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## CHALLENGES OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT DURING THE COVID PANDEMIC

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**ABSTRACT.** The changing environment complicates the functioning of organizations. Main thing in such conditions is optimal resource management, that increases the importance of human resource sciences, among them is conflict management. The environment has become even more volatile under the Covid Pandemic, which began in 2019 and has completely changed the work environment. Under the new reality, both the organizations that were unprepared and the employees' psyche were affected.

Working from home, social isolation, complicating the separation of free and working time have posed a new challenge to conflict management. However, the economic crisis and the situation in organizations in certain sectors, such as the tourism sector, have increased unemployment. Which of course greatly increased the stress and feelings of instability in people. For example, according to Bloomberg, up to 340 companies in the US in 2020 declared bankruptcy, Pandemic was named as a one of the reason.

Conflict is an intense image or severe differences between two or three parties each depends on the others, on basis of inconsistencies in needs, desires, values, beliefs, and attitudes. Since each person is an individual and, at the same time, a social being, conflict in the organization is inevitable. Consequently, the goal of conflict management is not to avoid organizational conflict, but to manage it so that it does not become destructive. Properly managed conflict can increase employees performance. Of course, Covid Pandemic has also had an impact on conflict management. Most organizations have moved to remote work, the role of software / online platform in human resource management has been increased.

The article discusses the meaning of conflict management, the path of development of organizational conflict and different views and the importance of its proper management in the organization. The article also covers the causes of organizational conflict. Of course, this is key point for analyzing the impact of the pandemic. It also reviews what new challenges the pandemic has posed to the business environment and organizations, what impact the current processes have had on employees and people in general. For better understanding of the issue, several studies related to the condition of employees, adapting to the new environment and the challenges faced by the pandemic were discussed. Particular attention is paid to stress, which is one of the causes of conflict and which has been particularly affected by the pandemic, the results of various studies are discussed in this regard.

The problem of including remote employees in the organizational environment were even before the pandemic, however, due to increased stress, the situation has become more complicated in this regard. The article also covers the difficulties that conflict management faced in working remotely during the pandemic, including the work-family conflict. The work-family conflict was quite topical even before the pandemic, but with the majority of employees working remotely for months and not functioning, educational institutions, transport, restaurants, etc. increased interest in the issue. To clarify the challenges, several studies conducted in different fields and countries are reviewed.

The example of various studies highlights what new challenges conflict management faces: how did the new reality affect the number of organizational conflicts, their content, what methods are used to resolve them, which factor in the conflict should be given special attention. Of course, the role of managers, the actions taken by them and the decisions made are important in this regard. It also discusses what positive outcomes and opportunities the current situation may have on conflict management. Based on the analysis of research conducted in different fields and countries, the article provides an opportunity to create an overview of the challenges of conflict management during the pandemic.

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## Introduction

The management of human resources is especially relevant in the recent period, since it is the only resource that is unique and without which it is impossible to gain a competitive advantage. At the same time, humans are a social beings, and conflict is inevitable in society. The Covid pandemic has changed both the work environment and organizational processes, as well as people's lives in general. Therefore, it is important to analyze and change approaches related to human resource management.

The purpose of this article is to highlight the challenges and opportunities of conflict management in Covid pandemic. Also to analyze the factors affecting conflict management and the consequences of their impact. Therefore, the following tasks were defined: highlighting the factors causing organizational conflict and the impact of the pandemic on them, challenges of conflict management and ways to solve them.

Methodology: to achieve the research goal, relevant studies and publications, both Georgian and foreign authors, are used.

Results: Working from home, social isolation, complicating the separation of free and working time have posed a new challenge to conflict management, but it also provides opportunities to further develop different methods and approaches.

## Conflict management

The attitude towards conflict is heterogeneous, according to the traditional approach, conflict has a destructive character, and managers should not spare efforts to avoid it. But, over time, this view has changed and now organizations understand that conflict is an inevitable event in society. "In the 1970s, a neutral view about the conflicts was created according to which conflicts were considered neither good nor bad, but rather a reason for organizational growth." [1]

There are two types of conflict: relationship conflicts and task conflicts. "Relationship conflicts are related to emotional and interpersonal aspects and it create a serious impact on an individual self-identity and self-respect." [1] "Task conflicts is related to the disputes between two or more people about an objective or a particular task which is to be performed. Such kind of disputes usually occur because of the opposition or differences of the ideas, opinions and point of views of the employees within a group and sometimes the disputes are related to the allocation of materials, policies and procedures, difference in perception and understanding of particular information or fact are part of the task conflict." [1].

"As it is known, conflict can have constructive and destructive impact on the organizations. Conflict management professionals should pay a special attention to avoid destructive results of the conflict as it can decrease productivity not only workforce, but worse organizational outcomes at all." [2] "There are different ways to manage conflicts, some of them are focused on interpersonal relations and others are fundamental changes. To deal with a conflict in a productive manner is the perfect way of conflict resolution within the organization." [1] But the key to organizational conflict resolution is proper communication. "The way in which conflicts are handled are also dependent on factors such as a person's connection to the issue, whether or not there is emotional involvement, and the energy level involved in the motivation to resolve the conflict." [3] "Studies have also shown, however, that in more complex conflict situations, a one off approach of conflict management may not prove to be very effective. In fact, chances of there being a more of a negative reaction to the conflict management style are even higher. If the conflicting parties already have very strong negative

feelings towards each other, then the expected outcome of the problem solving approach may not be achieved.” [4]

### **The impact of the covid pandemic**

The environment has become even more volatile under the Covid Pandemic, which began in 2019 and has completely changed the work environment and people’s lifestyle as well. “Quarantine has been associated with increased rates of suicide, anger, acute stress disorder, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder, with symptoms continuing even years after quarantine ends.” [5] “Organizations have found themselves unprepared for this whole new reality and it primarily damaged people and their psyche.” [6] “The COVID-19 outbreak has made working from home (WFH) the new way of working for millions of employees in the EU and around the world. Due to the pandemic, many workers and employers had to switch, quite suddenly, to remote work for the first time and without any preparation.” [7] Of course, this had an impact on human resource management as well and presented it with completely new challenges and opportunities. “Perhaps one of the most salient HRM challenges stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic involves adjusting new and current employees to drastically altered work conditions, such as shifting to remote work environments or implementing new workplace policies and procedures to limit human contact.” [8]

Of course, the Covid pandemic has had a great impact on people working in any field, but for people in certain professions, this period has been particularly stressful. According to a study by Rahman et al., the police officers feel more depressed since the COVID-19 pandemic and their workload.” [9] which may cause conflict, mainly the reason of it is lack of communication and different values/beliefs. “87% of the police officers agreed that conflicts encountered in the workplace during the COVID-19 pandemic could cause disciplinary problems among police officers.” [9] Another sector whose employees have been particularly affected by the Covid pandemic is ICU staff. “There is a variety of studies describing the types of conflict which occur in ICUs, but too few of them address the issue of conflict management. As intensive care environment might be hazardous and oppressive, conflict management is crucial for improvement of working conditions. (ICU). As many conflicts may arise among ICU staff, it is very important to identify their causes, to take preventive measures adequately early or to introduce targeted corrective measures. Even more so when there is a situations of high demand for the resolution capacity of professionals, managers and health systems, such as the current COVID-19 pandemic.” [10]

Of course, the covid pandemic had an impact on Georgia as well. The labor market of Georgia was not in a good condition even before the pandemic, the high rate of unemployment and the shortage of qualified personnel are characteristic of our labor market. “In statistical and social studies unemployment is presented as Georgia's socioeconomic problem and represents one of the most pressing and important political issues for the country.” [11] In this regard, the pandemic worsened the situation. “In the second quarter of 2020 the employment rate decreased by 0.5 percentage points to 55.9%. In the II quarter, compared to the corresponding quarter of the previous year, the share of employees in the total employment rate decreased by 1.6 percentage points to 48.6%” [11] Nevertheless, research by Nino et al found that organizational conflicts have decreased. “Total number of conflict cases has decreased as work nature has changed. People are working remotely or partly remotely till now. They have meet each other rarely, which decreases probability of appearing stressors and develop conflict. people realize more, that instead of competing, it is better to collaborate.” [12]

“In mid-March 2020, as many employees began working at home because of government dictates for social distancing, the abrupt shift in the nature of work-nonwork boundaries generated potential shocks to role conflict.” [13] This is what led to the increase of work-family conflicts. “The problem that takes place between the two demands makes a particular person getting stressed in their personal life due to the imbalance between work and family.” [14] “Work-family conflict is associated with a strong gender dependency, as in most cultures women are predominantly responsible for housework and caregiving.” [15] Based on the results of research, conducted by Novitasari et al, it can be “concluded that work-family conflict gives negative and

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significant affect towards the worker's performance in the packaging industry. This means that the higher the family conflict experienced by an employee; the lower the worker's performance would get." [14] If work-family conflict cannot be resolved in time, it leads to role and interpersonal conflicts. "Learning how to manage remote work can decrease the perception of family-work conflict. In addition, organizations should support employees' time management skills, enabling them to divide the two spheres and give each of them the right attention at the right time, with a view to the right to disconnection and physical and mental recovery of each worker." [16]

### **Conclusion and recommendations**

Conflict is an inevitable event in society, and any organization should have its own approach to organizational conflicts. Conflict management is one of the most important factors in managing human resources and achieving organizational goals in general. The Covid pandemic, along with many other aspects of life, has changed the opportunities and challenges of conflict management. Stress, lack of communication, fear of job loss, increase in unemployment, remote working are the factors that human resource management has to deal with. All of the above-mentioned issues also present new challenges to conflict management. Since the importance of work-family conflict is increasing, which leads to interpersonal conflict, which is quite difficult to deal with, especially in conditions of remote working. Accordingly, conflict management methods and approaches should be changed. "Our focus must be forward thinking, building on the assumption that the grand challenge we currently face is not a singular, anomalous event, but rather constitutes a "new reality" that offers new opportunities to which organizational scholars and practitioners alike will need and want to remain attentive." [16]

Of course, the reviewed studies and literature are not sufficient for conclusions and recommendations, the mentioned issue is the subject of further discussion and research. However, organizations should change their approach and establish a conflict management system that corresponds to the current reality. Managers should have relevant knowledge and experience in organizational conflict resolution, as well as appropriate communication skills. Because, it is clear from the studies that the main cause of conflict both before the pandemic and during the pandemic is the lack of communication. Special attention should be paid to the emotional state and role conflicts of remote employees. "Previous studies suggest that an independent leadership style amplifies the influence on self-efficacy positively" [15] which can be used in the formation of conflict management style of remote employees.

<p>ავსაჯანიშვილი ე., (2022). <i>ინოვაციური ეკონომიკა და მართვა</i> 9(2), 17-22.</p> <p>DOI: <a href="https://doi.org/10.46361/2449-2604.9.1.2022.17-22">https://doi.org/10.46361/2449-2604.9.1.2022.17-22</a></p>	<p><b>კონფლიქტ მენეჯმენტის გამოწვევები კოვიდ პანდემიის პირობებში</b></p>
<p><b>ეკა ავსაჯანიშვილი,</b> <i>ივანე ჯავახიშვილის სახელობის თბილისის სახელმწიფო უნივერსიტეტი, დოქტორანტი, თბილისი, საქართველო</i> E-mail: <a href="mailto:avsajanishviliEka96@gmail.com">avsajanishviliEka96@gmail.com</a> ORCID ID: <a href="https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7110-825X">https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7110-825X</a></p> <p>DOI: <a href="https://doi.org/10.46361/2449-2604.9.2.2022.17-22">10.46361/2449-2604.9.2.2022.17-22</a></p>	<p><b>აბსტრაქტი.</b> ცვალებადი გარემო ორგანიზაციების საქმიანობას ართულებს. მთავარი, ამ შემთხვევაში, ადამიანური რესურსების სწორად მართვაა, რაც ზრდის ადამიანური რესურსების მენეჯმენტთან დაკავშირებული მეცნიერებების მნიშვნელობას, მათ შორისაა კონფლიქტ მენეჯმენტი. გარემო განსაკუთრებით არასტაბილური გახდა კოვიდ პანდემიის დროს, რომელიც 2019 წელს დაიწყო და სრულიად შეცვალა არსებული რეალობა. რამაც, რა თქმა უნდა, გავლენა მოახდინა, როგორც ორგანიზაციების საქმიანობაზე, ასევე ადამიანების ცხოვრებაზე.</p> <p>დისტანციურმა მუშაობამ, თავისუფალი და სამუშაო საათების გამოიკვინის გართულებამ, იზოლაციამ ახალი გამოწვევების წინაშე დააყენა კონფლიქტ მენეჯმენტი. ამასთან, ეკონომიკურმა კრიზისმა და გარკვეულ ბიზნეს სექტორებში მოღვაწე ორგანიზაციების მდგომარეობამ გაზარდა უმუშევრობის დონე. მაგალითად, ბლუმბერგის მიხედვით, 340-მდე კომპანიამ 2020 წელს აშშ-ში გამოაცხადა გაკოტრება, რის მიზეზადაც პანდემია დაასახელეს.</p> <p>ნაშრომში განხილულია კონფლიქტ მენეჯმენტის არსი, მასთან დაკავშირებული შეხედულებები და სწორად მართული კონფლიქტების მნიშვნელობა ორგანიზაციაში. ასევე, წარმოჩენილია კონფლიქტის გამომწვევი ფაქტორები. რაც, რა თქმა უნდა, საკვანძოა კოვიდ პანდემიის გავლენის შესასწავლად. ამასთან, გამოკვეთილია გამოწვევები, რომლის წინაშეც თანამედროვე ორგანიზაციები დგანან. განსაკუთრებული ყურადღება გამახვილებულია სტრესზე, რომელიც კონფლიქტის გამომწვევი ერთ-ერთი ფაქტორია და რომელზეც პანდემიამ დიდი გავლენა იქონია. ზემოთ ხსენებულ საკითხების ნათელსაყოფად განხილულია სხვადასხვა კვლევა.</p> <p>დისტანციურად დასაქმებულთა საკითხი, პანდემიამდეც აქტუალური იყო, თუმცა ამ მხრივ გარემო მეტად კომპლექსური გახდა. ნაშრომში ასევე მოიცავს სირთულეებს, რომლის წინაშეც კონფლიქტ მენეჯმენტი აღმოჩნა ამ შემთხვევაში, მათ შორის სამსახური-ოჯახი კონფლიქტის შემთხვევაში. დასაქმებულთა უმრავლესობის დისტანციურ რეჟიმზე გადასვლამ, თვეების განმავლობაში დაკეტილმა ტრანსპორტმა, საგანმანათლებლო დაწესებულებებმა, კვების ობიექტებმა და აშ. საკითხს მეტი მნიშვნელობა შესძინა.</p> <p>კვლევებზე დაყრდნობით გამოკვეთილია კონფლიქტ მენეჯმენტის გამოწვევები, ორგანიზაციული კონფლიქტების დინამიკა, მათი შინაარსი, მეთოდები, ფაქტორები, რომლებიც განსაკუთრებულ ყურადღებას იმსახურებს. რა თქმა უნდა, მენეჯერების როლი, მათი ქმედებები და გადაწყვეტილებები კონფლიქტის გადაჭრის საკითხში. ამასთან, წარმოჩენილია ის დადებითი მხარეები, რომელიც კონფლიქტ მენეჯმენტს შეიძლება მოუტანოს შეცვლილმა გარემომ.</p>
<p><b>JEL Classification: . O15, P23, P42,P48</b></p>	<p><b>საკვანძო სიტყვები</b> კონფლიქტ მენეჯმენტი, პანდემია, დისტანციურად მუშაობა, გამოწვევები</p>

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