

## Personnel Managers' Roles in Workplace Conflict Resolution in a Small Enterprise

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### ABSTRACT

*The article examines the roles of personnel managers in resolving workplace conflicts in a small enterprise. It is based on research that combined theoretical analysis with a semi-structured interview with Company XY's general director. The case shows that conflicts in a small team often arise from current individual discomfort, mood transfer into the collective, and insufficient communication. The manager prefers early, direct intervention, gathers information from both sides before reaching a conclusion, and uses positional power only when necessary. His approach is based on natural authority, mutual respect, openness, decent behavior, and direct dialogue. The article interprets these findings in light of the literature on managerial communication, mediation, facilitation, coaching, assertiveness, empathy, and conflict strategies. It proposes a six-step model for constructive conflict resolution: early recognition, bilateral information gathering, neutral naming of the issue, facilitated dialogue, concrete agreement, and learning. Practical recommendations include a microcode of respectful communication, early check-ins, active-listening training, documented agreements, realistic team building, and periodic feedback. The findings indicate that small enterprises can improve conflict management without complex HR structures if managers combine personal proximity with simple, consistent procedures.*

**Keywords:** Conflict resolution, Personnel managers, Managerial communication, Mediation, Small enterprise, Workplace culture.

### Introduction

Workplace conflicts are a normal consequence of cooperation among people with different expectations, moods, roles, values, and communication styles. They become destructive when ignored, personalized, or handled through power alone. For personnel managers and line managers, conflict resolution is therefore a key organizational behavior competence. It protects working relationships, preserves productivity, prevents escalation, and fosters a culture in which employees can raise concerns before they become entrenched. In small enterprises, the role is even more visible because employees interact frequently and managerial authority is personalized rather than distant.

This article transforms the findings of research on personnel managers' roles in resolving workplace conflict into an article. The empirical case is the Company XY, a small company in Trenčín. The research used a theoretical-empirical design, combining literature on management, managerial roles, communication, empathy, assertiveness, mediation, facilitation, coaching, and conflict strategies with a semi-structured interview with the general director. The interview explored the manager's personal style, typical sources of conflict, timing of interventions, use of power, company culture, team building, ethical principles, and communication tools for stressful or conflict situations.

The topic is relevant beyond the case company. Contemporary organizations face change pressures related to digitalization, service expectations, risk, corporate responsibility, and new business models. Studies on the sharing economy, corporate social responsibility, and strategic risk-benefit analysis demonstrate that organizational decisions are increasingly evaluated by multiple stakeholders and require transparent communication (Jankalova & Vartiak,

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2016; Garbarova & Vartiak, 2021; Kovalova & Vartiak, 2024; Al-Madah, 2025, 2026). Internally, the same logic applies to conflict resolution: employees expect fairness, openness, and explanation rather than hidden decisions or arbitrary power.

The research question guiding this article is: Which managerial roles and communication practices support constructive conflict resolution in a small enterprise with an informal culture? The article contributes by presenting a conflict-resolution model grounded in the case evidence: early recognition, bilateral information gathering, direct dialogue, cooperative problem solving, limited use of positional power, and learning from conflicts. It also formulates practical recommendations for small enterprises with limited formal HR structures.

### *Literature Review*

Management can be understood as a practical activity, a scientific discipline, and a group of people responsible for achieving organizational goals through others (Vojtovic *et al.*, 2013; Kebe *et al.*, 2025). In this sense, managers perform planning, organizing, leading, and controlling, but their effectiveness depends heavily on interpersonal competence. The research emphasizes that management is not only a technical process. It requires work with human relations, motivation, authority, responsibility, and communication (Armstrong & Stephens, 2008; Sedlak, 2009; Homayoun *et al.*, 2024).

Managerial roles include informational, interpersonal, and decision-making roles. In conflict situations, managers act as monitors, disseminators, spokespersons, leaders, liaison persons, negotiators, and problem solvers (Smerek & Durian, 2021; Kunie *et al.*, 2025; Lam *et al.*, 2026; Nurjonov *et al.*, 2026). These roles overlap. A manager resolving conflict has to collect information, interpret it, communicate with both sides, maintain neutrality, decide whether intervention is necessary, and sometimes negotiate a mutually acceptable solution. The case study shows that conflict resolution is not a single event but a sequence of managerial roles.

Communication is central to these roles. Managerial communication is a specific form of professional communication used to lead and coordinate people (Szarkova, 2011; Szarkova, 2018; Sagnayeva *et al.*, 2025; Sabdenova *et al.*, 2026). It includes verbal communication, non-verbal signals, listening, assertiveness, and empathy. Active listening allows the manager to hear not only the literal message but also concerns, emotions, and unstated needs (Mikulastik, 2015). Assertiveness enables managers to express expectations and boundaries without humiliating employees. Empathy helps managers understand employees' emotional situations and identify the human source of a conflict (Gugova-Rozvadsky, 2012).

Conflict can be functional or dysfunctional. Functional conflict may stimulate discussion, creativity, and better decisions when it is focused on tasks and managed constructively. Dysfunctional conflict personalizes disagreement, creates stress, weakens trust, and reduces cooperation (Clegg, 2005; Yi, 2025). Conflicts may be intrapersonal, interpersonal, intragroup, intergroup, or interorganizational. Their causes can include differences in perception, poor communication, unclear roles, lack of resources, stress, negative moods, and unsuitable managerial behavior (Kacani & Buckova, 2001; Miller, 2009; Yilmaz & Erkol, 2025). In small enterprises, interpersonal and mood-related conflicts can be especially visible because teams are small and employees interact repeatedly.

The literature also discusses mediation, facilitation, and coaching as managerial tools. Mediation helps parties communicate and find a solution without the manager imposing content. Facilitation supports structured group discussion and collective problem solving. Coaching helps employees reflect on their own behavior, needs, and options (Szarkova, 2018). These tools are particularly relevant when a manager wants to build responsibility rather than create dependence on authority. The challenge is to remain neutral while still maintaining managerial responsibility for the workplace climate.

### **Materials and Methods**

The article is based on a qualitative case study conducted as part of the research. The empirical object was workplace conflict resolution in Company XY. The main data source was a semi-structured interview with the company's general director. The interview lasted approximately 2 hours and was conducted on the company's premises. It included open and closed questions focused on the manager's self-characterization, causes of conflict, tendency to avoid or resolve



conflicts, intervention methods, prevention, use of managerial power, company culture, team building, ethical code, and communication tools related to mentoring and coaching.

The research analyzed the interview using a combination of thematic and content analysis (**Table 1**). The analysis proceeded in four steps. First, statements about conflict causes were coded. Second, statements about intervention style were grouped into managerial roles. Third, cultural factors were identified. Fourth, the findings were compared with theoretical concepts from the related literature.

**Table 1.** Interview-based themes from Company XY

| Theme                             | Case evidence summarised from the research                                                                                                                                           |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Managerial self-image</b>      | The director described himself as calm, able to keep perspective, decisive, and oriented toward direct communication, openness, and motivation.                                      |
| <b>Typical causes of conflict</b> | In a small team, conflicts often arise from an individual's current mood or discomfort, which is then transferred into the collective; communication still has room for improvement. |
| <b>Timing of intervention</b>     | The manager prefers resolving conflicts rather than avoiding them and believes many causes can be prevented.                                                                         |
| <b>Conflict handling</b>          | Before concluding, the manager gathers information from both sides and reacts early to prevent escalation.                                                                           |
| <b>Power and authority</b>        | The manager first tries to act as an equal partner and builds authority naturally; positional power is used only if necessary.                                                       |
| <b>Culture and ethics</b>         | The company relies on mutual respect, humility, decent behavior, communication, and adherence to basic rules of respectful conduct.                                                  |

## Results and Discussion

The first major finding is the manager's cooperative orientation. He does not describe conflict resolution as a process of identifying a guilty person and imposing a sanction. Instead, he emphasizes information gathering, dialogue with both sides, and early reaction. This approach corresponds to the theoretical recommendation that conflict should be handled through understanding and cooperation when possible (Kacani & Buckova, 2001; Szarkova, 2018). The manager's response also suggests that small enterprises benefit from rapid and personal intervention, as conflict signals are visible early and can be addressed before they escalate into formal disputes.

The second finding is that communication is both a cause and a solution of conflict. The manager explicitly linked a good team, comfort at work, and good results with communication. He identified communication as an area for improvement and described direct communication as the primary tool for coaching, mentoring, and crisis management. This is consistent with the communication literature: listening, empathy, and assertiveness are not optional personal qualities but core managerial instruments (Szarkova, 2011; Gugova-Rozvadsky, 2012; Mikulastik, 2015).

The third finding concerns emotional climate. The manager reported that, in a small collective, conflicts often arise when one person's current discomfort is transferred into the team. This observation is practically significant. It means that conflict prevention is not limited to rules and procedures. It also requires attention to mood, stress, workload, and interpersonal sensitivity. A small enterprise may lack formal HR analytics, but a manager's proximity to employees can help them recognize emotional tension early. The risk is that informal proximity may also blur boundaries if not supported by consistent principles.

The fourth finding is limited use of power. The manager stated that he first tries to be an equal partner and to build authority naturally rather than relying on function. Positional power is used only when necessary in a later phase. This is important because excessive use of managerial power may solve the surface dispute but leave resentment. However, avoiding power entirely is not desirable either. Managers remain responsible for safe and respectful workplaces. The case indicates a balanced approach: partnership first, authority if cooperation fails or if conduct violates basic norms. The fifth finding is the importance of informal culture. The Company XY does not have written company values, but the manager relies on natural authority, mutual respect, humility, decent behavior, communication, and consistency.



In a small company, this informal culture can be effective because relationships are close and norms are transmitted through everyday behavior. Yet the same finding also reveals a vulnerability. If values remain implicit, new employees may interpret them differently, and conflict resolution may depend too much on the current manager's personality. A concise written code of respectful workplace behavior could preserve informality while clarifying boundaries. All managerial roles across stages of constructive conflict resolution are listed in **Table 2** below.

**Table 2.** Managerial roles across stages of constructive conflict resolution

| Stage                   | Managerial role       | Practical behavior in the case                                                        |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Recognition</b>      | Monitor               | Notice mood, discomfort, communication tension, and early signs of dispute.           |
| <b>Understanding</b>    | Listener and mediator | Collect information from both sides before concluding.                                |
| <b>Dialogue</b>         | Facilitator           | Create a safe space for direct discussion and help parties express their positions.   |
| <b>Solution</b>         | Negotiator            | Search for a mutually acceptable agreement and prevent escalation.                    |
| <b>Boundary setting</b> | Leader                | Use positional authority only when cooperation is insufficient or norms are violated. |
| <b>Learning</b>         | Coach                 | Help employees learn from the conflict and improve future communication.              |

The case also confirms that team building is valuable but difficult in small enterprises with shift work, diverse ages, and long commuting distances. The manager reported that organizing joint activities is complicated, but when they do happen, almost everyone attends and enjoys them. This suggests that small enterprises should not imitate expensive corporate teambuilding. They should use realistic formats: short shared meals, informal meetings, rotating micro-events after shifts, or problem-solving workshops connected to practical work needs. The purpose is to strengthen trust, not to create symbolic events detached from daily reality.

Ethical principles are present in the case through everyday expectations rather than formal documentation. The manager stated that basic rules of decent behavior and mutual respect are generally well established. This is a strong foundation, but conflict-management practice could be improved by documenting three simple norms: speak directly and respectfully; raise problems early; and listen to the other side before evaluation. Such a micro-code would not contradict the informal culture. On the contrary, it would make implicit expectations visible and teachable.

The case has broader organizational behavior implications. Conflict resolution is a form of internal risk management. If conflicts are ignored, they can become hidden costs through absenteeism, turnover, reduced performance, and damaged cooperation. If conflicts are managed constructively, they can clarify expectations and strengthen the team. This resembles the logic of risk-benefit analysis in strategic decisions: the question is not whether risk exists, but whether it is understood and governed responsibly (Kovalova & Vartiak, 2024).

### *Practical Model*

Based on the case and the selected literature, a six-step model is proposed (**Table 3**). First, managers should recognize early signs of conflict, including mood shifts, repeated misunderstandings, silence, and indirect complaints. Second, they should collect information separately from relevant parties before making judgments. Third, they should name the conflict neutrally, describing the issue without blaming. Fourth, they should facilitate direct dialogue focused on needs, facts, and future behavior. Fifth, they should agree on a concrete action, a specific responsibility, and a follow-up date. Sixth, they should reflect on lessons for communication, workload, role clarity, or team norms.

**Table 3.** Recommendations for small enterprises without formal HR departments

| Recommendation             | Implementation detail                                                                | Expected benefit                                   |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Create a micro-code</b> | Write three to five rules of respectful communication and early problem reporting.   | Clearer expectations and fairer conflict handling. |
| <b>Use early check-ins</b> | Ask employees about tension during short regular meetings or informal conversations. | Prevention before escalation.                      |



|                                   |                                                                          |                                                |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Train active listening</b>     | Practice paraphrasing, neutral questions, and emotional self-control.    | Better trust and fewer misunderstandings.      |
| <b>Document agreements</b>        | After a conflict meeting, record the agreed action and follow-up date.   | Accountability without bureaucracy.            |
| <b>Use realistic teambuilding</b> | Organize short, shift-compatible team activities.                        | Stronger relations and informal trust.         |
| <b>Collect feedback</b>           | Periodically ask whether employees perceive conflict resolution as fair. | Continuous improvement of managerial practice. |

The proposed model is suitable for small enterprises because it does not require a large HR department. It relies on managerial competence, simple documentation, and regular communication. It also respects the advantages of informal culture. Instead of replacing personal dialogue with procedures, it supports dialogue with minimal structure. This is important because the case manager's most effective tool is direct conversation. The model strengthens that tool by adding timing, neutrality, follow-up, and learning.

#### *Indicators of Success*

For practical use, the success of conflict resolution should be evaluated by observable indicators rather than by the manager's subjective feeling that the conversation went well. The first indicator is behavioral change: the behavior that created tension should become less frequent or disappear. The second indicator is communication quality: the parties should be able to discuss work issues without avoidance or personal attacks. The third indicator is team functioning: colleagues should not be forced to take sides or compensate for unresolved tension. The fourth indicator is recurrence: a conflict that returns in the same form signals that the underlying cause was not solved.

Small enterprises can monitor these indicators informally but systematically. A manager can record the date of a conflict conversation, the agreed action, and the follow-up result. This record does not have to contain sensitive details; its purpose is to remember commitments and identify patterns. If several conflicts arise from unclear shifts, workload distribution, or communication gaps, the issue is no longer only interpersonal. It becomes a process problem requiring managerial redesign.

These indicators also protect the manager from overreliance on personal impressions. A calm atmosphere immediately after a meeting may reflect relief rather than real resolution. Follow-up after a short period provides better evidence. In this way, conflict management becomes part of continuous improvement. The manager learns which interventions work, employees learn that agreements are taken seriously, and the organization develops a culture in which problems are addressed early and respectfully.

#### **Conclusion**

The article examined the roles of personnel managers in workplace conflict resolution through a qualitative case study of Company XY. The findings show that constructive conflict management in a small enterprise depends on early intervention, direct communication, information from both sides, cooperative problem solving, natural authority, and a culture of respect. The manager's approach is mainly cooperative and dialogue-oriented. He avoids immediate use of positional power and uses it only when necessary, while emphasizing personal contact, open doors, and direct communication as the main coaching and mentoring tools.

The case also shows that informal culture can foster trust and openness, but clear written norms and systematic feedback should support it. The article recommends a microcode of respectful communication, early check-ins, active-listening training, documentation of agreements, realistic team building, and periodic feedback on fairness. Future research should include employee perspectives and compare small enterprises with different degrees of formal HR structure. The central practical conclusion is that conflict resolution should be treated as a continuous managerial competence, not as an emergency response used only after relationships have deteriorated.

#### *Managerial Competencies for Conflict Prevention*





The case highlights four competencies that support conflict prevention before formal intervention becomes necessary. The first is emotional awareness. In a small team, a manager can often sense when discomfort, fatigue, or frustration begins to influence behavior. Emotional awareness does not mean diagnosing employees or intruding into private life. It means noticing changes in tone, cooperation, punctuality, or willingness to communicate and asking neutral questions before tension spreads through the group.

The second competency is communicative discipline. Direct communication is useful only when it remains respectful and structured. A manager should separate facts, interpretations, and emotions. For example, instead of saying that an employee is creating problems, the manager can describe the observed behavior, explain its effect on colleagues, and ask for the employee's perspective. Such discipline reduces defensiveness and makes it easier to move from blame to solution. It also supports the respectful culture that the case manager considers fundamental.

The third competency is impartiality. The manager in the case emphasized gathering information from both sides before making conclusions. This is essential because employees are more likely to accept a solution when they believe the process was fair. Impartiality does not mean that all behavior is equally acceptable. It means that the manager listens before evaluating and makes the criteria visible. If a norm has been violated, the manager can still respond firmly, but the response is then grounded in evidence and standards rather than personal preference.

The fourth competency is follow-up. Many workplace conflicts appear resolved after one conversation, but return later because no one checks whether behavior actually changed. Follow-up can be simple: a short meeting after one or two weeks, a confirmation of agreed actions, or a question during a team check-in. Follow-up communicates that the solution matters and that the manager is not merely trying to end an uncomfortable conversation. It also gives employees a chance to correct misunderstandings early.



#### *From Informal Culture to Minimal Structure*

Informal culture is one of Company XY's strengths, as employees can approach the manager directly without navigating complex procedures. Nevertheless, the article suggests that minimal structure can strengthen rather than weaken informality. A micro-code of respectful communication, a short conflict-resolution checklist, and written follow-up notes would not create bureaucracy. They would make the manager's values more explicit and help employees understand what to expect when problems arise.

Minimal structure is also important for fairness. In small companies, employees often know one another personally, which can foster trust. It can also create suspicion if employees believe that decisions depend on personal relationships. Transparent steps for conflict resolution reduce this risk. Everyone should know that the manager will listen to both sides, focus on facts and future behavior, avoid humiliation, and document the agreement. Such consistency supports natural authority because employees see that fairness is practiced, not only declared.

A small enterprise can implement minimal structure through one-page tools. The first tool is a respectful communication agreement displayed or shared with employees. The second is a manager checklist for conflict conversations: prepare, listen, summarize, agree, document, follow up. The third is a feedback question included in periodic conversations: 'Is there any tension or misunderstanding that should be addressed early?' These tools are inexpensive and compatible with the direct dialogue approach reported in the interview.

#### *Implications for Personnel Management*

Although the company does not appear to have a formal HR department, the case demonstrates that personnel management is present in everyday managerial behavior. Conflict resolution, motivation, team atmosphere, ethical expectations, and coaching are HR functions, even when performed by a general director. This has two implications. First, managers in small enterprises should be trained in basic HR competencies because their daily decisions directly shape the employee experience. Second, small enterprises should document key HR practices so that they remain stable even if the manager is absent or if the company grows.

The findings also indicate that conflict resolution should be linked to employee development. When a conflict is resolved, the manager can help employees identify what they learned about communication, workload, cooperation, or personal boundaries. This converts conflict from a purely negative event into a learning opportunity. The literature distinguishes functional and dysfunctional conflict; the managerial task is to keep disagreement focused on work

issues, prevent personal attacks, and use the experience to improve future cooperation (Kacani & Buckova, 2001; Clegg, 2005).

For personnel managers, the case reinforces the value of coaching. Coaching is not limited to formal development programs. In daily conflict situations, coaching means asking questions that help employees reflect on their own contribution to the conflict and on the options they have for future behavior. The manager's open-door approach is consistent with this logic. However, coaching should be combined with boundaries. If an employee repeatedly violates respectful conduct, the manager must move from coaching to setting clear expectations and consequences.

#### *Limitations and Future Research*

The article has limitations. It is based on a single interview with a manager, so the findings reflect the managerial perspective rather than the employees' full experience. Employee interviews would be necessary to confirm whether they perceive the conflict-resolution style as fair, open, and effective. The case is also situated in a small company with an informal culture, so the findings cannot be transferred mechanically to larger organizations with formal HR departments and more complex hierarchies.

Future research should include multiple respondents, including employees involved in different roles and tenure groups. It would also be useful to compare organizations where conflict resolution is highly formalized with organizations where it depends mainly on informal managerial dialogue. Such a comparison could show which structural elements are necessary and which are best left flexible. Another direction is to examine whether training in active listening, mediation, and assertiveness changes the number, intensity, or perceived fairness of workplace conflicts over time.

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