

## ASSESSMENT OF THE LEVEL OF CONFLICT IN THE REGIONAL DIRECTORATE "AGRICULTURE" BLAGOEVGRAD

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### *Abstract*

*This article examines the levels of conflict in the structural units of the Regional Directorate "Agriculture" Blagoevgrad (municipal departments of agriculture and Central Administration) and the influence of the hierarchy, age, gender and professional experience of the employees on them.*

*In the article, the degree of disturbed relationships at the workplace was assessed by using the Questionnaire for the Assessment of Conflict Relationships according to A. Velichkov (2005), and with it the existing level of conflict in the Directorate was specified.*

*The questionnaire was designed to diagnose conflicts in the organization according to the Bulgarian environment and culture. 16 questions are formulated, which are assessed on a 5-point Likert scale, for the frequency of the conflict interactions described in them. The proposed tool was validated by Velichkov for the Bulgarian population and application in organizations. The questionnaire has shown high internal consistency (Cronbach's  $\alpha=0.91$ ) from a study in an organizational setting.*

*To determine the level of conflict, the three-level scale proposed by the author was used. A high degree is associated with the presence of conflicts, and low values reveal the absence of conflicts in the organization. As a result of the conducted research, the main conclusions are summarized.*

**Keywords:** *employees; public sphere; level of conflict; conflict; factorial and outcome signs.*

**JEL Codes:** *D00; D74.*

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### **Introduction**

The management of human resources in public sector organizations is characterized by the contradiction of the goals of activity - of the employees, on the one hand, of the managers, on the other, as well as by the presence of certain limitations of an organizational nature and the operation of distributed and evaluation mechanisms in relation to the material resources, the duties of workers, etc. (Ivanov, 2017, p.16). In view of this, the

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implementation of separate personnel management functions is accompanied by a significant conflict-generating element.

Conflict is an inevitable phenomenon in public sector organizations because they function by achieving coherence and compromise between the expectations of the individual and the expectations of the organization, as well as between other conflicting elements in their structure and between the individuals and groups employed in them.

The real objects of conflicts in organizations are actually people, but from a theoretical and methodological point of view, organizations become the object of conflicts due to the presence of many variables that should be taken into account in the process of conflict management such as: characteristics of the people involved in the conflict (gender, seniority, experience, age, etc.); the specifics of the organization's activity and structure (places and causes of conflicts); organizational and management goals, as well as conflict management goals; the systems and procedures of activity (potential conflictogens); available technologies (morally and materially outdated equipment, shortage of materials and consumables); the culture of the organization (values, beliefs, ideas, ideals, convictions).

Organizations of the public sphere are social groups in which people are united on the basis of their common goals, whose activities are consciously coordinated and directed to achieve these goals (Mihailova, 2018, pp. 2-4). This is evaluated through the achievements of individual individuals and structural units in the organization. Insight into the nature of individual behavior underlying specific employee differences is critical to effective organizational management.

A guarantee for a normal business climate to suppress the manifestation and development of destructive conflicts with a view to achieving organizational success is a good knowledge of the attitudes, expectations, perceptions and experiences of employees, as well as balancing the variables that negatively affect the organization (Milkov, 2014, pp. 114-116).

### **Purpose of the study**

Determining the level of conflict in the structural units of the Regional Directorate "Agriculture" Blagoevgrad (ODZ) and the influence of the hierarchy, age, gender and professional experience of the employees on it.

### **Processing and interpretation of the results**

The study covers all 14 municipal offices in agriculture in the territory of the Blagoevgrad district and the employees in the Central Department of ODZ. The number of

persons examined (46 in total) constitutes 54.76% of all 84 employees of the Regional Directorate "Agriculture" Blagoevgrad. Employees were divided into two main groups: employees with managerial functions - 9 (19.6%) and employees with expert functions - 37 (80.4%). When comparing the two groups under consideration, employees with expert functions predominate, with the ratio being 1:4 ("managers - experts").

The socio-demographic characteristics of the employees included in the study are presented in Table 1

**Table 1.** *Socio-demographic characteristics of the employees in ODZ Blagoevgrad*

Characteristics	Number	%
<b>Hierarchical status</b>		
Executives	9	19.6%
Experts	37	80.4%
<b>Gender</b>		
Men	22	47.8%
Women	24	52.2%
<b>Age (Years)</b>		
< 30	5	10.9%
31-40	17	41.3%
41-50	14	23.9%
51-60	7	17.4%
> 61	2	6.5%
<b>Work experience (Years)</b>		
< 10	17	36.96%
11-20	16	34.8%
21-30	9	19.6%
> 31	3	13.%
<b>Work experience in ODZ (Years)</b>		
< 10	32	69.6%
11-20	10	21.7%
21-30	3	6.5%
> 31	0	0%

Source: Own research

The hierarchical status of the investigated employees is considered as a factor initiating or contributing to the resolution of conflicts in individual administrative units.

In the studied contingent, a statistically significant greater relative share of women was found - 52.2% compared to men - 47.8%

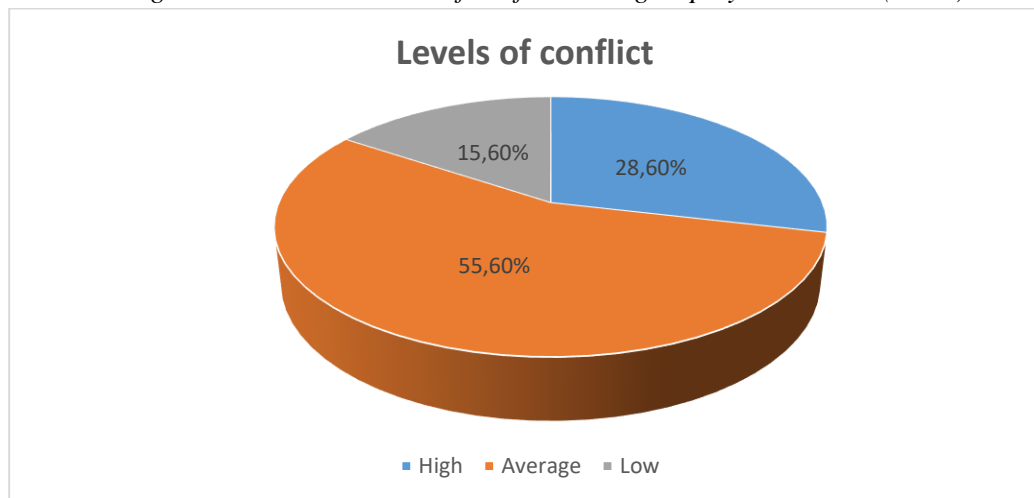
The gender disparity is due to the fact that the pool of administrators in the public sector is predominantly female. This also corresponds to the actual state of engagement of individuals in the country.

The age distribution of the employees participating in the survey is presented in five groups, with the average age of the persons participating in the survey being 42.07 years.

## Results and discussion

The assessment of the presence of conflictual relationships was determined for each subject, and the summary data are presented in Figure 1.

*Figure no. 1 General level of conflict among employees in ODZ (n=45)*



Source: Own research

The analysis of the level of conflict found that the actual working environment is perceived by the employees as:

- ✓ relatively conflicted by 55.6% of respondents;
- ✓ highly conflicted by 28.8% of the respondents in OSZ Gotse Delchev, OSZ Bansko, OSZ Blagoevgrad, Directorate "APFSDCHR" and DG "AR";
- ✓ low conflict by 15.6% of the respondents in the municipal agricultural services of Petrich and Hadjidimovo.

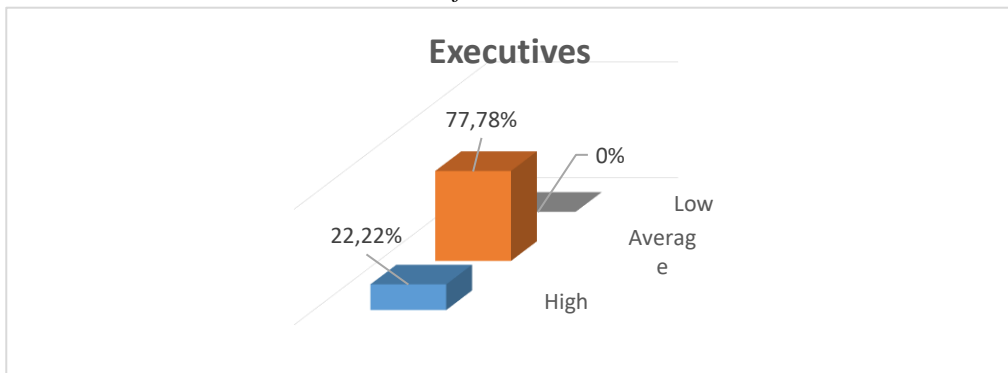
The interpretation of the results shows that for a large part of the employees, conflicts are a serious problem and illustrate the presence of deteriorated relationships and a conflictogenic situation in the administrative structures.

This assessment could be taken as an indicator determining the need for adequate

measures to reduce the degree of conflict relationships in order to optimize the activities of employees.

A thorough examination of the results revealed differences between the high, medium, and low levels of conflict-causing environment for employees with managerial functions and employees with expert functions (Figure 2) and (Figure 3).

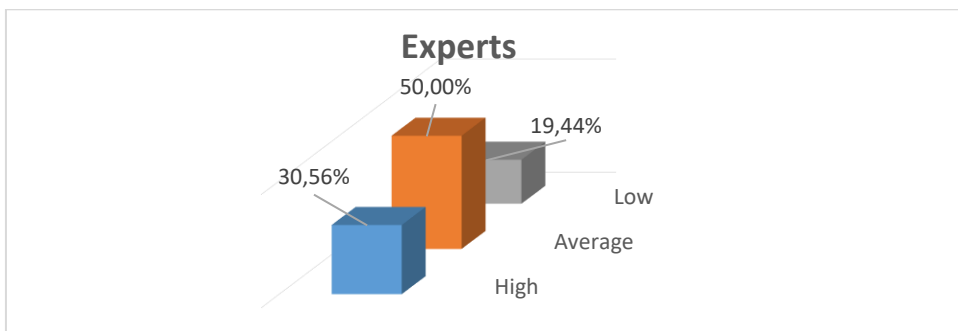
*Figure no. 2 Relative share of the level of conflict among employees with managerial functions*



Source: Own research

Among the employees with managerial functions, the average level of conflict prevails - 77.8% of the respondents. A high level of conflict is shared by 22.2% of the managers surveyed. The respondents do not share about low levels of conflict.

*Figure no. 3 Relative share of conflict level for employees with expert functions*



Source: Own research

For employees with expert functions, average levels of conflict are observed in 50% of the respondents. High in 30.6% and low in 19.4% of respondents.

The data from the comparative analysis in the levels of conflict between the employees with management functions and the employees with expert functions are presented in Figure 4.

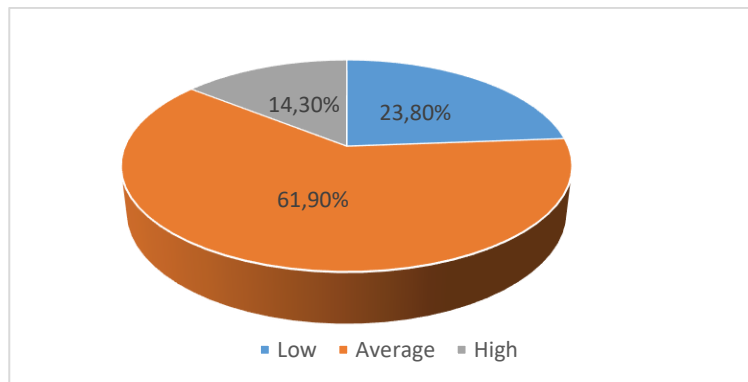
*Figure no. 4 Comparative analysis of conflict levels between managers and experts*



Source: Own research

Analyzing the ratings for the presence of conflict relationships, significant differences were found in the relative shares of low, medium and high levels of conflict among male and female employees (Figure 5) and (Figure 6).

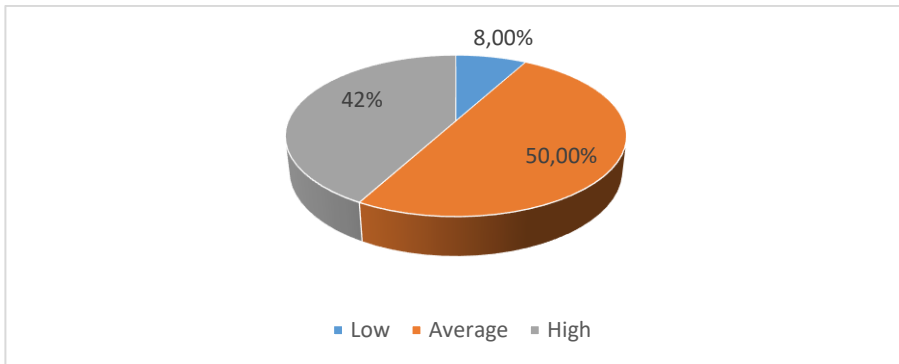
*Figure no. 5 Relative share of conflict level among male employees*



Source: Own research

Among men, the average level of conflict prevails - 61.9% of the respondents. A low level of conflict is observed in 23.8% and a high level of conflict in only 14.3% of respondents.

*Figure no. 6 Relative share of conflict level among female employees*



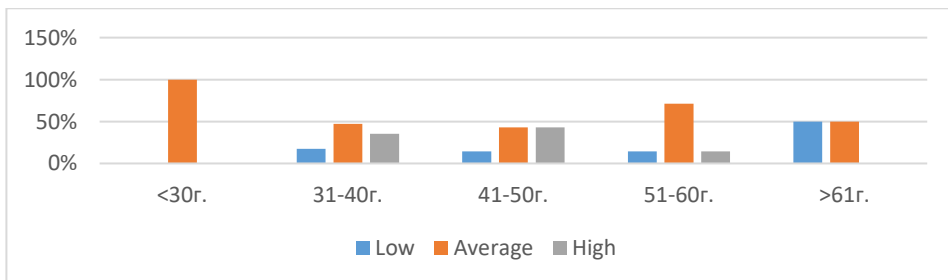
Source: Own research

Among women, the average level of conflict prevails - 50% of the respondents. A high level of conflict is observed in 42%, and a low level of conflict - only in 8% of respondents.

When comparing the estimates for the presence of conflict relationships, significant differences were found in the relative shares of high, medium and low levels of conflict in both sexes. The high level of conflict is more pronounced in women (42%), and the average - (61.9%) and the low level - (23.8%) are more pronounced in men. Due to the observed differences between men and women, it can be assumed that their manifestation in this case depends on the way the conflict is perceived.

When examining the level of conflict, statistically significant differences were found by age (Figure 7).

*Figure no. 7 Influence of age on the level of conflict*

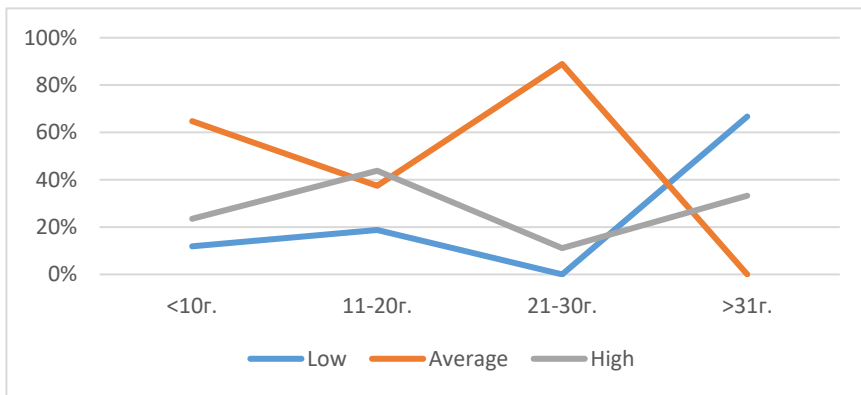


Source: Own research

The results show a predominantly high degree of conflict in the age group from 41 to 50 years (42.9%). The average levels of conflict are most pronounced in the age group up to 30 years. High and low levels of conflict are not reported in this age group. Respondents aged 51 to 60 show high average levels of conflict - 71.4%. In the age group over 61, a high level of conflict is not observed. Low and medium levels in this group are distributed equally - 50%.

Differences were found when comparing the estimates for the degree of conflict relationships and according to the professional experience of the respondents (Figure 8)

*Figure no. 8 Influence of total work experience on the level of conflict*



*Source:* Own research

High rates of conflict are reported in the first 10 years of the employees' work experience. With the increase in professional experience, a gradual increase in high levels of a conflictogenic environment is observed. The change is most pronounced among employees with experience between 21 and 30 years (33.33%).

The highest average levels of conflict are shown by employees with work experience from 11 to 20 years (60.00%) and up to 10 years (56%)

The analysis shows a distinct trend of decreasing the level of conflict with increasing age and work experience. With increasing age and length of service, employees are likely to successfully avoid conflict in the workplace as well as improve their non-conflictual interaction skills with each other.

## **Conclusion**

As a result of the analysis of the obtained results, the following conclusions were formulated:



1. The employees of the Regional Directorate "Agriculture" Blagoevgrad perceive the working environment as relatively and highly conflictual. Low levels of conflict are reported only in the municipal agricultural offices of Petrich and Hadjidimovo.

2. High levels of conflict are more pronounced among: women; employees with expert functions; employees in the age group of 41 to 50 years; employees with work experience from 11 to 20 years.

3. A tendency to decrease the level of conflict is observed with the increase in the age and length of service of the employees. The indicated dependence can be explained by the fact that accumulated life and professional experience improve the skills of non-conflictual interaction and successful avoidance of workplace conflicts.

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