

The Importance of non-Conformism in Organizations

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Abstract

In sociology, the non-conformism means that opposing and denying attitude and behaviour of some individuals or groups towards the opinions, the rules and the values which dominate the organisations or the societies. The stress at the workplace, including the positive aspects of challenging opportunities are frequently sources of nonconformist behaviours. Otherwise, even a hostile environment makes some people feel threatened and to have dissident reactions. The rebellion against the old generation and the fight with conventions unleash or increase the confliction needs. These manifestations can not be ignored like some colleague's "simple personality aspects" or "job events". Like any anomic phenomenon, the non-conformism destroys the team spirit, paralyses the individuals and can generate unpleasant litigations, finally leading to harming the organizational interests. Team results become more and more weak as the job atmosphere wears down. Beginning from such an involved actor in the life of his organisation, we will try to emphasis the role played by this individual, the hypostasis and the psychological, sociological and economical repercussions that are determined by this actor. The effects of nonconformist behaviour can hover over the organization for many years. That is why we will present the classical strategies of damping the dissidence state.

Being a problem of organisational culture, we believe that a dose of non-conformism is necessary in the actual perspective of anthropocentric management, the knowledge management.

Keywords: non-conformism, dissidence, anomic phenomenon, nonconformist behaviour

The organizational and national cultures determine the frequency of nonconformist, rebel behaviours, refractory personalities with dissident tendencies. In the open and permissive societies, these dissidents are easily accepted and can behave without restrictions while in the rigid and intransigent societies, that anomic behaviours appear more rarely and are quickly eliminated.

With actual tendencies of social and economic liberalization, the release of human conception by prejudices and rigidity, some organizations are confronted with problems brought by the nonconformist's manifestations, which are sometimes beneficial for the organization's objectives.

We have the tendency to overlook, to excuse or to pretend that we have forgotten the nonconformist incidents in order for them to stage an even more unpleasant comeback.

Our paper intend to be a literature review concerning the nonconformist manifestations and present some results of our observations regarding the employee of the companies in Oltenia and Romania region. The psychology indicate that the oltenian are usually hurried people and very attached on his values and desires. We present the sociological determinants of these attitude, particulary observed in our region.

Conceptual clarifications

Non-conformism is, in general, the refusal and opposition to conform to common standards, conventions, rules, customs, traditions, norms or laws. In organizations, it refers to the that employee who refuse to "conform", or follow the governance and usage of the group.

The non-conformism means for the sociologists that opposing and denying attitude and behaviour of some individuals or groups towards the opinions, the norms and the values which dominate the enterprises or the societies (Boudon, 2006).

Non-conformism is manifested through the elaboration of alternative norms and values and through the rigorous conformation to them, thus turning into conformism. Non-conformism can be comprehended only by reference to certain norms and values. What from one perspective can be seen as non-conformism, from another point of view is pure conformism.

Usually, the nonconformist use to effing (offensive words used to emphasize that the members of the organization are angry and to avoid saying swears). The use of taboo-words, of trivial language in fact, means that the nonconformist actor is ready to break the patterns and the social norms for "truly speaking". This trivial language is primary used by the marginal groups without rights or social positions and not concerned about the rules of civilization. These taboo-words are borrowed by persons with high position from the marginal groups in order to improve their speech with energy, disobedience or insubordination and notoriety. The use of taboo-words decrease the manager's reputation and bring possible disciplinary sanctions.

"The institutionalization of non-conformism leads to conformism" (Grosu, N., 2005). Propagation of the opinions initially considered as nonconformists, the acceptance of these opinions by the dissident's colleagues, give these ideas legitimacy and force of acceptance for the decision factors. By accepting the radical opinions and by transforming them in norms, we take part in their institutionalization process.

In the corporation, the anomic situation can appear among it's members even more frequently in periods of thoroughly social transformations, major structural modifications, lacking a social control from the superiors.

We must not confuse anarchism with non-conformism: the anarchist does not obey any rules, he is completely devoid of reason; the conformist believes in his theories and sometimes it can be proved that they are true and more efficient than those of the ones who do not accept them and reject the one who elaborates them, naming him a dissident.

Even the term of "non-conformism" can sometimes be considered harsh. Besides the extreme cases, when the dissident is indeed a severe case and very dangerous, who suffers from personality disorders and is not lead by an innovating spirit, regarding organizations we consider the term of "non-conformism" a little inappropriate. In fact, we are talking about a simple deviancy phenomenon, a deviation from the general tendencies which can even be profitable. Thus we can obtain superior technologies, superior decisions, though difficult to accept, more efficient strategies, even products superior in quality.

Management theories and the non-conformism

The Taylorism (Vlăsceanu, M., 2003) says that the organization treated it's employees without taking into account their characteristics, the individual being depersonalized and was not treaded like a human being but as a simple "working hand". The classics, organizers encourage the necessity of maintaining the control over the behaviour as a fundamental premises of efficiency.

The behaviourists (Elton Mayo, McGregor) assert that the incensement of behaviour control determine the rigidity instead of the flexibility, the weakness instead of engagement and motivation. If sometimes control leads to efficiency, this is only for a short period of time and at the cost of many internal conflicts. From the behaviourists' point of view, organizational efficiency can only be achieved only through a reduced control and through the incensement of the individual and group's autonomy. The organization give many opportunities to manifest the creativity and innovative spirit.

Anthropocentrism gives the man back what is indeed human in him: the creating individuality, personality, responsible autonomy, the other's appreciation, the dialogue with the others (even in contradiction). The human is an individual with many particularities, in permanent change, the rhythm of the change with which humanity is confronting being another source of dissidency, because the system of values is changing an some evolve faster than others.

Nowadays, we observe the expansion of the knowledge-management. Competencies do not exist, are not offered but appear in a socio-economic process. The employee is asked to surpass these competences. The knowledge-management pursuits the change of the strict way in which the control is exerted, going from the superior's control to auto-control. The human relations are emphasized because they are the only ones that can diminish the tension between the members of the organizations. They come to work with attitudes, value systems, with a set of temperamental characteristics which are not always the same with those of their colleagues or with the organization's objectives.

Human personality

A person's personality and behaviour is like all other people's, like some other people's and like no other people's. (Luthans, 2005, p. 99)

Behaviour and personality mean how people affect others and how they understand and view themselves, as well as their pattern of inner and outer measurable traits, and the person-situation interaction.

How people affect others depends primarily upon their external appearance (height, facial features and other physical aspects) and behaviour (vulgar, friendly, courteous and so on). All the ramifications of personality perceptions, conformist or not enter into this aspects of personality.

We will analyse the influence of power in nonconformist reactions. The power relationship can be better understood by examining some of the characteristics of the targets. F. Luthans (1989, p. 458) identifies the following characteristics as being especially important in influencing the nonconformist's targets:

- Dependency. The greater the targets' dependency on their dissidents relationship, the more behaviour are influence.
- Uncertainty. The more uncertain people are about the appropriateness or correctness of a behaviour, the more likely they are to be influenced to change the behaviour.
- Personality. People who cannot ambiguity or who are highly anxious are more susceptible to become nonconformists, and those with high needs for affiliation are more susceptible to group influence).
- Intelligence. Highly intelligent people may be more willing to listen, but, because they also tend to be held in high esteem, they also may be more resistant to influence.
- Age. The susceptibility to influence increases in young's career and then decrease.
- Culture. The cultural values of a society have tremendous impact on the influenceability and behaviour of its people. Western cultures emphasize individuality, dissent and diversity, while others, such as Romanian's culture emphasize cohesiveness, agreement and uniformity.

The managers and all employees need to know the influence of different temperaments in the workplace. Anyone must admit that ones own temperament is not the only, and this fact determines synergies.

Nonconformists have the tendency to go off at any provocation or accumulate tensions that periodically outburst. Many times, nonconformists have the reputation of being the most dedicated to the firm. Otherwise why would they spend so much energy on matters concerning work?

Factors and solutions

Among the factors which determine the situations considered as nonconformists we can mention the individual's need to surpass the coercions that diminish the use of innovative capacities.

The abuse, the brutal imposing of power, determines the desire of revenge, which is a source of non-conformism. Even the control and social recovery actions, if not correctly elaborated, can generate phenomenons of recidivism and violent reactions, while those attitudes which are to permissive contribute to the growth of the deviance phenomenon over the tolerated limits.

Surprisingly, another source of non-conformism¹ is represented by the human's need for conflict. The management has to create a climate that

¹ not to mention the sever psychical confusions

will balance these needs, and for those individuals whose manifestations are toxic a climate that will dissolve them. A unanimously recognized theory says that "a good administration of discipline focuses on the employee's behaviour not their personality". This is perfectly justified as even a nonconformist behaviour can be educated, however the personality can not. The purpose of the disciplinary actions is to achieve the organization's targets as well as the performance's maximization.

Sometimes, in order to diminish the nonconformist manifestations, a superior intervention is not necessary, the solution emerging from the group.

One of the proposed solutions for diminishing the non-conformism is to increase the number hours spent working in groups which improve the communication, balance the internal tensions, the organizing and practicing of team building activities. The purpose is to create a partnership spirit between the involved factors.

Arthur H. Bell (2005, pp. 96-99) proposes ten commandments for managers and supervisors in order to avoid the nonconformist behaviour. These commandments are:

- do not rise up the voice; the interlocutor's reaction will generate an undesirable confrontation;
- do not swear or hurt feelings; smart managers use positive criticisms ;
- do not nickname your colleagues;
- when you are angry, listen more and talk less;
- do not use sarcasm for hurting somebody's feelings;
- tell when you are unsatisfied and do not act like an unsatisfied person; the team interests do not accept the bad feelings transposed in the members behaviour;
- it is necessary to criticize the problem and not the person;
- do not proffered vague threats (like "You will regret");
- do not leave the place when the opponent is trying to justify his point;
- if you are intelligent, do not jump the gun.

In an organization there are numerous invisible conflicts, which lead to a loose of a great amount of money. The true crisis is not the economical one but the relational crisis.

The individuals accept the group's norms because they realize that if they do not they risk to be punished, while conformation brings them rewards. The one that breaks the rules, will deal with hostility, gossip and even ostracism. The ones that obey the rules receives appreciation, popularity, prestige, and the others define him as "a good person".

Behaviour rules

Rules guarantee the aforementioned conformity and clarity. In some cases such conformity is essential. Particularly when the stakeholders have substantial interests at stake (for example security, health, etc.) a clear and finely outlined policy must be demanded from the organization regarding the fulfilment of its responsibilities.

Moreover, clarity is required when breaching the code results in sanctions being imposed. The disadvantage of rules (and hence the advantage of considerations) is that not all actions can be incorporated into rules. In practice, every rule can be evaded if so desired.

"Employees can not be programmed like robots, without having freedom for their views and opinions" (Captein, Wempe, 1998, p. 858). Too much emphasis on unity rewards conformism and punishes non-conformism and ultimately leads to an inflexible organization which is not open to internal and external criticism. Furthermore, excess conformism infringes upon the individual responsibility of the employees. The developing organizational ethics must take into account, and allow for, an individual sense of norms.

The rules of verbal behaviour are very unclear, this is a problem of organizational culture. No rules stipulate that managers or superiors need to be elegant or decent. But some rules forbid particular nonconformist behaviours in particular situations.

All good and useful things are products of excess. And all good things therefore breed their extreme opposite. In this case, the overwhelming need to win can produce pathological anti-social behaviour. (Peters, 2005, p. 26)

The working team can sense insecurity or inequity when an individual has broke the rules and imposed standards. The individuals who break the organizational norms will also break the rules of the group, as the lack of discipline will cause problems to both the group and the managers. If a manager tolerates an unacceptable and undisciplined behaviour, the group will feel threatened.

The employee

The nonconformist can hold a key-position in the organization and his impact is extremely important for the efficiency.

In the organizational psychology theory, we identify the dangerous situation of two extreme employees: the dissident employee and the "boxing bag" employee (Bell, A.H., 2005, p. 40). The last one receives the attacks and then behaves like nothing has happened. The dissident can use this "boxing-bag" employee to transmit a force message to the others: Behave like I say or you can take the "boxing-bag" employee's place.

The worst effect of non-conformist behaviour is when the purpose of the actor's action is to determine the other's pain and not to bring a constructive change or amelioration the work conditions. Typically, the nonconformist is used to criticize someone's activity, offending the person. The victim(s) feel a personal attack and not a professional evaluation.

We can observe in our region that the stress at the workplace, including the positive stress of challenging opportunities determine many behaviour types. Only the employees who are not interested about their job do not release their emotions at the workplace. We consider that it is important that the managers not deny the passionate

implication, the behaviour and language characteristic for this spirit in their work relations.

Conclusions

Our observations for the Romanian companies indicate that the non-conformism destroys the team spirit, paralyses the individuals and can generate unpleasant litigations, finally leading to harming the organizational interests. Team results become more and more weak as the job atmosphere wears down.

The conflict or aggression can easily appear inside the team or between teams which include strong personalities and highly motivated for innovating and divergent thought.

The extreme cases can create a hostile work atmosphere and determine many threatening feelings for the employees.

The disciplinary actions for maintaining and respecting the internal standards can impose norms and results in performance to the working groups. In the absence of centralisation and cohesion, no body can really prevent or punish dissidence.

All in all, in adequate situations we consider that the existence of nonconformists is useful within some limits, and we do not approve the rejection, and in the end even the sacrifice of these nonconformists. A certain amount of dissidency is necessary for the modern organization.

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