in some cases to further insufficient conflict,[10] so as to achieve organizational and individual goals[11], which are basically creating a favourable ambience for establishing a culture of peace in society. Which style or strategy should be used depends on numerous circumstances, among which the most important one is the very personality of people and the nature of relations characterizing conflict, basic causes, and conflict dynamics. Among the styles offered, neither one of them can be considered universal for certain types of conflicts. Therefore, the best approach may be the one that leads to a stable peace with the least negative consequences.

CONCLUSION

Manifesting in different ways, conflicts are inherent in life – all people, of different ages, gender, race and social characteristics, as well as all social

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[10] Hellriegel, D. and Slocum, J.W. (1996). *Management.* Cincinnati Ohio: South Western College Publishing. In: Alimba, C. (2018), *Op. cit.*, p. 25.

[11] Gumuseli, A.I and Hacifazlioglu, O. (2009). Globalization and conflict management in schools, *Cypriot Journal of Educational Science,* Issue 4, pp. 183-198. In Alimba, C. (2018), *Op. cit.*, p. 25.

groups and countries, experience conflict situations during their existence. Although they are inevitable, they must not be viewed only in a negative context since they also have their positive aspects, primarily in because they help us improve our views and ways of responding to problems, and to build better and more lasting relationships through getting better knowledge of ourselves and others. It is important to learn to live with conflicts and not allow them to dominate us, because in that case, we will become sources of destruction ourselves. Therefore, it is necessary to be an active participant, not a passive observer or ignorant, not to suffer but to manage conflicts in direction of their transformation into a positive development. Since we live in an age of accelerated technological development, new family models, new migration movements and the transformation of societies in general, most conflict situations are very complex, especially when the actors are social groups and states. That is why the success of conflict management is significantly conditioned by an appropriate planning approach, i.e. choosing the most suitable strategy. Five styles of conflict management, which were developed with the help of the so-called Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument method are a generally accepted basis for creating an appropriate approach to conflict management, but they are not a solution in themselves. There is no universal most effective strategy because every conflict is a story in itself, and the actors are not always the same as well. Even in situations where the same actors have a recurring conflict situation, the circumstances are not the same, at least due to the fact that they enter the new conflict resolution process with some experience and lessons.

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Appendix

_Figure 1__: Conflict Management by the Thomas-Kilmann Method_[12]

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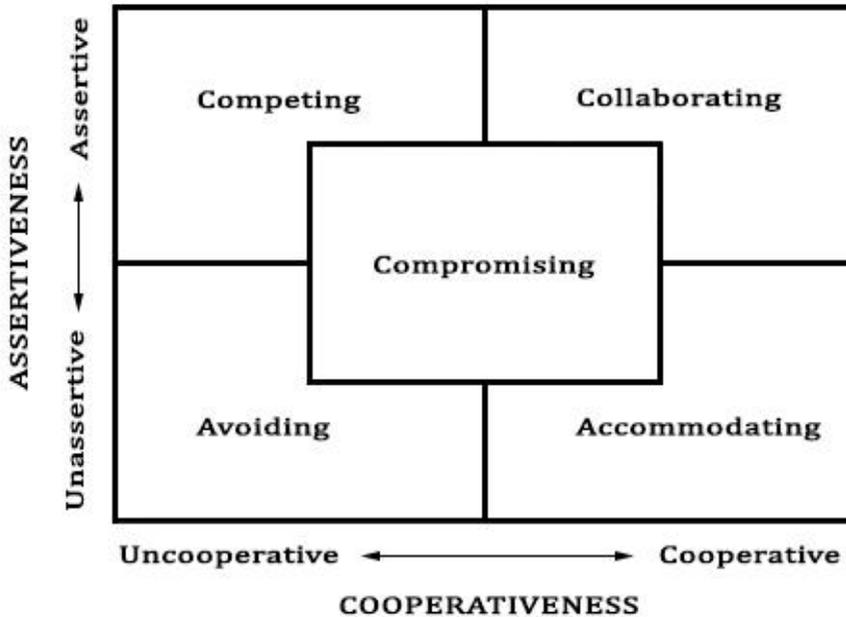
[12] This two-dimensional model of conflict-handling behaviour is adapted from "Conflict and Conflict Management" by Kenneth Thomas in The Handbook of Industrial and Organizational Psychology, edited by Marvin Dunnette (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1976). Another valuable contribution in this field is the work by Robert Blake and Jane Mouton in The Managerial Grid (Houston: Gulf Publishing, 1964, 1994).

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СТРАТЕГИЈЕ И СТИЛОВИ УПРАВЉАЊА КОНФЛИКТОМ У ФУНКЦИЈИ КРЕИРАЊА КУЛТУРЕ МИРА

Апстракт

Сукоб, насиље и мир, као и односи међу њима су основне осе одреднице мировних студија као интердисциплинарне области, која се почела развијати у првој половини XX века као реакција на катастрофалне последице I и II светског рата. Како је време одмицало, уважавајући комплексност друштвених односа и прилагођавајући се променама фокуса у погледу друштвених интереса и брига, концепт негативног одређења мира (одсуство насиља и рата), уступио је место оптимистичнијем концепту позитивног мира, односно мира који се одржава превентивним приступом. Да би се мир креирао позитивним приступом, неопходно је правовремено утврдити присуство конфликта, његову природу и могућност изазивања насиља, па у складу са тим изабрати одговарајући пут превазилажења несугласица које производе конфликт, односно смиривања конфликта и спречавања његове ескалације у неки облик насиља. С тим у вези, циљ овог рада јесте да истакне значај управљања конфликтом с намером креирања културе мира, а не наметања сопственог интереса по сваку цену и, на тај начин, заоштравања конфликтне ситуације.

Кључне речи: *друштвени односи, хармонија, конфликтна ситуација, супротстављање интереса, решење конфликта*