

Organizational change and conflicts: A Sociological analysis of organizational dynamics

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Abstract: The sociological analysis of organizational dynamics during change highlights the inherent complexity of organizational life. Change, inevitable and often necessary, can provoke conflicts but also presents opportunities for evolution. The sociological approach deciphers interactions among individuals, social groups, and structures, revealing the underlying mechanisms of tensions and resolutions. Managing conflicts during change requires an integrated approach, spanning individual, collective, and organizational levels. Recognizing divergences as drivers of innovation is crucial, prompting proactive organizations to foster a culture of open communication and encourage constructive conflict resolution. In essence, this sociological analysis provides an enlightening perspective on how change and conflicts intertwine in organizational life, offering insights to transform challenges into opportunities for development and prosperity.

Keywords: organizational change, conflicts, sociological analysis, strategies, conflict management.

1- Introduction

In an unstable environment, organizations today are influenced by multiple changing conditions such as privatization, globalization, the adoption of information and communication technologies, economic diversification, and the dominance of the tertiary sector, among others. This has resulted in an attempt by all organizations, especially economic ones, to catch up with this constant movement, and this can only be achieved through organizational changes, whether partial or global.

This omnipresent trend brings about changes either structurally or functionally and also leads to resistance to these changes, manifested through conflicts.

If organizational change reflects the attempt to adapt to a dynamic and evolving environment, with the aim of safeguarding its existence, improving competitiveness, seizing opportunities, or avoiding threats, conflicts represent, on the one hand, resistance to change, and on the other hand, they bring about multiple changes at the structural, management, and regulatory levels. Thus, conflicts affect both the micro-organizational and macro-organizational aspects. On another note, conflicts represent a contradiction between the visions, strategies, and interests of stakeholders within the organization. Each stakeholder tries to satisfy their demands and achieve their objectives.

Algerian organizations are not exempt from this logic; they have undergone several transformations since independence, with the state being a key factor in their creation, management, and change. The state played a crucial role as the main driver of Algerian social, economic, and political life, forming the core of economic revitalization and development in all fields.

Among the organizations that have undergone sometimes slow and sometimes rapid changes are the public and private economic sectors, the tertiary sector, and public services. The latter encompasses all activities carried out by the state to meet collective needs and is managed by

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public institutions in an equal, free, and permanent manner. It spans various sectors such as health, education, training, transportation, etc.

The evolution of societal needs and demands, influenced by constant changes and the introduction of technological factors into the management of economic and social life, leads to transformations in lifestyles, increases social demands, and compels institutions to respond effectively and quickly while providing quality service.

To achieve all this, the State has adopted reform strategies that affect all areas, such as justice, education, the healthcare sector, higher education, etc. The objective of these reforms is to upgrade the public service so that it can play a leading role in achieving economic and social development and meet the growing social demands (Wassila & Zerrouki, 2014, pp. 43-59).

The main and fundamental reform is the attempt to rely on modern technologies, especially information and communication technologies, to manage public affairs and address these needs. These reforms trigger conflicts in public institutions, manifested through strikes that have affected all sectors of public services. The main cause of these strikes is the lack of understanding of the importance of human capital in the achievement and establishment of any reform or reform project.

The State responded to the social demands of all socio-professional categories in the public service with two techniques. The first is regulatory, through the development of specific statutes for each category, and the second is lucrative or economic by revising the remuneration system for different socio-professional categories.

Despite the importance of these efforts, the issue of rehabilitating human capital to fulfill its role effectively remains, as the problem requires a comprehensive system review. This includes technical aspects such as defining tasks and how to execute them, as well as organizational and structural aspects like logistical means or new management methods based on efficiency and quality. This necessitates reconsidering the qualification of this capital through training or introducing skills capable of implementing this reform.

From this perspective, we will try to address the relationship between these two fundamental concepts: organizational change and conflicts within the public service in Algeria. This involves revealing all the connections that drive this service to adopt appropriate strategies in line with the social evolution of society and the societal changes of the State, while maintaining the concept of organization as an expression of public service.

2. The Organizational Change Process: A Permanent Dynamic

Organizational change represents a major challenge for any form of organization. For the public sector, it has become a crucial issue in order to materialize the policy of the state's economic and social development. This change takes various forms: restructuring, reorganization, total quality, workforce reduction, centralization, and decentralization, among others. All these forms represent organizational and operational processes that aim to lead organizations toward efficiency and effectiveness.

The practices that emerge during this dynamic impact all components of the organization—material, financial, managerial, and human. The human element is the driving force upon which the success or failure of the change depends, given that it is not solely related to a purely material aspect. Instead, there is a mutual interaction that results in a positive or negative behavior towards each decision related to making a change or not.

This situation of change elicits various human responses based on the status of each socio-professional category. These actions and reactions are influenced by the prevailing culture within the organization, the social origins of individuals, and their cultural, social, and symbolic capital. Each category reacts according to its individual and collective interests, which will impact the overall change process.

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2.1. Definition of Organizational Change:

Organizational change is the subject of various sociological, economic, and managerial approaches, leading to diverse and fluid terms such as adjustment, modification, evolution, innovation, development, transformation, mutation, revolution, disruption, or metamorphosis (Meier, 2012). Based on this, we will present some definitions of organizational change and extract its components to understand it better.

- "Organizational change can be defined as a process leading to a transformation, more or less profound, more or less in line with the intentions of the initiating actors, formal rules, but also individual and/or collective behaviors characterizing socio-organizational functioning. Such processes can be voluntary, directed, and planned or, on the contrary, spontaneous and continuous." (Foudriat, 2015, pp. 5-30)
- "What we call organizational change is a set of congruent responses, by various parts of the organization, to various interconnected parts of the environment." (Soparnot, 2008, pp. 104-122)

Following these two definitions, we can conclude that organizational change is a natural phenomenon within organizations, but it varies based on certain factors: the content of the change, the context of the change, the process, and the interaction between change variables. Each factor represents a question seeking an answer: What is changing? How is it changing?

And why is it changing? (Soparnot, 2008, pp. 104-122) The issue here is not the change itself, but rather its outcomes and what results from it, whether it is partial or global, gentle or violent, consensual or imposed.

Therefore, in a logic of adaptation and adjustment to an environment that sees change as a process of lasting transformation and mutation, and a solution to all situations in managing social reality and its progress, organizations have had to manage change in its various degrees.

2.2. Factors Causing Organizational Change:

Most often, organizational transformation originates from factors or influences, whether they arise from within the organization or its external environment, and can be perceived as pressures. Therefore, the reasons for organizational change are categorized into two types:

2.2.1. Internal Forces of Change:

There are several internal factors within the organization that can be the source of organizational change, including:

- Changes in the organization's goals, mission, and objectives.
- Introduction of new equipment (administrative technologies).
- Labor shortages.
- Introduction of advanced information systems.
- Merger with other institutions.
- Decrease in employee morale.
- Increase in staff turnover rate.
- Occurrence of an urgent internal crisis.
- Decline in profits.

Additionally, there is a range of factors that could be the catalyst for change, including the desire to improve efficiency and organizational capacity, dissatisfaction with how organizational performance is managed, the level of services for beneficiaries and employees, the emergence of the need to address an elevation in the level of human needs within the organization, and the need for retraining and rehabilitation of personnel to cope with the demands of modern life.

2.2.2. External Forces of Change:

External factors influencing change can be categorized into three main categories as follows:

- Market changes (intense competition).
- Technological changes (information revolution).
- Environmental changes, social developments, advances in global communications, and labor markets have created significant opportunities while also posing considerable risks and threats for managers.

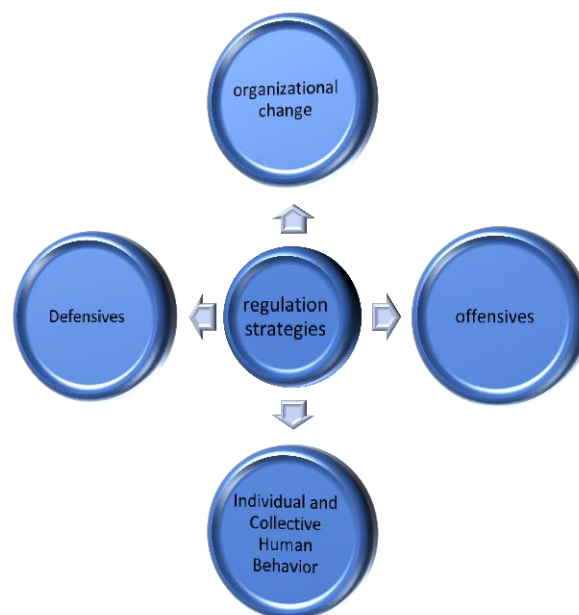
Reasons for organizational change can also be attributed to factors such as globalization, public opinion and increased pressure to steer and rectify policies both internally and externally, laws and regulations imposed by states or foreign entities, market competition

in terms of new innovations, research and development, as well as the rising awareness of individuals, such as interest in the environment and improving women's conditions. Furthermore, global environmental factors (social change, technological change, political change, economic change, legal change, and attitudinal change) have a major impact on organizational change, as the organization, as an open system, is influenced by its external environment and also exerts influence on it.

Based on this observation, it is possible to consider the organization as a fertile ground for tensions, encompassing all facets of conflicts that act as mechanisms of change, whether gradual or sudden. These conflicts may arise from differences in opinions, competition for limited resources, or variations in vision among members of the organization. Whether manifested subtly or explosively, these confrontations can also stimulate innovation, encourage dialogue, or, conversely, lead to necessary adjustments within the organizational structure. Thus, conflicts, far from being exclusively negative, can also serve as catalysts for beneficial developments within the organization.

This idea can be presented in the following diagram:

Figure (1): A diagram that represents the link between organizational changes and conflicts.



The source: developed by the authors

2.3. Types of Organizational Change:

The identification and classification of different types of organizational change are essential for understanding dynamics within an organization. This facilitates visualization and comparison, helping organizational stakeholders better grasp the implications of each type of change. It also highlights the connections between different types of change and their potential interactions. Thus, this classification becomes a valuable tool for comprehending the complexity of organizational changes and guiding strategic decision-making accordingly.

Table 01: presenting the types of organizational change:

Types of Organizational Changes	Description
Structural Change	Alters the hierarchy, roles, or distribution of power.
Cultural Change	Alters the values, beliefs, or norms of the organization.
Technological Change	Introduces new technologies or modifies existing ones.
Strategic Change	Adjusts the overall strategy of the organization.
Process Change	Modifies work methods, workflow.
Product/Service Change	Transforms the organization's product or service offerings.
Personnel Change	Involves changes in the composition or management of human resources.

Source: developed by the authors

These various types of organizational changes can often trigger resistance and generate conflicts within an organization. When an organization undergoes significant transformation, employees may resist due to uncertainty about their professional future, fear of change, or the loss of familiarity with existing routines. This resistance can manifest as interpersonal conflicts, general dissatisfaction, or reluctance to adopt new work methods. Managing these conflicts requires a thorough understanding of the underlying factors of resistance while involving employees in the change process, fostering open communication, and implementing mechanisms to resolve disputes constructively. Thus, how different types of changes interact with resistance and conflicts largely determines the overall success of an organizational transformation initiative.

2.4. Resistance to Change:

When leaders of an organization undertake or attempt to implement a change, they face one of the main challenges: resistance from workers within the organization. Key change agents, as well as those responsible for its implementation, strive to convince and explain the motivations behind the change, emphasizing the reasons rather than the nature of the change itself. The goal is to persuade employees of the legitimacy of the change, the integrity of the leaders, while seeking to understand individual reasons for resistance to change. It is crucial to establish appropriate mechanisms to mitigate negative repercussions. The main reasons for resistance to change include:

- Fear of the unknown,
- Lack of information about the nature of the change due to inadequate communication and insufficient clarifications from the management,
- Apprehension about losing acquired experience and not benefiting from it during the change process,
- Inappropriate timing for the change (an unfavorable period),

- Fear of losing power or certain acquired rights, as the change removes some responsibilities while adding new obligations.
- Furthermore, resistance to change also extends to personal aspects, such as a threat to individual values, lack of alignment with justifications for the change, disparity in understanding and individual perception of the change, and rejection of the dominant organizational culture of change.

These factors motivating resistance to change are diverse and stem from individual causes related to long-standing habits. Accepting them overnight without opposition from workers is challenging, mainly due to the fear of disruptions that could affect the organization after the change, due to the lack of information and communication within the organization among different categories of workers, thus creating a form of resistance to implementation. Leaders, lacking sufficient opportunities to explain the content of the change and the expected outcomes, must also deal with the gradual evolution of organizational cultures, demonstrating that the change is an improvement for the organization and strengthens its position in the market, benefiting everyone.

3. Organizational Conflict: A Dual-Task Process:

In the dynamic context of organizations, organizational conflict reveals itself as a complex process, presenting facets that encompass both challenges and opportunities. This phenomenon, inherent to human nature and interactions within organizational structures, proves to be a dual-task process. This duality invites exploration of the multiple dimensions of organizational conflict, where apparent tensions can coexist with opportunities for growth, resolution, and transformation. Let's delve into this intriguing organizational reality, where stakes and possibilities intersect in the tumult of conflict.

3.1. Definition of Organizational Conflict:

Conflict is one of the outcomes of change, and also one of its causes. It is a human act that plays a role in either provoking or limiting change. In this regard, it takes various forms that can be either violent or peaceful, depending on the different situations of change. Therefore, the conflict here is organizational conflict, encompassing all types of individuals, interpersonal, social group, horizontal, or vertical conflicts. It plays a constructive role in organizations when individual and collective experience leads to avoiding future conflicts, and a destructive role when it leads to competition and competitiveness among social actors within the organization.

It can be defined as follows: "Organizational conflicts are situations in which individuals are involved, and their goals, cognitions, or emotions are incompatible, leading them to oppose each other." (Cazals-Ferré, 2011, pp. 261-273) Conflict is also "an encounter of elements (opinions, issues, methods, references, feelings, etc.) that are contrary, opposing, and where each party or one of them strives to assert its goals, point of view, interests to achieve satisfaction." (Dethiet, 2018, pp. 269-318).

We can conclude that organizational conflict is also a natural social phenomenon; it constitutes a dynamic and enduring human act, taking various forms, which gives us conflicts and not just one. This plurality allows us to say that the way to handle it depends on its situation and context in order to find appropriate solutions for each situation.

Conflicts prove to be inevitable companions in the wake of change within organizations, weaving a complex web of relationships between individuals and groups. According to Hellriegel and Slocum (2006), organizational conflicts are situations in which individuals are involved, and their goals, cognitions, or emotions are incompatible, leading them to oppose each other (Cazals-Ferré, 2011, pp. 261-273).

Conflict is also "an antagonism between individuals or groups in society (or between societies). It occurs 'when a decision cannot be made by usual procedures.'" (Rui, 2010, p. 54).

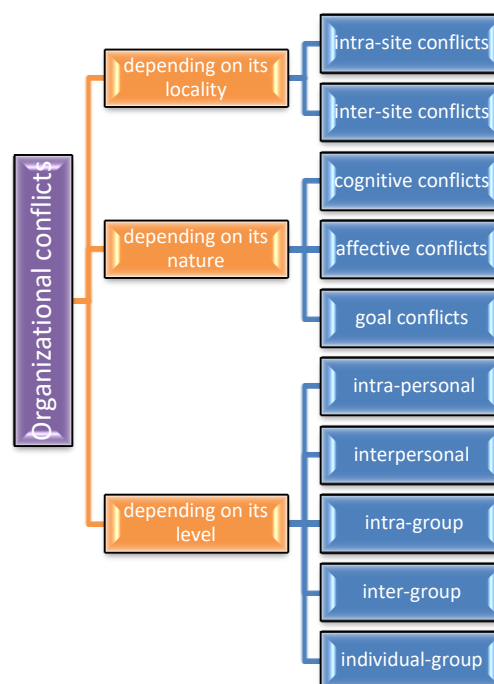
Conflict within organizations is intrinsically linked to the social bonds and relationships that develop among individuals and groups within the structure. Social bonds can be catalysts for conflicts, as individuals interact with different expectations, values, and interests. Power relationships, communication, and resource distribution play a key role in the dynamics of conflicts. For example, power imbalances among team members or misunderstandings in communication can easily lead to tensions.

On the other hand, conflicts can also be necessary elements for the growth and evolution of social relationships within an organization. They can stimulate innovation by encouraging the questioning of established norms, promote dialogue by allowing different perspectives to be heard, and prompt adjustments in social structure to meet the changing needs of the organization.

3.2. Types of Conflicts:

Organizational conflict takes various forms depending on its locality, nature, and level. The following diagram presents these types (Cazals-Ferré, 2011, pp. 261-273):

Figure (2): Types of Organizational Conflicts: Classification by Locality, Nature, and Level



The source: developed by the authors

From this diagram, we can say that conflict is defined according to a given situation. This conflict situation represents a process of disagreement between the interests and objectives of the parties and social actors, leading to the emergence of a power dynamic established within the organization that requires an immediate solution.

3.3. Sources of Organizational Conflicts:

Social actors within an organization may be driven to engage in conflicts due to various causes, highlighting the inherent complexities of organizational dynamics. These conflicts often arise from differences of opinion, conflicting interests, or tensions resulting from interactions within the organization.

Organizational conflicts, inherent in professional life, emerge from various sources that interact at the individual, group, and organizational levels as a whole. This complexity has its roots in several problem situations, which we will present in the following table:

Table 02: Sources of Organizational Conflicts: Analyzing Individual, Group, and Organizational Levels:

Sources of Organizational Conflicts	Individual Level	Group Level	Organizational Level
Differences in Values and Beliefs	Personal Attitudes, Ethical Differences	Alignment of Values within a Team	Organizational Culture
Role and Responsibility Conflicts	Ambiguity of Individual Roles	Distribution of Responsibilities within a Team	Organizational Structure
Competition for Limited Resources	Divergent Personal Interests	Internal Competition for Resources	Resource Management
Ineffective Communication	Misunderstandings, Different Interpretations	Communication Barriers Within the Group	Communication Protocols
Divergent Management and Leadership Styles	Personality Conflicts Among Leaders	Incompatibility of Leadership Styles Within a Team	Alignment of Leadership Strategies
Contradictory Organizational Objectives	Divergent Individual Priorities	Alignment of Goals Within a Group	Strategic Planning Process

Interpersonal Conflicts	Difficult Interpersonal Relationships	Group Dynamics and Individual Relationships	Organizational Social Climate and Policies
Ambiguity of Objectives and Expectations	Different Interpretation of Expectations	Clarification of Expectations Within a Team	Definition and Communication of Objectives
Organizational Changes	Individual Resistance to Change	Change Management at the Team Level	Communication and Change Management
Conflicts Related to Performance Management	Divergent Individual Evaluations	Group-Level Evaluation Process	Performance Evaluation Systems
Problems Related to Organizational Culture	Individual Cultural Differences	Integration of Cultures within a Team	Promulgation and Reinforcement of Organizational Culture

Source: developed by the authors

The sources of organizational conflicts operate through a complex process that influences the individual, social groups, and the organization as a whole. At the individual level, differences in perspectives, competition for resources, personality conflicts, resistance to change, and trust issues create tensions. These individual dynamics aggregate at the group level, generating conflicts related to role ambiguity, value conflicts, perceived injustices, communication problems, and external pressures. Generally, at the organizational level, these tensions manifest through contradictory goals and visions, resource allocations, ambiguous structures and processes, aspects related to organizational culture, and challenges in managing change and strategic adaptation. Understanding this process allows for more effective conflict management, fostering an organizational environment conducive to collaboration and constructive resolution of tensions.

3.4. Management of Organizational Conflicts:

The management of organizational conflicts is crucial to contextualize the importance of this process within collective structures. Conflict management holds particular relevance in a dynamic professional world where varied interactions among individuals, groups, and organizational levels can give rise to inevitable tensions. Conflict, far from necessarily being negative, is an inevitable manifestation of diverse opinions, values, and perspectives within an organization.

Effective conflict management goes beyond eliminating these tensions; rather, it involves transforming them into opportunities for improvement. It entails creating an environment conducive to the constructive resolution of differences, thus fostering an organizational climate where diversity is perceived as strength rather than obstacle. Skillful conflict management leads to stronger collaboration, enhanced team cohesion, and increased organizational effectiveness.

This approach highlights the essence of organizational conflict management as a strategic tool to promote a healthy dynamic within organizations, encouraging dialogue, learning, and progress.

In the following table, we will present the process and modalities of conflict management by social actors, individuals, social groups, and the organization.

Table 03: Levels of Organizational Conflict Management: Strategies at Individual, Collective, and Organizational Levels:

Levels of Organizational Conflict Management	Individual Level	Collective Level	Organizational Level
Identification of Conflict Sources.	Self-reflection on One's Own Feelings and Opinions.	Open Dialogue to Understand Different Perspectives.	Analysis of Organizational Factors Contributing to Conflict.
Effective Communication.	Clear Expression of Concerns and Active Listening.	Encouragement of Open Communication Within the Group.	Establishment of Transparent and Accessible Communication Channels.
Emotion Management	Emotional Self-Regulation and Understanding Others' Emotions.	Encouragement of Collective Emotional Management.	Promotion of Stress Management and Well-being in the Workplace.
Negotiation and Conflict Resolution.	Seeking Mutually Beneficial Solutions.	Facilitation of mediation or negotiation between parties.	Implementation of Formal Conflict Resolution Processes.
Conflict Management Training.	Individual Skills Acquisition in Conflict Resolution.	Training Sessions on Collective Conflict Resolution.	Integration of ongoing training in conflict management into HR policies.
Fostering Team Cohesion.	Promotion of a collaborative and supportive environment.	Team-building activities and fostering a culture of mutual support.	Encouragement of collaboration and solidarity among teams.
Development of a Feedback Culture.	Promotion of constructive and regular feedback.	Encouragement of collective feedback and shared experiences.	Establishment of an organizational culture promoting open and honest feedback.
Change Management Strategies	Individual support in adapting to change.	Implementation of gradual changes involving the members.	Transparent communication and active participation during organizational changes.

Source: developed by the authors

This approach details conflict management strategies at various levels within the organization, from the individual to the collective, up to the organizational level. The coordinated implementation of this process contributes to creating an environment conducive to constructive conflict resolution and the promotion of a positive organizational culture.

4. Conclusion:

The sociological analysis of organizational dynamics related to change and conflicts highlights the inherent complexity of life within organizations. Change, inevitable and often imperative, can be a source of conflicts, but it also represents an opportunity for evolution and adaptation. Organizational sociology helps decipher the interactions among individuals, social groups, and structures, revealing the underlying mechanisms of tensions and resolutions.

Conflict management in a context of change requires a comprehensive approach, integrating strategies at the individual, collective, and organizational levels. Recognizing divergences as potential drivers of innovation and growth is crucial. Proactive organizations cultivate a culture of open communication, encourage constructive conflict resolution, and perceive periods of change as opportunities for learning and strengthening.

In short, organizational sociology provides an enlightening perspective on how change and conflicts intertwine in the fabric of organizations. By developing a thorough understanding of these dynamics, leaders and practitioners are better equipped to successfully navigate the challenges of change, transforming potential conflicts into catalysts for development and organizational prosperity.

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