

Source of Occupational Conflict at Greek Municipal Sports Organizations

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The purpose of this paper is twofold. At first, to examine the role of political influence in public administration using the non-productive occupational conflicts in Municipal Sport Organizations (M.S.Os). At second, to investigate which might be the particular aspects of conflict creation.

Design/methodology/approach: The study used information extracted from semi-constructed interviews. Interviewed participants were employees of different municipal sports organizations of the Region of Attica Greece. They also belong to different occupational levels.

Findings: The results indicated that the employees in municipal sports organizations detect the roots of interior conflicts in the political influence, which is a practice as an indirect pressure of the elected management members of the board, to implement a certain policy. The results also revealed a new source of non-productive occupational conflict referred to as “the man close to the President”.

Practical implications: Conflicts in the interior of a municipal sports organization adds extra cost. Having knowledge of the deeper causes of a conflict, managers and board members can work in advance in certain procedures to avoid the creation of such situations. This will guide the board and the management of the organization in wiser funds use, and it will help in the creation of a much better organizational environment.

Originality/value: This study fills a significant gap in the existing literature. Concerns both the political influence of elected members of a municipal sports organization board as causes of conflicts and particular aspects, which provoke conflict, detected and named as the man next to the president.

Keywords: Conflict, Municipal Sports Organization, Political Aspect.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The conflict has always been part of the society resulting in change for better or worse. Nobody can claim that he/she has never engaged in some kind of conflict. In the relations between people (Pruitt & Carnevale, 1993), as well as between groups (Jehn, 1995), conflicts are an important decision-making process (Amason, 1996) in many aspects of life (Cosier & Schwenck, 1990; Jehn, 1995; Van de Vliert & De Dreu, 1994).

Scholars over time have conceived many reasons for this social phenomenon. Karl Marx (1867) presented the first social based conflict theory. He argued that due to lack of resources there is constant conflict among the different parts of society, trying to protect and promote their interests (Kavadia, 1994). In a different approach, Max Weber (1947) established the conflict theory on an economic basis, proposing that the inadequacy of resources prompts those in control of the productive means to try to prevail in society. Different theoretical approaches indicate that the reasons for conflict are either the pursuit of limited sources or the counteraction of a part of the society against the pressure applied to it by another more powerful part (Sherif, 1966).

Since the workplaces are an important part of society, the conflict appears there as well. For this reason, the academic subject of organizational behavior analyzes such issues in order to understand the behavior of the employees in relation to the effectiveness of the organizations (Zavlanos, 2002).

Under certain conditions, a conflict could produce positive results (Lewicki & Spencer, 1992). Many authors (Fisher, 1994; Amis, Slack & Berrett, 1995; Slack, 1997; Medina, Munduate & Dorado, 2005) identified a strong correlation between conflict and productivity, while Slack (1997) argued that in the context of a sporting organization the concepts of “conflict” and “productivity” are inextricably linked. On the other hand, occupational conflict can be non-productive resulting in feelings of distress, unfairness, etc

among the staff, impacting negatively the production and thus economical the organization (Kosmas & Afthinos, 2013).

An interesting aspect of conflict in organizations results from the function of the management as well as the type of the organization. More specifically, public organizations are prone to employee conflicts, especially in countries where civil servants employment and career status are protected by national laws. In such a case, conflicts arise often between elected political administration board members and career civil servants. The reason is obvious especially when a different political party takes over the administration of the organization. This, most of the time, bring changes in organizational functions, philosophy of operations, and type-production of services. The late is an issue overlooked by the related literature even though affects both civil servants and citizens served. Therefore, the researcher of this study intended to investigate how the political personnel that takes over the administration of a municipal sports organization affect its function, especially the personnel.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Organization conflict. Managers of all types of organizations (profit, nonprofit, local, national international, etc.) (Burke & Collins, 2000; Thomas & Schmidt, 1976) and at all levels of government (vertically, horizontally, within groups, between groups) (Spector, 2008) spend approximately 20% of their working time every day to deal with conflicts (Roberts, 2006). The systematic analysis of the interests and power of the political groups functioning in the organizations, which implement a system of "governance" that maintains order, can be an excellent interpretation tool concerning conflicts. The analysis of groups facilitates the inquiry of the policies that govern the relations between them. Policies are necessary because people think and act differently and this diversity creates tensions, which can only political means can resolve them (Morgan, 2000).

In the past decades, several organizational theorists approached the complex concept of conflict in the organizational environment suggesting that it is described by contradictory behaviors (Thompson, 1960), preventing, interfering, harmful or restrictive actions against the desired action of a counterpart (Deutsch, 1973) and a certain expanding attitude towards other members of the organization (Morgan, 1986). Conflict is also presented as an incompatibility between values, needs, interests, or actions that are inherent parts of everyday life (Wall & Callister, 1995) or it can be seen as an inevitable part of life, where different people's goals are often incompatible (Jones, 2004). However, recent surveys show that conflicts can be beneficial for both organizations and employees' lives in general (Amason, 1996; Aminuddin *et al.*, 2009; Jehn, 1995, 1997; Pondy, 1992; Robbins, 1990; Spector, 2008; Thomas, 1992).

Conflict emanates from several factors, the organizational environment being sometimes of higher importance than interpersonal relations are (Hackman, 1992; Katz & Kahn, 1978). Managers plan the organizational structure for effective and efficient operation. This structure consists of departments in order to achieve the objectives agreed upon (Slack & Parent, 2006). As an organizational unit, each department consists of employees engaged in specific activities (i.e., sports department, marketing department, financial department, etc.) (Afthinos, 2001). The paradox is that these efforts for higher levels of efficiency and productivity are most of the time followed by conflicts between their members or between departments (Amis, Slack & Berrett, 1995). Conflicts arising from the structure of an organization are usually recorded as interdisciplinary and are not necessarily only dysfunctional. On the contrary, they often lead to new ideas and "healthy" groups (Bloch, 1988).

Occupational relations, especially those based upon the authority of a superior who imposes it on lower-level employees (Hoy & Miskel, 1978) is another reason for conflict (Katz & Kahn, 1978; Hackman, 1992). In such a situation, the lower level employees decide collectively or personally whether they will obey an instruction coming from "above". Their obedience or apostasy is an act of authority. If imperishability prevails, the hierarchy superior loses its authority (Bernard, 1938).

A. Conflict in Sports Organizations

Spector (2008) emphasizes that conflicts occur at all levels of government in sports organizations' environments (vertical, horizontal, within groups, between groups), and the type of structure of the organization (e.g. centralized or decentralized). Several examples of conflicts exist in the context of sports.

A case-study survey in Canada in the late 1980s showed strong conflict phenomena when the local government wanted to organize Professional athletics, in order to organize more effective the Olympic Games held in Calgary in 1988 (Slack, Berrett, & Mistry, 1994). For this reason, I decided to delegate the decision-making power of the volunteers, who until then formed a driving force of the sporting bodies of winter sports, in paid staff. The result was that volunteers believed that the government did not recognize their many years' contribution and created a negative stereotypical perception towards the professionals who were entrusted with improving the organization of the country's sports organizations.

Similar problems arose in the Canadian Summer Sports Federation when management decided to hire a

technical manager to develop the sports while giving him the power to accomplish the goals of the venture. He made structural changes at both organizational and competitive levels, effectively altering the context of all sports, which caused dissatisfaction with athletes, coaches, etc., resulting in conflict situations. The technical manager fired and left, he said he knew very well what he had to do, but many others did not know (Amis, Slack, & Berrett, 1995).

Australia adopted the same policy. Professional managers replaced volunteers, who were the basis for the operation of sports organizations (Sherry, Shilbury, & Wood, 2007). In many of these organizations, managers faced a lot of pressure coming both from the political level and at the level of achieving goals.

Another example of similarly addressing the structure and operation of sports organizations was the Athens 2004 Olympic Games, where criticism of the entire sports community in the country was keen on the results. Federal sports directors received specific orders from their superiors and they aligned their practices in these commands. This has resulted in conflicts between the involved members at all levels (coaches, athletes, etc.). When managers asked about the practices they implemented, they replied that they had applied commands given to them by their superiors (Schlink & Moscaritolo, 2004).

There are also examples concerning the political influence, putting pressure on political leadership on a certain group involved. Executives from various sports organizations in Norway replied at a rate of 71% that they had been strongly influenced by ministerial leadership pressure to promote specific views and actions on sporting issues as opposed to their personal beliefs (Guldbrandsen, 2002).

Conflicts are a common phenomenon in Greek public administration as well (Anastasiou-Pizi, 2004; Kontogianni, 2007). However, despite their importance to the proper functioning of public institutions the literature does not confirm their existence, their sources, the type, and the results of such administrative situations, especially in Municipal Sports Organizations (M.S.Os).

According to Turley *et al.* (2015), an assessment of non-financial performance measures is necessary for analyzing the overall performance of public organizations. Holt *et al.* (2012) underline that it is important to note the context, for conflict, can arise around performance (i.e., task) or relationships (i.e., social) issues—a finding. Several researchers (Greer *et al.*, 2008; Holt *et al.*, 2012) believe that the long-lasting impact of conflicts that go unresolved would be harmful for any public sports organization, which is why it is important to investigate. Slack (1997) confirmed this observation admitting that although several authors in the international literature have captured many issues of sports organizations, conflicts remain a neglected field.

A significant source of friction and conflicts in local authorities is the effort political parties engage themselves in imposing their philosophy as soon as they ascend to power (Faber & Shearson, 1970). Getruda (2013) reports that conflicts in Local Government Authorities (LGAs) are inevitable, many of which emanate from improper use of authority. Conflicts lead to changes not only in the structure of organizations but also in the relations between their staff (Corwin, 1969). Massawe (2009) argues that political interest, personal interest, economic interest, lack of confidence, authority, not adhering to the existing work rules, regulations, and procedures are usually the causes of conflict in LGAs. Expanding his view, the researcher suggested some methods that could be used to settle conflicts, the most important of which would be meetings, advice from experts, instructions from higher authority, clear rules and regulations, and adhering to those rules and regulations. Moreover, the estimation of the cost on the organization's employees (Kosmas & Afthinos, 2014), on the organization as a unit (Kosmas & Afthinos, 2013) and on citizens (Kosmas & Afthinos, 2012) would lead to the realization of the damage conflicts can produce.

Afthinos and Nassis (1999) argued that politics influences sport. In interviews, they recorded the dependence of sports executives on their political leadership and their obligation to follow a specific way of implementing sports programs. The change in LGAs leadership every four years as the law 3852/2010 requires, creates new environments and conflicts arise among executives. Individuals' and groups' pressure, towards the government for the achievement of private benefits, often uses this form of political influence (Alnon, 2013). Such practices are in direct contrast to the fundamental principles of public administration, such as good administration, impartiality, etc.

The General Inspector of Public Administration in Greece (GIPA) in his 2014 Report highlights the phenomenon of maladministration in LGAs, especially the abusive exercise of power by elected – politicians. He argues that officials are not selected through the appropriate procedure according to the law, but the elected Board members form a group of "trusted" people whom they empower to implement the Board's majority decisions.

Concluding, conflict in the public sector sports organizations in Greece has a sense of political guidance and interference regarding the implementation practices of sports executives. It also seems that there are certain causal factors with references to persons, who play an important role in the leadership's influence dictated.

B. Municipal Sports Organizations in Greece

Municipalities in Greece are constitutionally established and they can develop multifaceted activities (Greek Constitution, Article 102). The Greek law 3463/2006, article 239, enables them to set up M.S.Os, which are governed by 5-15 Board members, who are councilors of both majority and minority, and citizens who use the facilities or engage in actions appropriate to the purpose of the M.S.Os (Panagiotopoulos, 2006). The same law describes the responsibilities of the Board members, as well as actions permitted or prohibited to them. A key document is their organizational chart, which shows the departments and describes the positions of permanent (with an indefinite contract under public law) and seasonal (hired a certain period to do a certain job staff, by category (level of education, specialization, etc.) (Greek law 3584/2007, article 10).

A few years ago, an ambitious plan for reforming the LGAs titled "Kallikrates" was introduced (Greek law 3852/2010). The purposes of the program were to reconstruct the state, rebuilt the public confidence in the management of public money, and facilitate the production and equal distribution of wealth.

C. The 5 Ps theory

The 5 Ps theoretical framework was considered appropriate for the development of the questionnaires used to perform the pilot study and the interviews' analyses. The 5 Ps theory focuses on people, as well in the process of conflict. It provides insights for situations like a mismatch between: a) individuals, expectations and policy interpretation, and b) stated policies and actual practices. Galtung (2000) was the first who introduced the theory, which was developed by Hayes (2009) who claimed that, like almost anything organic, conflicts have a life cycle going through the following phases. a) Diagnosis (investigation of who collides with whom, why, and what the stakes are), knowing what the diagnosis means depends on the understanding of the stages in the development of conflicts. b) The prognosis (experience from past conflicts is used to analyze present and predict future conditions) and c) treatment (identification of techniques and processes that will reduce or eliminate the effects). The 5 Ps stand for five factors: a) people (age, sex, social status, educational level, job title, relations between employees, experience in their position, etc.) experience in their position and others in organization and Organization of people in relation to others. b) Perceptions (individual beliefs, values, expectations of the organization, as well as perceptions of what is happening inside and outside the workplace). Perceptions primarily changed through, education, experience, interventions resulting in reflective processes. c) Practices (interactions policies in relation to the individual characters; most of the conflicts occur in the context of practices). Behaviors can alter without altering perceptions or personal characteristics. d) Policies are a broad range of written and unwritten rules. Written rules could be work schedules, formal political orders in paper, laws, etc. Unwritten rules could be an appropriate demeanor, way of a deal with problems, etc. and all these things include in organization culture. e) Persistence is the element of "time" in the model; change takes place over time. An intervention's ability to be successful is dependent on addressing "persistence". Individuals must take a "long view"; organizations see the "shorter term" interests of individuals.

III. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is twofold: a) to examine the role of political influence as a source of non-productive occupational conflict in Greek Municipal Sports Organizations (MSOs) and b) to investigate how this phenomenon is manifested and affects human resource management.

A. Research Questions

In order to achieve this purpose, the following four research questions were established:

- 1) Are there non-productive occupational conflicts in Greek M.S.Os?
- 2) If so, what is their time extent in the weekly working hours of the organization?
- 3) How do non-productive occupational conflicts manifest in the Greek M.S.Os as a political influence?
- 4) How does it affect human resource management?

IV. METHODOLOGY

This research was structured via two approaches: (a) a quantitative study in order to identify MSOs as well as employees that have experienced a nonproductive occupational conflict of >8 hours/week and (b) a qualitative approach to investigate in-depth this phenomenon.

A. The Quantitative Research

Sample: The nineteen municipal sports organizations that operate in the Athens metropolitan area of Greece were classified as big, medium, or small according to their population, to be part of this study.

Data collection: The purpose was to record the hours per week spent in non-productive occupational

conflict. The data were collected via the conflict assessment questionnaire of Delmote, Kennedy, and Aronson (2004) that it was mailed, e-mailed or delivered personally in the selected M.S.O.s, and was received in the same way.

Data analysis: The data collected through the completed questionnaires were descriptively analyzed. The response rate was 56.0%. The outcome of this procedure yield, n=34 employees employed in n=9 M.S.O.s, who were declared as spending in conflict a higher average than the eight hours per week suggested in the related literature as problematic, fulfilling the selection criterion and considered suitable to form the population of the study (Burke & Collins, 2000; CIPD, 2008; Thomas & Schmidt, 1976).

B. The Qualitative Research

In order to fulfill the purposes of the study, qualitative procedures through semi-structured interviews were administered.

Sample: In the qualitative study, the sample consisted of nine persons (five men and four women), from three different organizational levels (top, middle and entry), from four different M.S.Os who were selected randomly out of the population formed by the quantitative study, and agreed to participate in the interviews.

Pilot study: In order to ensure the validity of the assessment, reduce potential errors or mistakes (Thomas & Nelson, 2003), correct any methodological errors that could arise (Merriam, 1998), and determine the degree to which respondents understand the questions for the semi-structured interviews of this qualitative research, a pilot study was conducted (Bloch, 1988; Jehn, 1995; 1997; Burke & Collins, 2000). In this procedure, three randomly selected employees from the sample produced by the quantitative procedure were invited to participate. The pilot resulted in no suggestions for improvement to interview questions.

Qualitative data collection procedure: As soon as the questions of the semi-structured interviews finalized, a letter is sent, e-mailed or delivered personally to the prospective study participants. The letter informed them about the purpose and the details of the process (day/time of the interview, the duration of the process, and method of the data collection (tape recorder). It also provides details related to confidentiality and their right to choose not to participate or disengage from the process whenever they felt they should do so (Bell, 1997; Briggs, 1986; Johnson, 1984). As soon as the candidates expressed their consent to participate, the appointments were arranged with direct communications (Thomas & Nelson, 2003). In the beginning, the researcher advised each interview participant to identify any words, expressions, or statements they saw not clear to her/him. Their response in the first question is used as a base for articulating the next question in order for the interview to evolve into a dialogue (Fontana & Frey, 1998). Every word and act of the participants during the interview recorded, without influencing or instructing. Then the interviews were transcribed into a text, which was sent to the participant for approval within five days.

Qualitative data analysis: For the data structuring and analysis it was used Galtung's (2000) 5 P's theoretical framework. The information contained in the texts was coded and categorized in similar codes (Thomas & Nelson, 2003) and the categories analyzed using the existing literature. The finalized content of the interviews was introduced in NVivo Version 7 (QSR international, 1997-2007) qualitative research program in order to record the experiences of the participants, to understand the meaning of their statements and comprehend as clearly as possible their input to the study (Brink & Wood, 1998; Morse & Field, 1996; Thomas & Nelson, 2003). In each unit of text a representative thematic title (code) is given, signifying the interpretation to each specific point of the interview (e.g., feeling of distress, etc.). After all the texts of the transcripts were concentrated in a series of thematic units they were compared between them to identify units with similar characteristics (Huberman & Miles, 1998; Polit & Hungler, 1999; Tesch, 1990; Thomas & Nelson, 2003), which were placed together to form homogeneous modules. As condensed descriptions and interpretations, these units formed the final form of how the statements of the participants in the study were perceived, interpreted and experienced (Huberman & Miles, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Thomas & Nelson, 2003).

In the final stage of the analysis, the thematic units are interpreted through the broader literature, producing a more elaborate knowledge about the phenomenon under investigation. That is, it was determined what the similarities and differences between the research results and the existing knowledge were. It also highlighted the way in which the results offered and offered a better understanding, deeper understanding and more elaborate knowledge about the phenomenon under investigation (Holloway & Wheeler, 1996; Munhall & Boyd, 1993; Thomas & Nelson, 2003).

Qualitative data validity and reliability: To secure the validity of the study: (a) the views of the people surveyed were compared among them using the triangulation qualitative research method (Olsen, 2004), (b) Some interviews were conducted by academics and professors of physical education with related scientific background and (c) Approximately five days after each process was completed, the transcript sent to the participant in order to approve the content.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the *first research question*, it was examined whether there are non-productive occupational conflicts in Greek M.S.Os. The outcome of this procedure yielded, n=34 employees employed in n=9 M.S.Os, who were declared as spending in conflict a higher average than the eight hours per week (Burke & Collins, 2000; Thomas & Schmidt, 1976) (Table I).

TABLE I: AGE, YEARS IN THE SERVICE AND HOURS OF CONFLICT PER WEEK OF THE SURVEY PARTICIPANTS (N = 34).

	Min	Max	M	S.d.
Age	28	58	44.12	6.713
Years of work at work	1	32	12.22	8.347
Hours of conflict per week	1	35	10.35	9.406

The *second research question* concerned about what is the time extent and impact of the non-productive occupational conflicts in Greek M.S.Os, as well as their impact on the organization. The result was revealed that in four M.S.Os, it was reported occupational conflicts ranging from two to 22.5 hours a week in all but one M.S.Os. This accounts for twelve hours of non-productive occupational conflict above the international average. Based on participants' claims, occupational conflict of such intensity is harmful to the M.S.Os, the employees, as well as to the public to which they offer services. (Kosmas & Afthinos, 2014).

The *third research question* was exploring how non-productive occupational conflict manifests in the Greek M.S.Os. The results revealed that a key element in such situations was the M.S.Os' President official position power, especially the manner she/he exercised it. Specifically, it was found that they usually choose to work mainly with employees they know and trust, thus creating an informal organizational structure, which produces employee conflicts of high intensity. This fact was identified during the interviews as a new source of significant non-productive occupational conflict. It was referred to as: "*the person close to the President*" (id 5,7&8). An employee said: "... there are some people who are close to him [President] either due to a friendship they have developed in the job or because of a previous social relationship they had, that was also the means to join the organization [due to this friendship]. These people are the privileged ones ..." (id 5 employee); "... she [President] informally took close to her an employee who became her 'right hand' in the organization interfering in every issue and despising everyone in the chain of command. She trusted only that particular individual and scoffed all kinds of suggestions to her..." (id 7 head of economics, ...); "... most of them [personnel close to the president] proclaim themselves as supervisors, but they are not ... they are simply 'planted' in a position and they are given responsibilities without following the legal procedure and just because they want it this way they manage things in the organization" (id 8 empl.); "... all Presidents bring their own persons in the organization, or they find one in the job for as long as they are Presidents to make them feel that they have support..." (id 7 head of economics?).

Furthermore, respondents (Id 7) claimed that "...all Presidents want to have close to the people whom they can trust; these people enjoy excessive powers, usually given to them 'under the table' and they use it to control and pull many strings ..." They also claimed that: "...the person close to the President' is a lasting phenomenon and each time a new President is elected bring someone along and thus an informal structure of management is created, which discredits the legal hierarchy." This person usually creates a climate of fear and more often than not does not convey to the President what really happens in the organization. The outcome of this situation is the creation of two personnel groups or "*camps*" within the organization: one with those who collaborate with "*the person close to the President*" and another with those who are against him/her: "... employees create 'camps', teams. How can I describe it... They are separated from those who are with the President and the 'others' ..." (id9 empl.).

The *fourth research question*. How do non-productive occupational conflicts affect Human Resource Management in the Greek M.S.O.s? Employees in M.S.Os stated that despite their desire to work in unity, to play fair, to produce quality work and to avoid "difficult" situations as much as they can, relations among them range from moderate to poor. As a result, conflicts arise among employees of the same level, and of different levels. This is mainly due to varying individual personalities and attitudes, lack of communication, lack of specific objectives and clear written organizational policies and procedures. Specifically, they characterized their organizations as an "arena", with conflicts arising mainly on issues regarding working hours. A participant, in particular, stated that "... conflicts are everywhere; they [employees] are all in an arena colliding to each other..." (id7 head of economics). The elected Board members who are appointed to administer these organizations, do not maintain good relations with all of their subordinates.

Based on reports of the present study participants, all perks are usually given to people close to the President of the sports organizations (Kosmas & Afthinos, 2012). As the decisions are ultimately taken by "these" people and especially the "man close to the President", the power model becomes centralized (Bowditch & Buono, 2000; Dalton *et al.*, 1980), increasing the number and intensity of labor conflicts (Aminuddin *et al.*, 2009). In his 2014 Report, the Greek General Inspector of Public Administration

(G.I.P.A.) notes that such situations lead to nepotism and corruption (G.I.P.A., 2015).

In most cases, some employees choose not to come into direct confrontation with their superiors and try to solve the arising problems in a discrete manner. When the situation escalates, they submit a complaint to their Union. If the issue is not resolved there, then they sometimes take the dispute to courts.

VI. IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY AND PRACTICE

In a conclusion, non-productive occupational conflicts in Greek M.S.Os do exist and are created for several reasons, such as differences in personalities and attitudes, lack of interpersonal communication, lack of specific organizational objectives. Furthermore, although policies and procedures do exist, are not properly followed. The main source of nonproductive occupational conflict in M.S.Os revealed to be "the person close to the President". Valuable steps towards improving the structure and function of organizations could be: a) seminars on legislation, organizational behavior, and human resources management, which Board members, directors, and senior managers could attend before taking up their duties, b) the establishment of a consultation body which could work as a mechanism for conflict prevention and should conflict arise to work as a response mechanism and c) inclusion of crisis management skills into the selection criteria of people who are elected or hired to work in organizations.

In summary, the results show that there are occupational conflicts from 2-22.5 hours a week in all but one M.S.O., of the Regional Unity of Athens. In four of these, the hours reported were over twelve; more than the relative international average. Based on the literature, occupational conflicts can be not only harmful but also beneficial in some cases to both organizations and people (Amason, 1996; Aminuddin, *et al.*, 2009; Jehn, 1995; 1997; Pondy, 1992, Robbins, 1990, Spector, 2008, Thomas, 1992). However, in the present study, occupational conflicts are of such intensity and form that the parties say they are loss-making for the M.S.O.s, the employees, and also for the public in which they offer their services.

Etzioni (1964) mentions three types of power exercising in an organization: (a) oppressive (pressure with fear of punishment); (b) quantitative (control through material wages); and (c) Remuneration, such as prestige, appreciation, etc.). In the present study, participants reported that quantitative and qualitative privileges are usually given to people in positions close to the president of the sports organization, who take "instead" the coordination of the implementation of organizational decisions (Kosmas & Afthinos, 2012). The result of this is "the man next to the president", who is the representative of the president's policies and views. According to the respondents' answers to the qualitative exploration of conflicts at the outset of the present study, "the man next to the president" is the one who, in cooperation with the president of the M.S.O.s, draws the policies and takes the decisions for the implementation of the job, without often taking into account the opinions of other employees.

This is because every elected person wants to cooperate with people who will pursue policies that are in line with the community mix he belongs to, and not with people who will "hurt" these policies. For the president, these are his "right hand", who finally gives the orders to the departments of the organization. In many cases, their decisions are inconsistent with those of the Board of Directors of the M.S.O.s, and as a result, problems arise.

In his report for 2014, the Greek General Inspector of Public Administration notes similar situations leading to corruption (Nepotism). As the decisions are ultimately taken by a person, the "man beside the president", the power model becomes centralized (Bowditch & Buono, 2000; Dalton *et al.*, 1980), which increases the number and intensity of labor conflicts (Aminuddin *et al.*, 2009).

- ID 1= employee (administrative)
- ID 2= employee (administrative)
- ID 3= PRESIDENT
- ID 4= employee (inancial)
- ID 5= employee (teacher of physical education)
- ID 6= employee (teacher of physical education)
- ID 7= head of economics
- ID 8= employee (teacher of physical education)
- ID 9= employee (teacher of physical education)

VII. CONCLUSIONS

Conflicts in M.S.Os with "intense" working relationships do not arise only from employees. Elected Board members as well, are those whose working practices exacerbate tensions in the interior of the organizational environment. Employees describe situations that cause unpleasant feelings and when they refer to occupational conflicts, they wish they did not exist.

A dominant and new source of conflict that was identified by the participants in this study was "the man

next to the President", who may be an employee in the organization or outsourced, who makes all the decisions regarding the everyday function of the sports organization. At the same time, around the "man next to the President", some MSO employees create an informal support group and collaborate with him/her. The president wants to have such people next to him, in order to firmly apply the policies of the elected municipal fraction in which he is a member and who has appointed him in that position. Its goal is to meet citizens' demands appearing as voters of the municipal authority, but also to have a strong ally in the organization, assembling beside its employees to support him.

Employees, who do not agree with this group, create another that opposes any unlawful act of the former, either through verbal or written protests or through the employees' union. The result is a dysfunctional and non-productive occupational conflict, which tarnishes the image of the organization, decreases the employees' efficiency, increases the cost of labor, and generally, depreciates the M.S.Os' services. The abovementioned situation arises from the fact that the Greek State officials are permanent and have the legal capacity to resist acts, which they consider to be contrary to the public interest.

Most of the employees are unaware that they have rights, which are protected by the Constitution of the country. Knowledge of these rights, as well as knowledge of the legal framework of the organization, would strengthen the employees at all levels and would make interference attempts by the political leadership difficult.

In view of the above findings, it is proposed that the elected Board members, as well as employees at all levels, should attend seminars on conflict management, legislation, organizational behavior, and human resources management. Moreover, counseling would be a useful method of preventing conflicts and dealing with them when they arise. Counseling process takes into account the behavioral tendencies of the stakeholders, the ability of the organization's members to make decisions, as well as the knowledge, and the anticipation of possible sources of occupational disputes for timely treatment. The establishment of a consultation body could work as a mechanism for conflict prevention. Such a kind of consultation could be of a higher importance step for the improvement of the function of the Greek M.S.O.s. This is because the counseling process takes into account several factors. Variables like this can be the behavioral tendencies of the stakeholders, the ability of the organization's members to make decisions, as well as the knowledge, and the anticipation of possible sources of occupational disputes for timely treatment.

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