VARNA FREE UNIVERSITY
CHERNORIZETS HRABAR

FACULTY OF
SOCIAL, BUSINESS AND COMPUTER SCIENCES
DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

MARIA-STEFKA DIMITROVA DIMITROVA

MEDIATION AND ACHIEVING AGREEMENTS WITHIN THE PROCESS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL OVERCOMING OF CONFLICTS

AUTOREFERAT
of a dissertation for awarding educational and scientific degree PhD,
professional field 3.2. Psychology,
PhD programme General Psychology

Scientific supervisor:
Prof. Mayana Mitevska, DSc

Varna, 2026

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The dissertation is with total volume 215 pages. It consists of an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, a bibliographic reference and a supplement. The bibliographic list includes 68 sources in Bulgarian and foreign languages. In connection with the dissertation subject are presented three publications.

The dissertation's author is a PhD student in PhD programme General Psychology to Department of Psychology of Chernorizets Hrabar Varna Free University.

The public defense of the dissertation before a scientific jury will take place on November, 19th, 2026 at 10:00 h in the Meeting Hall at Varna Free University "Chernorizets Hrabar". The dissertation defense materials are available at the office of the Department of Psychology and at the website of the university www.vfu.bg.

I. GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DISSERTATION

1. Introduction

Conflict is an inseparable part of the human relationships and originates in different life spheres – family, work, education, society – when disagreements appear. It is a sharp way for expressing and solving significant contradictions within the process of interaction. The individual's psychology and behaviour are determined not only by their personality qualities, but also by the complex social environment, in which he/she develops. In society people are integrated in different in size and character groups, and personality development and relationships in these small groups pass constructively, as well as destructively. The achieving of mutual understanding is often full of difficulties, and the group relationships may be a source of contradictions. The individual's behaviour in a group is a derivative of his/her personality characteristics, as well as of the specificity of the very group and the wider social environment. Negative relationships within the group context deserve special attention, since they can cause anxiety, interpersonal conflicts and frustration with the separate members.

The resolution of conflicts is a purposeful process, which is directed towards decreasing or eliminating tension and disagreement between the parties, with purpose achieving mutually acceptable and satisfying solution. Psychological overcoming of a dispute is connected with the cognitive and emotional process of adaptation, which includes the individual's ability to manage with unfavourable circumstances and restore his/her psychological equilibrium. This process depends on multitude of factors, including personality traits, available social support and the used managing strategies, and it manifests in emotional, cognitive and behavioural forms. The successful overcoming can be assessed through criteria as psychic wellbeing, satisfaction from the relationships and general health condition.

Mediation is an exceptionally topical method in the contemporary society, where conflicts are an inevitable element of the social dynamics. The increasing complexity of the interpersonal and group interactions requires effective, non-confrontational approaches for resolution of arguments, which not only minimize the negative consequences, but also encourage the long-term relationship improvement and psychological recovery of the participants.

The significance of mediation originates from its ability to suggest an alternative of the traditional judicial proceedings – a process which is faster, more economical and less formal. Through the active participation of the parties in the forming of the solution, mediation increases the satisfaction by the result and preserves and often restores the violated relationships.

Mediation motivates the parties towards collaboration and mutual searching of a solution through a structured dialogue. Main motives for resorting to it include the desire to be avoided the high financial and emotional expenses of the lawsuits, as well as the striving for achieving stable, sustainable to time agreements.

The process of mediation is realized within the frameworks of determined normative acts and ethical standards, which guarantee its justice, voluntariness, confidentiality and defends the rights of all participants.

2. Topicality of the problem

Despite the increasing application of the mediation as an alternative method for resolution of arguments, there is a systematic deficiency of profound psychological studies in the Bulgarian and international context. The scientific interest remains predominantly focused on procedure, legal or general communicative aspects of the process, while the interrelations between the sustainable personality characteristics, the participants' social orientations and the efficiency of the mediation remain insufficiently clarified. This theoretical

vacuum also creates a practical difficulty: the lack of experimentally based models for prognostication of the process dynamics and mediator's style adaptation to the deep psychological profiles of the parties. Consequently, the present study is necessitated by the need to be overcome this deficiency through system analysis of the psychological mechanisms, which mediate the result of the mediation.

The topicality of the subject is also determined by the necessity the conflict to be considered not only as an organizational or legal problem, and as a psychological process, in which the perceptions, emotional regulation, communication and personality dispositions influence on the way of escalation and the opportunity for achieving sustainable agreement. Within this context mediation is studied as an instrument for transformation of the interaction and not only as a formal procedure for conclusion of an argument.

3. Research issue and author's thesis

A basic research thesis is formulated on the grounds of the theoretical analysis and the experimental results, that the approach to mediation with organizational conflicts has to be differentiated in compliance with the psychological characteristics of the parties, and more concretely – the locus of control. The specified relation between the more external locus and the higher conflict-proneness grounds the necessity of a more structured approach with externals and bigger usage of the self-reflection and personal responsibility with internals. The efficiency of the concrete differentiated strategies is subject to a subsequent intervention verification.

The defended thesis confirms that the psychological overcoming of the conflicts through mediation is a process, which has to be built on the diagnostics of the personality peculiarities of the participants. The including of methods for assessment of the locus of control in the mediator's practice has potential to assist

the adaptation of the negotiation strategy and the coming to more sustainable and satisfying agreements, as it addresses the psychological preconditions of the conflicting behaviour. The effect of this approach has to be verified through real intervention studies.

4. Purpose and tasks of the study

The basic purpose of the dissertation study is to be studied the relation between the locus of control and the perceived conflict-proneness in an organizational environment, to be analyzed the influence of the demographic factors and on this base to be grounded the applied potential of the mediation and to be developed differentiated strategies, conformed with the psychological profile of the participants.

1. A theoretical analysis and systematization of the psychological constructions: To be carried out a systematic critical review of the Bulgarian and international scientific literature (period 2000–2026), in order to be identified, defined and systematized the key psychological constructions, connected with the conflicting behaviour and the process of mediation. To be outlined the basic theories (for example Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument, Dual Concern Model, social-cognitive models of conflicts) and to be analyzed conflict styles (avoidance, adjustment, compromise, competition, collaboration), emotional intelligence in conflicts, cognitive connections (attributions, perception of a threat), principles of the mediation (neutrality, voluntariness, empathy, facilitation). After a systematic literary review is carried out, it will be possible to be outlined the strong/weak sides of the existing models.

2. Experimental study: To be diagnosticated the locus of control and the accepted conflict-proneness among employees in an organizational environment and to be analyzed their connections with the demographic factors (sex, age,

education), as there shall be identified groups with increased conflicting potential, which need a mediation intervention.

3. Analysis of the interrelations and modelling the influences. To be determined the statistical connections between the locus of control, demographic factors and level of perceived conflict-proneness in an organizational environment, as there shall be identified the key predictors of the conflicting behaviour and shall be outlined instructions for mediation interventions, conformed with the personality profile of the employees.

5. Object and subject of the study – hypotheses

Object of study is the psychological process of originating, manifestation and overcoming of organizational conflicts through mediation.

Subject of study is the connection between the locus of control (internal /external), the individual-personality characteristics, the perception of the conflicting environment and the applied potential of the mediation for constructive overcoming of organizational conflicts, with rendering an account of the demographic factors sex, age and education.

In compliance with the formulated purposes and tasks are built the following research hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: A significant positive correlation between the external locus of control and the level of the perceived conflict-proneness exists – the more strongly the externality is expressed, the higher the levels of the conflicting behaviour.

Hypothesis 2: The demographic factors (sex and education) do not have significant influence on the conflict-proneness, while the age is connected with changes in the conflicting behaviour (higher conflict-proneness in young age).

Hypothesis 3: The locus of control is a stronger predictor of the conflict-proneness than the demographic characteristics, i.e. it preserves its significance even when the influence of sex, age and education is controlled.

Hypothesis 4: In the studied organization the level of conflict-proneness exceeds the normative threshold for conflict-generating environment, which grounds the necessity of introducing mediation practices.

6. Methodology of the study

The study is realized through integration of theoretical, psychometric and statistical methods. The theoretical part includes a comparative and critical analysis of the scientific literature about the conflicts, the organizational behaviour, the locus of control and mediation. The experimental part is directed towards diagnostics of the organizational conflict-proneness and the locus of control.

The basic experimental sample includes 115 employees. The sex structure is 70 men and 45 women. The study analyzes sex, age and education as control demographic variables, and the locus of control – as a basic psychological predictor of conflict-proneness.

An author's questionnaire for assessment of the conflicting relationships in the organization is used. It has been developed on the grounds of a literary analysis and psychometric approbation, as well as Method for measuring the locus of control by Velichkov and Radoslavova. For the processing of the data are applied descriptive statistics, t-test, One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), correlation analysis, multiple regression and analysis of reliability through the Cronbach's coefficient.

Table 1. Basic variables and their operationalization

Variable	Role in the model	Measuring
Locus of control	Independent / predictor	Method for locus of control (Velichkov & Radoslavova)
Organizational conflict-proneness	Dependable / criterion	Author's questionnaire about conflicting relationships, 5-point Likert scale
Sex, age, education	Control variables	Demographic questions
Mediation	Suggested applied process in the model	Differentiated strategies and communicative techniques
Permanent agreement	Purposeful practical result	Satisfaction, practicability, restoration of relationships

7. Basic literary sources

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8. Theoretical and practical significance of the results of the dissertation

Theoretical significance: Enrichment of knowledge about the role of the personality dispositions (locus of control) within the genesis and dynamics of the organizational conflicts. Drawing a psychological profile of the conflicting person.

Practical significance: Developing criteria about diagnostics of the conflict-generating environment and differentiated strategies for mediation, which have potential to support the increase of the sustainability of the agreements and the improvement of the psychological climate in the organizations.

The scientific novelty is expressed in the connecting of the organizational conflict-proneness with the locus of control and also in the deduction of

differentiated mediation strategies in compliance with the internal or external orientation of the participants. This allows mediation to be conceptualized as a psychologically sensitive and personalized process, and not as an identical procedure for all conflicting parties.

II. STRUCTURE AND CONTENTS OF THE DISSERTATION

The dissertation is structured in an introduction, three chapters, conclusion, a bibliographic reference and a supplement. The total volume is 215 pages. The list of the used literature includes 68 sources. The used questionnaire is presented in the supplement.

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III. SHORT PRESENTATION OF THE DISSERTATION

Introduction

In the introduction is grounded the necessity the conflict to be studied simultaneously as an interpersonal, group and organizational process. The emphasis is put on the psychological overcoming of the argument, which includes a cognitive processing, an emotional regulation and a change of the behavioural strategies. Mediation is presented as a non-confrontational approach, which creates conditions for the active participation of the parties and for achieving a solution, which preserves or restores the relationship.

The research logic passes from the theoretical clarification of the conflict and the mediation towards the experimental measuring of the conflict-proneness and the locus of control, and after that to elaboration of differentiated strategies for work of the mediator. Thus, the dissertation connects the personality level of the analysis with the organizational environment and with the applied practice of the mediation.

First chapter. Theoretical fundamentals of origin and development of conflicts

First chapter of the dissertation has purpose to build a complete theoretical framework for understanding the nature, functions and typology of conflicts. It lays the foundations for the further study of mediation as a method for their resolution, as it considers the conflict interdisciplinarily – from the point of view of psychology, sociology, law and management.

General characteristics of conflict

In the beginning are summarized the different concepts for the conflict, highlighting the lack of a uniform definition.

From psychological point of view, the conflict is considered as an inevitable element of the human communication, which expresses itself in a

collision of incompatible necessities, motives, values or purposes, accompanied by negative emotional experiences.

In sociology the emphasis is on the conflict as a form of sharpening the contradictions between social groups, classes or communities, originated by the opposing of interests.

From legal point of view, the conflict is interpreted as a confrontation between parties with mutually excluding purposes, as for example in the legislation is defined the concept "interpersonal conflict".

In management (managing), it is also accepted as a struggle for values, power and resources, but also as an inevitable interaction in complex systems, which may have a positive-functional purpose.

As a synthesis of these definitions is suggested a working definition: “the conflict is a normal manifestation of the social relations, a way of interaction with collision of incompatible points of view and interests between mutually connected parties, who pursue their purposes“.

Functions of conflict (positive and negative consequences)

In this part we consider the dual nature of the conflict –it may be constructive, as well as destructive. Its functions are analyzed in the light of their influence on the organization and the interpersonal relationships.

Positive (functional) consequences:

Conflict may consolidate the group unity, if it is resolved in a way, which respects the mutual interests. It makes the interactions more dynamic and mobile as it clarifies the positions. In this way it acts as an indicator for social tension, unsolved problems or mistakes in the management, forcing the administration to pay attention. On the other hand, the struggle for the new often causes resistance (a conflict), but its successful imposing leads to a progress and overcoming of the conservatism.

Conflict may renew and improve relationships, as it puts them on a new and stronger base of mutual respect. It reveals significant information about the condition of the organization and the qualities of the people (their intellectual, emotional and volitional peculiarities).

Negative (dysfunctional) consequences:

They include dissatisfaction, decrease of the collaboration, increase of the hostility, reduction of unity and deterioration of the moral-psychological climate.

The basic conclusion is that the management task is to be encouraged the functional-positive character of the conflict and its negative consequences to be minimized.

Typology (types) of conflicts

Here are systemized the different types of conflicts according to different criteria, as it is drawn on from the works of number of authors (L. Kozer, H. Bisno, F. Borodkin and N. Koriak, V. Siegert and L. Lang and others).

A. Classical typology:

1. An intrapersonal conflict: A collision inside the individual (for example a roleplay conflict, a contradiction between work and personal values, stress from overexertion).

2. An interpersonal conflict: The most frequently met type – a struggle between two or more people for resources, power or because of incompatibility of purposes or values.

3. A conflict between a person and a group: It originates when the individual refuses to conform with the group norms or he/she occupies a position, which is different from the group one (for example a new employee against established rules or a manager, whose actions are considered unfair).

4. An inter-group conflict: A conflict between formal and informal groups, between departments in the organization (for example "sales" against "production"), or between a syndicate and administration.

B. Additional classifications:

- Realistic against unrealistic (L. Kozer): The realistic ones are means for achieving a concrete purpose; the unrealistic ones are originated by the necessity of releasing tension and aggression as the purpose is the very conflict.

- According to H. Bisno: Conflict of interests, forced, illusory, substituted (moving the aggression on another object), expressive.

- According to V. Siegert and L. Lang: Motivational (connected with the necessities), communication (because of lack of a feedback), conflicts of the helplessness of the authority, phantom (in the imagination).

According to Borodkin and Koriak:

Emotional (based on antipathy) and business (connected with the work). A significant conclusion: the prolonged business conflicts tend to develop into emotional ones.

Antagonistic (uncompromising, "all or nothing") and non-antagonistic (compromise, allowing searching of solution, respecting to a certain degree the interests of all parties).

The reasons for the conflict are problems, phenomena, events, which precede the conflict and in certain situations, which develop in the course of the activity of the individuals of social interaction, cause it. On figure 1.1 is shown the place of the cause for the conflict in its origin and development.

Mediation

In the second part of the theoretical base of the dissertation we focus on mediation as a key constructive method for resolution of conflicts as the emphasis is put on the so called restorative mediation. Its nature, principles, purposes and

expected results are clarified, as it presents it as a process, which not only terminates the conflict, and restores the relationships between the parties.

Necessity of mediation

The section begins with the observation that the constructive solution of conflicts requires collaboration and open dialogue, where the parties mutually express their complaints and make a joint decision. This allows to be avoided the negative consequences and the repetition of similar situations. However, in practice when the conflict has escalated the parties are often under influence of strong emotions (wrath, distrust, aggression) and they are not in condition to conduct such a conversation by themselves. Therefore, the interference of a neutral mediator is necessary – a third person, who does not take sides, and assists the process of communication, as he/she guarantees safety and observance of the rules. It is important that the responsibility about the decision remains in the very parties.

Definition and types of mediation

Mediation is defined as a process, where the participants with the assistance of a neutral third party (mediator) resolve the conflict. When this process is based on the ideas and principles of the restorative approach, it is called "restorative mediation". This type of mediation has a specific content, which exceeds the simple achieving of an agreement.

Nature of the restorative mediation – dialogue and change of the relationships. The basic element of the restorative mediation is the arrangement of a dialogue between the parties. Through the dialogue they mutually become better acquainted with their points of view, opinions and emotions. The mediator creates conditions for this, as he/she helps each person to express themselves and hear the other individual. This leads to a change of the relationships – from confrontation, prejudice and aggression towards more positive and constructive attitudes.

Results from the restorative mediation

Restorative actions: These are concrete steps like an excuse, forgiveness or desire for improvement of the caused damage. They are of significant importance, because they address the emotional and moral consequences from the conflict.

Reconciling agreement (agreement): A document, which can be presented to the respective body (for example court or management) and to be taken into account at further decisions regarding the participants.

Basic purpose – humanization of the relationships

The highest value and purpose of the restorative mediation is the "humanization" of the relationships. The conflict often leads to dehumanization – the parties see in each other only negative traits, and the feelings of fear, hatred and wrath deepen. This impedes the adequate perception of the situation. Mediation helps these negative notions to be overcome, as it restores the ability for understanding own and other people's actions, intentions and purposes.

The metaphor "ladder of the restorative mediation"

We use the figurative metaphor of "ladder" (see Figure 1.3), in order to explain the process. The mediator builds this ladder, on which the parties climb step by step. Each stage presents deepening of the knowledge about the other person and the situation. This gradual accumulation of understanding helps them to manage with the conflict and build strong relationships between themselves.

Ultimate purpose of the reconciling programmes

The reconciling programmes (based on restorative mediation) aim to apply an alternative method for resolution of conflicts. They create conditions for constructive dialogue, in which the parties:

understand mutually;

take responsibility for the things, which have happened;

independently develop a joint decision for a way out of the conflict;

determine approaches for future relations in order to prevent repetition of the problem.

2.1. Mediation as a psychological process

Mediation is a process, which concerns the cognitive, as well as the emotional processes of people, who participate in the conflict. The conflict is a situation, in which people have contrary or incompatible purposes, interests, points of view, opinions, necessities or values, which are accepted as a threat for their wellbeing or identity. The conflict may be internal (inside the person) or external (between people or groups of people). The conflict may have positive, as well as negative consequences for the individuals and groups, depending on how it is managed and resolved. According to the psychological theory of the conflict it consists of three components: cognitive (perception of the conflict), emotional (emotions, connected with it) and behavioural (actions, undertaken in the conflict).

Mediation is one of the methods for management and resolution of conflicts, which is focused on the cognitive and emotional component of the conflict. The mediator is a third person, whose purpose is to help the parties to understand themselves and the other party better, to express and hear their emotions, interests and necessities, to find mutual points and achieve agreement, which is acceptable for everyone. The mediator is not a judge, arbiter or negotiating person, and he/she is a facilitator, consultant and teacher. He/she does not resolve the argument, and assists the parties to resolve it themselves. The mediator does not give advices, recommendations or evaluations, and he/she stimulates the parties to generate and assess their own variants for resolution. He/she also does not influence the parties, and supports them to make informed and free decisions.

The advantages, which differ mediation from the other methods are:

- the parties decide on their own whether to enter in a mediation, to terminate it or to accept an agreement;

- improves the relationships between the people, since it stimulates communication, collaboration, mutual understanding and respect;

- all facts, data and documents, connected with the argument, are kept in secret and cannot be used in other procedures;

- it allows the parties to generate different variants for resolution and to achieve mutually acceptable agreement;

- the mediator assists the parties to communicate better and to find their own resolution.

Mediation is a complicated and dynamic psychological process, which concerns different psychological aspects like motivation, emotions, perception, cognitive processes and social psychology.

The usage of mediation in the labour relations

It is important to be made difference between mediation, carried out within the frameworks of the organizations (internal mediation), and mediation, realized through external specialized structures (external mediation), or in specific contexts as the mediation with discriminatory arguments. All of them are interference of a third party, who aims to resolve arguments between employees and employers or between colleagues, with individual, as well as with collective conflicts. Both types of mediation deal with existing arguments in organizational environment between parties, who usually maintain prolonged relationships, which are expected to continue and after the mediation. The significant difference between them is in the fact that the internal mediation usually takes place in a less formalized context, while the external one is carried out in a regulated environment under an established legal framework. The term “external labour

mediation“ is used for description of those formalized processes, which often precede legal proceedings or labour actions as a strike.

Mediation is a process, in which a third party – the mediator – facilitates the constructive communication between the arguing parties, directing them towards making decisions, resolving of problems and conducting negotiations for achieving a mutually acceptable agreement. Within the frameworks of this process, the mediator acts as a guarantor of the procedure, as simultaneously he/she restrains from an assessment of the legal or factual aspects of the argument and does not enforce concrete decisions. His/her main role is to help the parties to reach a deeper understanding of their mutual positions, interests and basic anxieties.

Criteria for efficiency of the mediation: Encouragement of efficiency, equality and participation.

A comprehensive approach, based on the perspective of the labour relations, is necessary for assessment of the applicability and forms of the mediation. As number of researchers notice, there is not a consensus regarding defining the efficiency of the procedures for resolution of arguments, which impedes its comparison with alternative methods. This is due to several factors: First, the usage of heterogeneous terminology (facilitation, reconciliation, mediation) leads to occasional unclarity. In compliance with the operating legislation, the present text accepts the term "mediation" as universally valid for the interference of a third party, considering the rest of the concepts for private methods within the frameworks of the process. Second, the assessment of the efficiency is based on numerous and often contradictory criteria.

In literature are identified three basic standards for comparison of the procedures about resolution of arguments: efficiency, equality and participation of the employees.

The adopted "efficiency" of mediation is analyzed predominantly regarding the expenses, the speed of the processes, the degree of achieving agreements and the satisfaction of the parties. The studies on the speed compare the duration of the mediation with the conventional procedures for complaints, while the studies on the satisfaction measure the adopted success of the agreements and the procedural justice. The prevention of expensive and prolonged legal proceedings is often emphasized as a key advantage of mediation. However, the criteria for efficiency are not undisputable, especially with the presence of power imbalances. Mediation assumes a relative equality between the parties, but in reality significant differences in the power are often observed, determined not only by the hierarchy, but also by the opportunity for expression, the education or the personality characteristics of the participants.

This imbalance can influence significantly on the course and result of the mediation. Despite the mediators' efforts to maintain balance during the session, they cannot change fundamentally the existing power relations outside it, which may restrict the ability of the weaker party for a meaningful participation. Consequently, a key question is: To what extent the parties are capable to negotiate as equal partners, or the mediation risks to reinforce the existing inequalities?

CONCLUSIONS

Second chapter. Study on the social-psychological aspects of mediation

Methodological framework of the study

The basic purpose of the study is to be studies the psychological factors, which determine the origin and course of conflicts in organizational environment, as well to be outlined the role of the mediation as an instrument for their constructive overcoming and achieving of permanent agreements. In the centre of

the study is the connection between the personality characteristics locus of control and the perceived level of conflict-proneness, as also the respondents' demographic peculiarities are reported. On these grounds are formulated recommendations for optimization of the mediational process and for development of skills for managing with conflicts in the organizations.

On the grounds of the theoretical analysis and experimental results is formulated a basic research thesis, that the approach to the mediation with organizational conflicts has to be differentiated according to the psychological characteristics of the parties and more concretely according to the locus of control. The ascertained connection between the more external locus and the higher conflict-proneness determines the necessity of a more structured approach with externals and bigger usage of the self-reflection and the personal responsibility with internals. The effectiveness of the concrete differentiated strategies is subject to a following intervention verification.

The defended thesis confirms that the psychological overcoming of conflicts through mediation is a process, which has to be built on the grounds of diagnostics of the participants' personality peculiarities. The inclusion of methods for assessment of the locus of control in the mediator's practice has potential to assist the adaption of the negotiation strategy and the achieving of more sustainable and satisfying agreements, as it addresses the psychological preconditions of the conflicting behaviour. The effect of this approach has to be verified through authentic interventional studies.

In theory, the constructive interpersonal resolution of problems originates when people leave aside the destructive emotions like wrath or desire for revenge, or when they pass from passive victims to active participants in search of mutual solutions of mutual problems.

The constructive interpersonal solution of problems is a transition from passivity and destructive emotions to active and joint search of solutions. This is in contrast to the traditional models of conflict, where wrath, revenge or the feeling of helplessness dominate and impede the efficient dialogue. According to Weitzman & Weitzman (2000), the key moment is the ability of the participants to leave aside the emotional burden and focus on the mutual problem. This approach does not simply decrease the tension, and creates a new framework for interaction, within which the parties perceive themselves as allies in the problem solution, and not like enemies.

In this context, the formal mediation is considered as a structured process, which facilitates this transition. It not only gives a neutral mediator, but also cultivates the necessary skills in the participants. As Herrman (1993) indicates, the increasing popularity of mediation in the court programmes and other spheres is an experimental proof about its efficiency. The logic is that if mediation is used more and more widely for resolution of disputes, this means that it successfully achieves its purpose – to encourage the constructive solutions of problems.

Consequently, mediation is not only an alternative procedure for resolution of disputes, and a social-psychological instrument, which:

Stimulates a change in the perspective from confrontation towards collaboration.

Creates a safe environment, in which the parties can express their necessities and interests without fear of emotional escalation.

Directs the focus from the past and guilt towards future and mutual solutions.

Probably because of methodological difficulties, a key challenge in the field of resolution of disputes is the lack of strict experimental tests, which can prove the excellence of mediation over other methods, like for example lawsuits

and arbitration. Simultaneously, there is volumetric literature about negotiations and mediation, which even though does not suggest ”strict tests” for excellence, gives opulent source of theoretical and conceptual frameworks.

Unfortunately, in literature lacks a consensus regarding the definitions of key concepts and variables in the field of mediation. This variety of conceptual and operational definitions, although it is an opulent resource for studies, often acts as a source of confusion for the scientist, as well as for the people who practice mediation.

The lack of a uniform theoretical and terminological apparatus is a direct result from the interdisciplinary nature of mediation. Specialists from fields like law, psychology, sociology, communication sciences and business administration contribute for the literature, but each one of them carries with themselves specific terminology and methodology.

This fragmentation has several key consequences:

Decreased comparability of the studies: When one and the same concept is defined in a different way in different studies, it becomes exceptionally difficult to be compared their results. For example, "the success of mediation" can be defined as achieving agreement in a certain study, while in another it can mean improved interpersonal relationships between the parties. This lack of common foundation impedes the accumulation of consistent scientific knowledge.

Difficulties in practice: For the practicing mediators, the lack of consensus may lead to confusion regarding the best practices, ethical standards and the professional competences. One mediator, who is trained within a legal framework, can have a different approach from a mediator, who is trained in psychology, which potentially can create inconformities in the quality of the offered services.

Impediment before the development of a uniform theory: Although the diversity of points of view is valuable, it may delay the forming of one comprehensive, universal theory of the mediation, which can unite the different approaches and suggest a more integral model for understanding the process.

Despite these challenges, the interdisciplinary character of mediation is also its biggest strength. Practically it allows to draw on from the opulence of different scientific fields, enriching it with different instruments and approaches. In order to overcome the fragmentation, is necessary to be worked for creating uniform frameworks and terminology, which can serve as a bridge between the different disciplinary traditions without sacrificing the valuable diversity.

2. Theoretical model of the experimental study

The suggested theoretical model integrates three basic psychological constructs: organizational conflict-proneness (as a dependent variable), locus of control (as an independent variable/predictor) and mediation (as an intervening variable/process). The model also reports the influence of the demographic factors (sex, age, education) as control variables.

3 . Questionnaire for the study

Questionnaire for assessment of the conflicting relationships within the organization

The questionnaire for assessment of the conflicting relationships within the organization includes the questions: from 1 to 25 question. It is an instrument for planning interventions (including mediation), directed towards improvement of the psychological climate and increase of the organization efficiency.

The studies in the labour and organizational psychology repeatedly ascertain, that one of the most significant sources of stress in the organization is connected with the quality of the informal interpersonal relationships. The presence of chronically maintained conflicts is a reason for periodically

originating negative experiences and gradual accumulation of chronical stress responses, which in turn lead to alienation from the work, loss of motivation for work, desire for leaving the organization and development of psychosomatic complaints.

Besides, the appearance of interpersonal and intergroup conflicts in the organization also creates significant problems of management nature and lowers the efficiency by the applying of the management decisions. Because of this, the assessment of the condition of the informal relationships has a practical significance in several relations:

Diagnostics of the organization with purpose improvement of the informal relationships and stimulation of the motivation for work.

Stress prevention.

Optimization of the management activity through increase of the group unity.

Selection of target groups for a psychological consultation and other practical interventions.

The suggested method here is a first attempt in our country to be operationalized one aspect of the interpersonal relationships in the organization. The idea with its construction was to be created an instrument, which can be applied in different private and state organizations.

With the construction of an author's instrument for assessment of the conflicting relationships initially are formulated 20 indicators, which are assessed as per 5-point Likert scale. The pilot psychometric validation is carried out with 150 employees from a state organization. The analysis shows that 16 of the assertions form a homogenous scale with a very high internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0,91$). This preliminary stage has to be delimited from the basic

experimental study of the dissertation, which is carried out with N = 115 employees.

Data for construct validity of the method give the correlations of the assessments, obtained with its help and the assessments of the perceived emotional social support by the colleagues and direct supervisors. These relations are presented in the following way:

- $p<.000$

The strong correlational relationships show, that the suggested method can be used except for diagnostics of conflicts in the organization also for assessment of the relationships of rendered social support.

The consistent reliability of the method is verified again in a second independent sample of 154 employees from another organization. The obtained Cronbach's coefficient is 0.91, which is analogous to the result of the first sample. This gives grounds to be expected, that the method is applicable in different organizations and shall indicate high levels of consistent reliability.

In the second sample is verified the internal structure of the method though usage of cluster analysis and application of the furthest neighbour method.

Out of the obtained cluster solution are outlined two aspects of the conflicting relationships – forming of groupings for protection of own interests and conflicts with the carrying out of the work tasks. The second aspect consists of strategies for diversion of the responsibility and direct conflicting interactions. If there is a desire for a more analytical approach with assessment of the relationships in the organization, can be formed subscales on the grounds of the obtained cluster solution.

Questionnaire for assessment of the locus of control

The questionnaire includes the questions from 26 to 45 question. The construct "locus of control" is introduced by Poker (1966) for description of the

generalized expectations about the sources of causality for the results, obtained by the individual. According to him there are two contrary expectations for the connection between the own behaviour and the results. The first one is the so-called internal locus of control, which is a generalized expectation the obtained results (notwithstanding whether positive or negative) to be considered as derivatives of own actions, i.e. they are subject to internal, personal control. The second expectation is the so-called external locus of control. In accordance with it the obtained results are explained by the action of reasons outside the person – luck, destiny, chance or other coincidence of circumstances. The external locus of control is a tendency of the individual to perceive himself/herself as dependent on external factors, which resist personal control.

The internal and external locus of control are the two poles of the construct "locus of control", so the assessments obtained with the suggested method allow to be estimated the position of the studied persons within the frameworks of one dimension. Here should be emphasized the theoretical conceptualization of the construct as a generalized expectation, i.e. as a generalized tendency to be attributed the sources of causality either to The Self (own behaviour, personal competence, ability to mobilize the resources, to manifest persistence and etc.), or to the action of factors, which resist influence of the own behaviour.

Construction of the method and psychometric characteristics

The suggested method is based on the original text as per Poker (1966), which contains 29 pairs alternative propositions. The studied person should choose out of every pair the proposition, which is closer to their own convictions. Diagnostic are 23 pairs, and the rest have for purpose to hide the genuine content of the measured construct. Only the propositions, which reflect external locus of control are assessed. They are given 1 point, so the total rating under the test varies within the limits 0-23 points. After reviewing the content of the original test were

eliminated items, which in our opinion are not relevant of our cultural conditions. We included on their place indications from another test – the one of Pe1c & Mare (1974), of which we adapt 8 items from the subscale for the control on the Self. The obtained preliminary variant of the test contains 51 pairs of indications.

The construct validity of the method is confirmed in great number of studies. Here we give data only from the initial validation of the method. The connections of the locus of control with the subscales from the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire and the Bulgarian variant of the motivation for achievement assessment scale are presented in table 1.

Note: ** p<.01 * p<.05

These initial data about the construct validity of the method are sufficient, in order to become clear that by its help can be obtained data and formulated hypotheses about the peculiarities and manifestation of another personality traits. After the initial publication of the method have been translated great number of studies in our country, which we shall not indicate here, but they many times and repeatedly prove the predictive validity and the construct validity of the method.

Table 2. Basic characteristics of the experimental study

Indicator	Value
Basic experimental sample	N = 115
Men	70 (≈61%)
Women	45 (≈39%)
Internals	71,3%
Externals	28,7%
Statistical processing	SPSS; t-test; ANOVA; Pearson r; multiple

Indicator	Value
	regression; Cronbach's α

Third chapter. Analysis of the interpretational results.

In the chapter are considered consecutively:

the structure and reliability of the used questionnaires;

the assessment of the conflicting climate in the organization through analysis of three key measurements: loyalty and group dynamics, work ethics and efficiency, communication capacity;

the results from the measurement of the locus of control and their connection with the conflict-proneness;

the quantitative analysis of the influence of the demographic factors (sex, age, education) on the level of conflict-proneness, realized through t-tests, One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and multiple regression.

The analysis allows to be outlined a complete picture of the organizational climate, to be identified the basic sources of tension and to be checked the relative importance of the individual-psychological in comparison with the structural factors. The obtained results put emphasis on the systemic nature of the conflict-proneness and stress the role of the locus of control as a sustainable predictor, which has a direct relation to the opportunities for conflict management through mediation and organizational interventions.

Assessment of the conflicting relationships in the organization

The method for assessment of conflicting relationships in the organization (Velichkov & Radoslavova) is only a self-report questionnaire, elaborated especially for the Bulgarian organizational context. It is the first attempt of its kind in Bulgaria to be operationalized and measured the level of conflicting

relationships within the frameworks of one organization. Its purpose is to serve as an instrument for diagnostics and practical interventions.

The survey includes 115 respondents altogether, who have answered 45 questions, divided in several key fields.

The first three questions of the survey are directed to collecting basic information about the participants, which allows segmentation of the results:

Sex: Identification of the sex distribution of the sample.

Age: Outline of the employees' age boundaries.

Education: Specification of the respondents' educational degree.

A big part of the questions (questions 4–13) study the informal relationships and the presence of conflicts in the work environment.

For the purpose of the study on mediation and its usage for resolution of conflicts peacefully, is used the questionnaire with 45 questions, out of which the first 25 are connected with the assessment of the survey respondents for their degree of its usage through measurement of competitive values. When it is applied the respondents are required to assess every affirmation as per a five-point scale, which varies from "completely no" to "very often". The questionnaire shows high psychometric data in a Bulgarian sample (Ilieva, 2006), and allows to be outlined the specificity of the relationships within the organization.

The data for reliability of the items are measured with the coefficient α of Cronbach and show high reliability of the questionnaire.

The questionnaire for study of mediation and the locus of control within the organization contains 22 items and is drawn up for the purposes of the present study (Snezhana Ilieva). The affirmations are assessed as per a five-point scale.

This gives opportunity to be outlined the specificity connected with the mediation and to be assessed each aspect, which has relation with it and its professional usage for resolution of conflicts peacefully.

The coefficient for internal consistency α of Cronbach is high - 0.81. As a result of the analysis are drawn several basic factors connected with the mediation.

The analysis is divided in three key dimensions: Loyalty and group dynamics, Work ethics and efficiency and Communication capacity.

Loyalty and group dynamics (Questions №4 – №11)

This section studies to what extent the team is united and what are the levels of hidden tension.

Solidarity against the Management: High degree of hiding mistakes before the managers – only 12,2% never do it, while the rest show solidarity in the hiding.

Interpersonal aggression: The mockeries and offences are a serious problem, as 35,7% of the respondent observe them “Often“ or “Very often“.

Emotional climate: Strong hatred is felt systematically by almost 1/5 of the team.

Information isolation: Strong fragmentation is available – 48,7% confirm that secrets are shared regularly only in small circles.

Hidden tension: This is a background noise in the organization, as for 27,9% of the people it is a permanent fact.

Work ethics and organizational efficiency (Questions №12 – №19)

Here the data show how the conflicts degrade the work process.

Sabotage and denunciations: The purposeful impeding other people’s work is a fact for 22,6% of the employees, and the anonymous denunciations are accepted as systematic practice by 20,9%.

Discipline: The diversion from the realization of the tasks is a mass phenomenon, observed frequently by over 40% of the team.

Disbalance and injustice: This is the most explosive zone. 45,2% indicate that some are overburdened, while others idle. Because of this, the joint work is frequently carried out by „particular individuals“ (39,2%).

Culture of excuses: The mutual accusations are a daily routine for 27%, and the looking for excuses about the omissions is systematic with 43,5%.

Imitation of activity: the organization suffers from heavy formalism – 45,2% confirm attitudes for work „only to be said that it is done“.

Communication capacity and management of conflicts (Questions №20 – №25)

The analysis of the skills for communication shows disagreement between self-esteem and real behaviour.

Skepticism towards mediation: Barely 10,4% would look for a mediator “Very frequently“, while almost 46% are rather negatively disposed towards such external assistance.

Psychological comfort: Half of the team (51,3%) feels comfortable to express their feelings, but the rest feel difficulties or hesitations.

Coping with the differences: Although 69,5% believe that they are capable to listen to opposing opinions, almost 26% admit that they regularly strive to avoid conflicting situations.

Empathy and control: There is available high declared empathy (68,7%). Simultaneously, the striving for imposing an opinion and establishing control is strongly expressed only with a small part of the people (7,8%).

Summarized assessment

The organization is in a condition of a chronical latent conflict, fed by:

Feeling for injustice with the distribution of the labour (the biggest risk factor).

Lack of transparency and forming of closed camps (information secrets).

Erosion of discipline, disguised through imitation of activity and solidarity in the hiding of mistakes.

Recommendation: The management should focus on objectification of the workload and improvement of the ethic norms, since the high „self-esteem of empathy“ of the employees does not correspond to the levels of mockeries and sabotage in the real work environment.

Method for measurement of the locus of control (Velichkov & Radoslavova)

This is a personality questionnaire, adapted and validated for Bulgarian conditions. It measures the generalized expectation of the individual about where the source of control on life and the happening with him/her is.

The method presents the construct as one dimension with two poles: internal and external locus of control.

The method measures two loci of control:

Internal locus of control (internal): the conviction, that the results (positive or negative) are a consequence of the own actions, efforts, competence and persistence.

External locus of control (external): The conviction, that the results are determined by external, uncontrollable powers: luck, chance, the influence of "powerful others" or the complexity of the situation.

Respectively, the method indirectly evaluates the tendency to assume personal responsibility, as well as the perception for personal efficiency and control on the outcome of situations.

The final results confirm one fragmented organizational culture:

Dominating intolerance with touches of pessimism: The basic core of the employees (around 55-60%) is composed by people, who assume responsibility. They are “the engines“ of the organization.

Risk group of “the helpless ones”: Around 40-45% of the employees systematically manifest signs of external locus. They feel dependent on chance and underappreciated. This group is most susceptible to conflicts, denunciations and demotivation.

Crisis of acknowledgement: Almost every second employee considers, that his/her efforts are not rewarded fairly. This is the strongest engine of the hidden tension in the organization.

Finally, it is important to draw attention that the method for evaluation of “The locus of control” in the organization indicated, that the team has a high potential for self-control, but is blocked by perception of organizational injustice. When the people with internal control (internals) do not see a connection between “work” and “reward”, they become the greatest critics of the system, which explains the high levels of mockeries and mutual accusations, reported in the beginning of the survey.

For the purposes of the basic statistical analysis are used the data of N = 115 employees. The results show, that the locus of control is connected with the conflict-proneness, while the influence of part of the demographic factors is limited. The most significant result is the positive correlation between the more external locus of control and the higher conflict-proneness ($r = 0,290$; $p = 0,002$).

Table 3. Summary of the basic statistical results

Connection	Statistical indicator	Significance	Conclusion
Locus of control → Conflict-proneness	r = 0.290	p = 0.002	Confirmed positive correlation
Sex → Conflict-proneness	t = -0.692	p = 0.490	There is no significant difference
Education → Conflict-proneness	F = 1.472	p = 0.234	There is no significant difference
Age → Conflict-proneness (single-factor)	F = 2.771	p = 0.015	There are significant differences (highest with age 20-24)
Multiple regression (complete model)	Locus: p = 0.009; Age: p = 0.150; Sex: p = 0.965; Education: p = 0.272	$R^2 = 0.112$	The locus of control is the only significant predictor in the complex model

The multiple regression analysis confirms, that the locus of control is the leading factor, which determines the levels of conflict-proneness in the studied group. With simultaneous inclusion of sex, age, education and locus of control

only the locus preserves statistically significant influence (B = 1,084; p = 0,009). The model explains approximately 11,2% of the variation of conflict-proneness, which shows that together with the personality orientation exist and other organizational and situational factors.

The sex (p = 0,490) and education (p = 0,234) do not manifest statistically significant influence on the conflict-proneness. The age is significant in the single-factor analysis (p = 0,015), as highest levels of conflict-proneness are observed with the participants at the age 20–24, but in the complex regression model the age loses its independent statistical significance. This necessitates a precautious interpretation of the age effect.

Table 4. Psychological profile and mediational orientation in accordance with the locus of control

Criterion	Internals (internal locus)	Externals (external locus)
Share in the sample	71,3 %	28,7 %
Average level of conflict-proneness	69,17	72,67
Basic attitude	“I control the events”	“The events control me”
Mediation strategy	Relying on self-control and empathy	Passing responsibility and structuring
Basic focus	Understanding the other party	Realizing the own role
Expected result	Faster and lasting agreement	Greater purposefulness is necessary

Differentiated strategies for mediation depending on the locus of control

Th experimental dependencies are used as a foundation for elaboration of differentiated strategies for mediation. With individuals with internal locus of control the mediator can rely on higher readiness for personal responsibility, self-regulation and collaboration. With individuals with external locus of control is necessary more structured work for realizing the own contribution to the conflict, decrease of the blame attributions and activation of the perception for personal control on the future behaviour.

Table 5. Mediator's communicative techniques with internals and externals

Technique	Application with internals	Application with externals
„I-message“	Assists expression of emotions without accusations	Learns to speak from first person instead of external accusation
Reformulation	Transforms critical statements into neutral	Moves the focus from accusation to description of the situation
Active listening (paraphrasing)	Intensifies the mutual understanding	Helps for realizing the contribution of the other
Technique of the question	Encourages the self-reflection and creative solution	Directs towards realizing the personal control
(Feedback)	Supports the positive behaviour	Gives concrete instructions for behavioural change

Role of the mediation in the process of resolution of conflicts

The fourth chapter presents the practical application of the restorative mediation as a model for resolution of conflicts, as it describes in detail the stages of the mediator's work, as well as the concrete instruments, which he/she uses in their practice. The chapter finishes with a conceptual summary of the principles and essence of the restorative mediation.

1 Stages of the mediator's work in the programme for restorative mediation

We present three basic stages in the mediator's work as each one of them is elaborated in detail with its phases and concrete tasks:

Stage 1. Preparatory

The initial phase includes estimation whether the case corresponds to the criteria for restorative mediation (the parties are known, the violator admits participation). The mediator informs himself/herself about an eventual pending proceedings, realizes a first contact with the parties and organizes individual meetings. If the participants are minors, their legal representatives are also included. Main tasks are achieving and maintaining of contact, creating conditions for constructive expression of emotions and provision of safe atmosphere.

Stage 2. Individual meetings

This stage is structured in four phases:

- Phase 1 (Creation of a foundation for dialogue): The mediator presents herself/himself, explains their neutral role, the voluntary character and the confidentiality of the process.

- Phase 2 (Understanding the situation): Through questions and careful listening the participant is assisted to formulate the different aspects of the situation, his/her emotions and the consequences of the conflict.

- Phase 3 (Finding resolution options): The possible resolutions are discussed, including the idea for a joint meeting with the other party. The mediator supports the assumption of responsibility for a restorative resolution.

- Phase 4 (Preparation for a meeting): The joint meeting format is explained, rules are negotiated (non-attacks, listening, confidentiality) and logistic details are specified.

Stage 3. Meeting of the parties

The actual meeting passes through six phases:

1. Creating conditions for dialogue: The mediator greets the participants, announces the purposes, regulations and rules.

2. Organizing a dialogue: the parties present their versions, express positions, and the mediator supports the constructive dialogue, as he/she transforms the negative statements.

3. Discussion and writing down variants: Looking for solutions for correcting the situation is initiated and agreements are fixed.

4. Discussion of the future: It is directed to prevention and planning (especially with minors) – what would they do with a similar situation, what are their plans.

5. Conclusion of an agreement: The achieved solutions and plan for execution are recorded, as the form of the agreement is negotiated.

6. Reflection of the meeting: The satisfaction of the participants is checked and there is opportunity for additional questions.

The chapter provides also an analytical conversation (in 2-3 weeks) for follow-up the carrying out of the agreement and the long-term effects from the mediation.

2. Mediator's professional instruments

Here are described the key communicative techniques, which the mediator uses in order to facilitate the dialogue and manage the conflict:

1. "I-message": A technique, which helps the parties to speak from first person about their emotions and necessities, instead of to blame the other person (for example "I am disappointed, that you did not keep your promise" instead of "You are a liar!"). This decreases the defensive reaction and maintains the communication constructive.

2. Change in the formulation of the statements: The mediator reformulates hostile or condemnable statements in neutral, acceptable forms, in order to be protected the focus on the content, and not on the offence.

3. Technique for active listening:

- Paraphrasing: Repetition of the heard with own words for checking the understanding.

-Verbalization: Expression with words of the emotional content or the messages "between the lines", as a careful assumption, which helps the speaking person to feel understood.

4. Technique of the question: The questions are a leading instrument – they become acquainted with the interlocutor, structure the conversation and determine its direction. The psychological climate depends on the way of asking.

5. Technique of the feedback (Feedback): The constructive feedback supports the positive behaviour and clarifies the relationships. It is important to be spoken concretely, to be avoided assessments and first to be described the behaviour, and then the emotions, which it causes. With obtaining feedback is recommended listening and self-assessment, without a dispute.

3. Conception for restorative mediation

In the conclusive part we define the restorative mediation as a process, with which the mediator creates conditions for restoring the people's ability to understand each other and achieve agreement for resolution of the problems, including fixing the caused damage. The process includes individual meetings, as well as a joint meeting of the parties.

Basic principles of the restorative mediation are:

- Voluntary participation: The parties participate without force and they can withdraw at any time.

- Information level: The mediator gives complete information about the process and the consequences.

- Mediator's neutrality: He/she supports both parties equally.

- Confidentiality: The process is confidential, except for a threat to life or a forthcoming crime.

- Responsibility: The mediator is responsible for the safety and observing the principles, and the parties – for the result.

- Repairing the damage: The violator bears responsibility to repair the damage of the victim.

- Independence of the services: The reconciling services are independent with organization of the process.

In the third chapter is presented a complete and structured model of the restorative mediation – from the initial contact and the preparation of the parties, through the actual dialogue and achieving an agreement, to the following tracking of the results. The emphasis is put on the active, but neutral role of the mediator, who through specific communicative techniques (active listening, "I-messages", feedback) creates a safe space for dialogue. The concept for restorative mediation, with its principles of voluntariness, neutrality and repairing the damage, suggests

an alternative approach, which exceeds the simple resolution of the argument and aims to restore the relationships and the social peace.

Limitations of the study

The limitations of the study are connected mainly with the structure of the sample. It is formed within the frameworks of one organization and does not include professional mediators or comparative groups from different organizational hierarchal levels. Convenience sampling is used, and not probability or stratified sampling, which restricts the external validity and the possibility for generalizing the results.

A demographic disbalance is available: the men are 61%, and the women 39%; the age categories are unevenly presented and the group 25-30 lacks. This requires cautiousness with the interpretations of the sex and age differences.

Regarding the instruments prevail self-report methods, which creates a risk from social desirability and subjective biases. The method for locus of control demonstrates moderate internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0,577$), and the author's questionnaire restricts the direct comparison with studies, which use standardized instruments like TKI or ROCI-II.

The research design is cross-sectional and correlational, because of which it does not allow deducing of casual relationships. There also lacks longitudinal follow-up. A significant restriction is that mediation is not applied as a real intervention in the studied organization; because of this, the conclusions about its efficiency are theoretically and indirectly experimentally grounded, but are not an assessment of a result from carried out mediation procedures.

IV. SCIENTIFIC AND PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

1. An interdisciplinary synthesis of the psychological, social, organizational and procedural dimensions of conflict and mediation has been carried out, as mediation is considered as a process of cognitive, emotional and communication transformation.

2. Experimentally is confirmed a statistically significant positive connection between the external locus of control and the organizational conflict-proneness ($r = 0,290$; $p = 0,002$), and the multiple regression analysis identifies the locus of control as the only significant predictor in the complex model ($p = 0,009$).

3. Psychological logics is deduced for differentiating the mediation work in accordance with the internal and external orientation of the conflicting parties.

4. An applied model for differentiated strategies of the mediator is developed, which includes techniques for taking responsibility, active listening, reformulating, “I-messages”, questions and feedback.

5. An author’s instrument for assessment of the conflicting relationships in the organization is developed and psychometrically validated, which can assist the diagnosing of conflict-generating zones and the planning of preventive interventions.

6. Organizational and applied guidelines are formulated for prevention of conflicts through improvement of the communication, transparency, the fair distribution of the workload and development of personal responsibility and internal locus of control.

V. DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES

1. Replication of the study in more organizations, branches and organizational cultures, with inclusion of professional mediators and comparative groups.

2. Usage of bigger, probability or stratified samples with balanced distribution as per sex and age.

3. Carrying out longitudinal and interventional studies with real applying of mediation and follow-up the sustainability of the achieved agreements.

4. Combining the self-report data with standardized instruments for conflicting styles, observation of the behaviour and assessment by third persons.

5. Study on the interaction between the locus of control, the organizational trust, the power imbalance, the styles of negotiations and the culture of the organization as potential moderators of the mediation efficiency.

VI. CONCLUSION

The present study achieved its basic purpose – to clarify the connection between the locus of control as a key personality characteristic and the manifestations of conflict-proneness in an organizational environment, as well as to analyze the role and the applied potential of mediation as a socially-psychological mechanism for management and transformation of the conflicts. The research tasks set in the introduction have been carried out through integration of a theoretical analysis and an experimental verification, and the formulated hypotheses have been subject to a statistical verification.

In the first place, the study confirmed the basic hypothesis about the existence of connection between the locus of control and the level of conflict-proneness. The determined statistically significant positive correlation ($r = .290$, $p < .05$) proves, that the external orientation is connected with higher levels of conflicting behaviour. This result corresponds to the classical theory of Julian Rotter, according to which the individuals with external locus of control are more prone to attribute the responsibility to external factors, which decreases their proneness to constructive resolution of problems and increases the possibility of escalation of conflicts. Thus, the leading role of the personality factors as predictors of the organizational behaviour is confirmed.

The second group of hypotheses, connected with the demographic factors (sex, education), did not obtain experimental confirmation. The lack of statistically significant differences ($p > .05$) shows that the conflict-proneness is not function of demographic characteristics, and it manifests as a system characteristic of the organizational environment. This result supports the contemporary theoretical models, according to which the organizational conflicts originate mostly from structural and communication deficiencies, and not from individual-social differences (Robbins & Judge, 2017). Consequently, the

hypothesis about a significant influence of education and sex on the conflict-proneness is rejected.

At the expense of that, the age outlined as a significant factor, partially confirming the research expectations. The youngest group (20–24) demonstrated higher levels of conflict-proneness, which may be explained with the process of socialization in the organizational environment, a lower degree of development of the self-regulation and the weaker expressed internalization of control. This confirms the hypothesis about age specificity of the conflicting behaviour and emphasizes the necessity of purposeful interventions to this group.

A significant contribution of the study is also the confirmation of the systemic nature of the conflict-proneness. The homogeneity of the variances and even distribution of the tension among the different groups show that the conflict is not localized, and it is integrated in the very organizational structure. This confirms the theoretical formulation, that the conflict is an immanent characteristic of each social system and functions as an indicator for structural disfunctions.

In the context of the set purpose mediation was considered not only as a procedure, and as a social-psychological process and instrument for transformation. The theoretical analysis and the interpretation of the results show, that the mediator can play the role of a specific temporary leader, who regulates the group dynamics and creates conditions for transition from confrontation to collaboration. In this sense theoretically is supported the formulation, that the potential efficiency of mediation is connected with the psychological mechanisms of perception, emotional regulation and communication, and not only with the formal procedures. Because of the lack of a real mediation intervention in the present study this formulation is not accepted as directly experimentally proved.

Additionally, the study contributes about the scientific knowledge through clarification of the methodological paradox between the correlation analysis and the t-test. It was proven that the lack of significance with the group comparisons does not refute the existence of a linear dependence, and reflects the high individual variability. This emphasizes the significance of the selection of a statistical approach with study of psychological phenomena.

From practical point of view, the results lead to several key conclusions: – the management of the conflicts has to be directed towards improvement of the organizational environment, and not towards concrete demographic groups; – the development of an internal locus of control and personal responsibility is a key factor for reduction of the conflict-proneness;

– mediation has to be applied as a strategic instrument for creating constructive communication and organizational culture.

In conclusion, the present study confirms, that the conflict-proneness in the contemporary organizations is a result of complex interaction between personality and structural factors, as a leading role in the studied sample plays the subjective feeling for locus of control. The theoretical analysis and the elaborated applied model outline mediation as a perspective mechanism for management and transformation of the conflict processes, which efficiency in the concrete organizational environment has to be verified through real interventional studies. The investment in the psychological capital of the employees and the development of personal responsibility and self-regulation outline as practical instructions for a sustainable organizational development and restriction of the destructive conflicts.

Practical recommendations

• The management of the conflicts in the organizations to be directed not towards stigmatization of separate demographic groups, and towards improvement of the communicative, ethical and organizational environment.

• To be developed trainings in communicative skills, self-regulation, personal responsibility and constructive management of the differences, especially with groups with increased conflict risk.

• Mediation to be used as a strategic and preventive instrument, and the differentiated approach according to the locus of control to be verified through real interventional studies.

VII. PUBLICATIONS AS PER THE RANGE OF PROBLEMS OF THE DISSERTATION

1. Dimitrova, St. (2024). Art of mediation from point of view of psychology. e-Journal VFU, issue 21 (2024), Publishing Center of VFU "Chernorizets Hrabar", ISSN 1313-7514.

2. Dimitrova, St. (2025). Mediation as a constructive method and a preventive psychological instrument for creation of culture of dialogue and prevention of conflicts before escalation. e-Journal VFU, issue 24 (2025), Publishing Center of VFU "Chernorizets Hrabar", ISSN 1313-7514.

3. Dimitrova, St. (2025). Interpersonal relationships and styles of mediation: social-psychological analysis. e-Journal VFU, issue 24 (2025), Publishing Center of VFU "Chernorizets Hrabar", ISSN 1313-7514.