

# Romania: Conflicts between prison employees in Satu Mare Penitentiary

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**Abstract.** *This article reports the results of a survey on the conflicts the staff of Satu Mare Penitentiary is facing at their day to day jobs and the causes that generate them. The questionnaire attempted to determine the most significant problems in daily prison activities, the methods used to manage work related (recurrent) disputes among employees and the most important features of the prison environment that lead to stress and conflict.*

**Keywords:** *Satu Mare Penitentiary, organizational conflict, survey.*

## Introduction

Mc'Shane (1993) notes that starting with the 1980's scholars tended to de-emphasize the inmate issues and focus on the conflicts between officers and between officers and administrators. This trend was set and put in motion once many scholars observed and noted that the correctional institutions are conflict-prone organizations. Powelson et. al., cited by Zald (1962, p. 22-23), among others, have described in detail some of the conflicts that may develop and manifest between the professionally trained treatment employees such as social workers, psychiatrists, medical staff or psychologists, and lay personnel (cottage parents, attendants, guards, other security personnel). The conflicts in such environments arise out of the

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incompatible requirements of the custodial and the treatment staff, and the goals they must serve inside the prison unit they work in. Conflict is an inherent, and some would say natural, part of this phenomenon, like any other business or employment relation. Modern organizations are dynamic, made up of people with increasingly diverse backgrounds, opinions, values and expectations about work, but often the tension to manage these emotions and the responsibility can lead to disputes, which in turn can lead to conflicts (Sandu, 2015).

Bennett (2012) observes how until relatively recently, prison research tended to focus mainly on prisoners and the effects of imprisonment. In such researchers, staff variables were invisible but mostly subsumed within the broader concerns. He mentions that “the study of prison staff may be considered marginal or a distraction. It could be argued that the primary focus of prison research should be prisoners, since they are the people who are most significantly affected by the prison experience” (p. 1). The lack of attention given to the ones taking charge of the prisoners is especially true in the Romanian context.

With these observations in mind, an idea started to grow: a research regarding a “virgin land”, or a “special” kind of organizations. Specifically, a research inside the prison, focused on prison employees. Although different evaluations of prison officers were conducted yearly by the Romanian National Penitentiary Administration regarding stress and stress management, work satisfaction, offender-staff relationship, etc., there is no research regarding the conflicts between the staff members.

This article reports the results of a survey of the conflicts the prison staff is facing at their day to day jobs and the causes that generate them. The questionnaire attempted to determine the most significant problems in daily prison activities, the methods used to manage work related (recurrent) disputes among employees and the most important features of the prison environment that lead to stress and conflict.

## **Organizational Conflict**

### *Organization – definition and structure*

In *Taking charge of organizational conflict*, David Cowman (2003) defines organizations in a simple, yet relevant, way: “organizations are only structures into which we place people to produce outcomes. Any success or failure we assign to an organization is only the reflection of the success or failure of its people” (p. 7).

Weihrich, Cannice and Koontz (2010) defines organizations as “a formalized intentional structure of roles and positions” (p. 174). Nelson and Quick (2013) believe that organizations are “open systems of interacting components in which people, tasks, technology and structure come together for a purpose. These internal components interact with external components in the organization’s task environment such as competitors,

customers, and vendors. Taken together, organizations are open systems inside which, people, technology, structure and purpose interact with an environment” (p. 9).

So, as we see from this definition, an organization’s components are: people (its human resources), technology (represented by a wide range of techniques, tools, knowledge that are used to transform the inputs into outputs), structure (represented by the system of authority, communication, and workflow). The above-mentioned task environment comprises the following elements: the lawmakers, suppliers and customers (Nelson & Quick, 2013). How does an organization system work? Basically, the organization uses its inputs (capital, material and human resources), converts them in throughputs in order to deliver to its task environment outputs, in the opinion of the same authors (2013, p. 9). “Throughputs are the materials and resources as they are transformed by the organization’s technology component. Once the transformation is complete, throughputs become outputs for customers, consumers, and clients” (p. 9).

Writers distinguish between the *formal* and *informal* aspect of an organization. Weihrich et al. (2010) believe that “formal organization means the intentional structure of roles in a formally organized enterprise” (p. 174). According to Nelson and Quick (2013), the formal organization refers to “the official, legitimate and most visible part that enables people to think of organizations in logical and rational ways” (p. 9). It is also described as “the *lines* [...] that can be drawn to show official relationships and power structures and workflows and channels of communication” by Katzenbach and Khan (2010, p. 3).

The informal organization refers to the relationships, space, and behaviors that exist outside the formal lines, in Katzenbach and Khan (2010, p. 3) view, while Weihrich et al. (2010, p. 175) describes it as appearing through the informal interaction between employees, that develops into a network of interpersonal relationships, that do not appear on the organization chart. As a definition of informal relationships, we consider that Weihrich’s et al. (2010, p. 186) fits best to the purpose of this document: “informal organization is a network of personal and social relations neither established nor required by formal authority, but arising spontaneously”.

According to Weihrich and Cannice (2010) the hierarchy of any organization is crowned by its top managers, and it applies to any kind of organization worldwide: small or large organizations, to manufacturing as well as service industries, to profit or not-for-profit enterprises, and that the term enterprise refers to a business, government agency, hospital, university, and any other type of organization. Weihrich and Cannice (2010) define management as the process of designing and maintaining such an environment in which the individuals, working together in different groups, accomplish in an efficient way selected aims.

As a manager (no matter the organizational level), one carries out the managerial functions of: organizing, planning, leading, staffing, evaluating and controlling. These

complex activities and the aim of management itself are the same in any type of organization and any level of it: to create surplus. "Managing is concerned with productivity, which implied effectiveness and efficiency" in Weihrich's and Cannice's view (2010, p. 4). They also show that the managers are the ones charged with the responsibility of taking actions that can and will enable the individual employees to make their best contributions to the group objectives.

### *Organizational conflict*

Just as other multiple authors, Rahim (2015) believes that "conflict is inevitable among humans. It is a natural outcome of human interaction that begins when two or more social entities (i.e., individuals, groups, organizations, and nations) come in contact with one another in attaining their objectives. Relationships among such entities may become incompatible or inconsistent when two or more of them desire a similar resource that is in short supply; when they have partially exclusive behavioral preferences regarding their joint action; or when they have different attitudes, values, beliefs, and skills. Another definition of conflict would be "*perceived divergence of interest*", a belief that parties' current aspirations are incompatible" (p. 1). Greenwald (2008) emphasizes the previous idea, by stating that "conflict of an interpersonal nature is familiar to almost everyone. Individuals lock horns over office space, personnel, and money. Disagreements arise over how best to do a job, or solve a problem" (p. 59). Cowman (2003) believes that conflict is the natural process through which people mediate all of their differences.

According to Zald (1962), "problem-solving organizations are likely to be conflict-ridden organization. Even if the overt conflict is raised or maintained in problem-solving organizations, however, some kinds of tension may be lowered – those tensions that result from feelings of injustice and misunderstandings and that lead to subversion of goals and avoidance of rules" (p. 48). Scholars in organization theory became interested in the scientific investigation of conflict phenomena during the later part of the last century, and they appreciate that once we recognize that conflict is an important concept within the society, we can take a closer look at the phenomena of organizational conflicts (Rahim, 2015).

Cowman (2003) emphasizes that "organizations are rife with opportunities for conflict. All the individuals who are a part of an organization, or who have any interest in involvement with it, bring to the organization the accumulation of everything they've learned – all of their habits and all the beliefs they've developed about themselves, other people, and their world. Such diversity makes conflict inevitable. And because the conflict resolution skills of most people are poorly developed, the outcomes of conflict are frequently negative – at times even destructive" (pp. 26-27).

Pondy (1976), cited by Rahim (2015, p. 1), mentioned that the theories on organization "that do not admit conflict provide poor guidance in dealing with problems of organi-

zational efficiency, stability, governance, and change, for conflict within and between organizations is intimately related to either symptom, cause, or effect, to each of these problems” Baron (1990), cited by the same Rahim (2015, p. 1) emphasizes that “organizational conflict is an important topic for both managers and for a scientist interested in understanding the nature of organizational behavior and organizational processes”.

The classical organization theorists “did not seem to appreciate different impacts that conflict can have on the organization. They implicitly assumed that conflict was detrimental to organizational efficiency and, therefore, should be minimized in the organization and they also prescribed organization structures – rules and procedures, hierarchy, the channel of command, and so on – so that organization members would be unlikely to engage in conflict. This approach to managing organizations was based on the assumption that harmony, cooperation, and the absence of conflict were appropriate for achieving organizational effectiveness (Rahim, 2015, p. 7). “Classical organization theorists, except Follett, did not incorporate a conflicting variable into their models. [...] this approach to organization and management dominated the literature during the first half of the last century” (Rahim, 2015, p. 9).

The behaviorist school of thought changed the way scholars thought and approached the world in general and implicitly that of organizations. “Behavioralists accept the presence of conflict and even occasionally advocate the enhancement of conflict for increasing organizational effectiveness. But they have not actively created conditions that generate conflict in organizations – believes Robbins (1974), cited by Rahim (2015, p. 10). This philosophy was closely followed by the interactionist theory, which stated that conflict is necessary, and opposition should be encouraged in organizations. In this approach, conflict management was defined to include stimulation and resolution methods, as conflict management was considered a major responsibility of all administrators (Rahim, 2015).

Just like the classical scholars, “the neo-classical or human relation theorists also considered the conflict to be dysfunctional but they tried to eliminate it by improving the social system of the organization. The modern view of the conflict, however, is that it is not necessarily dysfunctional for organizations. A moderate amount of conflict, handled in a constructive fashion, is necessary for attaining an optimum level of organizational effectiveness” – concludes Rahim (2015, p. 10).

According to David Cowman (2003) conflicts in the organizational environment not only affects the directly involved parties; it also has strong impacts on those who indirectly are being involved in it – the so-called “innocent bystanders”, as everyone connected to a conflict may be, and usually is affected on a personal level.

“Conflicts within organizations may involve disputes between departments and units. Technically trained individuals may chronically differ in outlook from business-ori-

ented personnel. *Interpersonal* conflict may be neither the most basic nor the most significant form of conflict observable in an organization. Gender and ethnicity may become the focus of conflict, as women and minorities are excluded from leadership positions. Individuals stuck in positions that do not utilize their talents and skills, or who experience the organizational climate as hopeless or “dehumanizing”, feel themselves in conflict with the structure that surrounds them. Individuals exposed to adverse stimuli from these sources experienced conflict not with other members, but with the organization itself” (Greenwald, 2008, p. 59). Regarding these aspects, it has become obvious recently that scholars from various disciplines present a growing interest in teaching and research on conflict in the organizational field, that managers are interested in learning more about organizational conflict and its management and as such, that conflict management skills are gaining ever-growing importance for managers (Rahim).

Greenwald (2010) feels that the most intricate conflict within an organization stems from competition for control over the purpose that the entire or a part of an organization should follow. He differentiates between the interests of the organization’s leadership and stockholders or the lower ranking, thus restricting their input and access to information or profit, or using the organization’s resources for the purposes they favor. Another competition over power in the organizational environment in the same authors’ view may also occur between skilled employees or subgroups that can employ the assets of a union or human rights or environmental organization to support own goals.

### **Penitentiary Staff in Romania**

According to the presentation brochure of the NAP system, in Romania, there are 32 prisons, two re-education centers for under-aged offenders, three detention centers for youngsters /women, six hospital-prisons. In the Satu Mare Penitentiary, offenders serve their sentence in half-open and open regime systems. A few words on each are needed for a better understanding of the work of prison staff in such units. Serving sentences in half-open regimes means one can have the liberty move around unaccompanied, in pre-defined areas of the prison, as there are many spaces that are not closed in such a facility: more than one library, shop, medical offices, gym, court-yards, detainee club. The open regime system houses offenders with a maximum of one year (left) of the sentence that are also free to move around the predefined spaces of the prison. Detainees in both regimes may get involved in re-educational activities, counseling programs, religious, cultural, educational, vocational, or hobby activities. Basically, in these two regimes, the prison staff operating in the operational field is surrounded during the daytime by offenders, and may have direct physical contact with them.

In each Penitentiary, there are multiple work fields: *the operational field* – also called the detention security and prison regime function. Staff working here is charged with

the safety and security of the offenders, the other categories of staff, and the community (by preventing escapes). This entails guarding the perimeter, supervising the movement of the offenders, making sure they do not change rooms, and generally respect the prison rules. Staff in the operational may be medium or high education employees, with or without previous work experience. The *social reintegration department* is charged with organizing and carrying out of activities that would prepare the offenders for their reintegration into society, starting with the first day inside the prison cell. This entails preparing him to cope with prison life and rules, offering them educational and psychotherapeutic activities, counseling, or other social services that the offender as a citizen is entitled to. The specialists working in this field are exclusively university graduates: psychologist, social workers, teachers, sociologists and/or graduates of theologies. The reintegration staff carries out their day to day activities (both individually or in groups of maximum 20 offenders) in direct contact with the offenders without being accompanied by security staff, as many of these activities are based on the sharing of confidential information.

The *health care* staff: mostly doctors and (mostly female) nurses that provide 24/7 health assistance; they are in direct contact with the offenders, mostly unaccompanied by security personnel. The *administrative staff* also comprises contractual employees that seldom or never come into contact with prisoners. We refer to the economic department, secretarial department, human resource, P.R, IT, logistics, etc. – both without and mostly with university studies.

In Romania, prison staff is divided into three categories: officers (which are trained in basic psychology, criminology, criminal law as graduates of the Police Academy), junior-officers (the new employees that graduate the school I have mentioned in the previous paragraph) and administrative personnel (either contractual or direct employees of the Penitentiary). Prior to Romania's admission into the European Community, the restructuring of the prison staff was a must, so that many of the prison officers and sub-officers were discharged due to abusive behaviors, alcohol abuse during work hours and tendencies towards violence – according to Holly Carter (USA: Human Rights Watch, 1992, p. 20).

One may easily find out what it takes to become part of the prison staff: being a Romanian citizen and having Romanian residence, they know the Romanian language, 18 years old and high-school studies as a minimum, medically and psychologically apt for prison work, haven't been convicted, meet the height and other pre-set criteria, haven't been discharged of previous jobs on disciplinary causes in the past seven years, have had adequate behaviors legally and socially, haven't been collaborating with the security forces of the communist regime. After being admitted at all of the tests that prove the above-mentioned aspects, future employees follow a year-long preparation in special units: at Târgu Ocna National School for the Preparation of Prison Junior-Officers that



ends with a final physical and testing knowledge evaluation. The promotion of the finals leads the newly employed prison employee to the penitentiary of its choosing... and the rest is a mystery.

“Officers receive training at the university level, in the form of four-year courses in the police academy; alternatively, they may have a degree, having acquired specialized training in various fields instead of employment experience. Junior officers follow one-year specialized courses in the military school for the training and advanced training of subordinate prison officers, but there is also the possibility of co-opting persons with different occupational backgrounds, who will then receive training in the form of three-month crash courses” (Council of Europe, p. 132). Around 190 men and approximately 30 women graduate the Târgu-Ocna training school every year, adding to the ranks of the prison staff. Most of them have had a previous job in different work fields while others have turned to this profession after graduation their education.

As in the case of offenders, life behind the prison entrance is pretty much an obscure area for most people. If offenders are viewed as people subjected to numerous and unnamed agony, spending their time in half-light, in an environment where screams haunt the hallways, how does that image describe the prison staff?

## **The Survey**

### *Methodology*

This article reports the results of a survey of the conflicts the prison staff is facing at their day to day jobs and the causes that generate them. The questionnaire attempted to determine the most significant problems in daily prison activities, the methods used to manage work related (recurrent) disputes among employees and the most important features of the prison environment that lead to stress and conflict.

The research started with two hypotheses:

- in the Satu Mare Penitentiary employees often find themselves involved in conflicts with peers and superiors due to work related stress,
- most of the conflicts between the Satu Mare prison are latent and contribute to the tension within the work environment.

In order for the research to be possible, a series of special conditions needed to be met: the approval of the Satu Mare Penitentiary, based on an approved project concerning the survey, the written or oral consent of each employee to its superior was needed in order to answer the questionnaire.

Though the Satu Mare Penitentiary has 189 employees, only 66 participated in this survey. As such, one of the limits of this survey is that it may not be representative for the Satu Mare prison staff overall. 18 questionnaires were invalidated, as one or more



questions remained entirely or partly unanswered. Respondents represented 34.9% of Satu Mare Penitentiary's prison staff.

Another limitation of the survey consists in leaving a time gap between conflicts that occurred in the 3 to 12-month period, and disputes that are being referred to generally. This gap has become evident once multiple respondents (different ones) gave answers to two questions that were initially meant to be responded at only is the answer to previous two questions was YES. The gap left respondents the possibility to refer there an answer to conflicts in general. Thus, though only 13 respondents have been involved in conflicts in the past three months, 25 prison staff answered the subunit question. So the descriptive results in this matter cannot be referred as being valid for the time frame the questionnaire has set (3 months).

### *Describing the sample*

In any prison in Romania, the operational and administrative departments comprise the highest numbers of employees. The respondents to the questionnaire were selected as follows: 56.1% activate in the operational field (their specific activities were listed in the previous pages), 27.3% work in the administrative department of the Satu Mare Penitentiary, 10.6% are Social reintegration staff, while 6.1% belong to the medical staff.

From the total of 66 respondents, 22.7% have graduated a form of secondary education, while 77.3% have university degrees. Of the later, 31.8% are law and 18.2% social science graduates.

When the seniority of the employees is concerned, 3% of the respondents are just recruited (under 1 year of activity so far), 9.1% have had 2-5 years of prison work, while 19.7% are close to the end of their activity as prison employees, as they have worked in the prison for over 20 years. 34.8% of my respondents have a 5 to 10-year activity, and 31.8% between 10 and 20 years as prison employees.

The administrative department is predominated by Law (10.6%) and Finance/accountancy (9.1%) graduates. There are also 1.5% social studies and 4.5% other higher level university graduates among the respondents

In the operational field only 19.7% of the respondents have secondary level studies, while 80.3% have university degrees: 19.7% in law, 7.6 in social sciences, 1.5% has finance/accountancy diplomas, 1.5% have graduated from more than one specialization and 6.1 have shown that they have followed "other" type of university studies.

7.6% of the employees from the Social reintegration department are social science graduates, 1.5 have law studies, while another 1.5 are secondary level graduates. 1.5 of the medical employee respondents have social science studies, while 4.5% indicated "other" as a form of studies. If we consider the prison employee legal status, one may conclude that in the medical department, those other studies are: nursery or medicine.

Related to the seniority of the employees, the latest staff recruit (*under 1 year* of prison work experience) works in the administrative department, all the recruits with *1 to 2 years of seniority* work in the operational field.

Respecting the numbers of employees of each of the department inside the Satu Mare Penitentiary, the respondents with *2-5 years of work* in the penitentiary were selected as follows: 50% in the operational department and each of the administrative, social reintegration and medical department have 16.7% respondents.

The sample comprises 57.1% staff with *10-20 years seniority* working in the operational department, 33.3% in the penitentiary administration, 4.8% in the medical and the same in the social reintegration departments. There is no medical staff with over *20 years* seniority; 7.7% of the sample that responds to this criteria is activating as reintegration staff and 23.1% in the administrative field. 69.2% of the employees in my sample are in their last years of activity (with only five years to go until the law offers them the possibility of retirement).

## The Results

### *The working environment*

In order to evaluate the environment of prison employees, we have focused on the characteristics of employee relationships (among peers and superior-subordinate ones), the nature of the daily activity, on features of the communication inside the Satu Mare Penitentiary.

So, from a list of features describing particularities of the working environment:

- 66.7% respondents believe it is about *teamwork*,
- 59.1% feel *stress* is a major threat of their job,
- 56.1% employees ticked *responsibility* as a characteristic of the prison work environment,
- 54.5% - *effort*,
- 53% think it is influenced by *bureaucracy*,
- 51.5% of the prison staff in my sample think of *legality*,
- 45.5% say *team-spirit* is a feature of the organizational environment they work in,
- 40.9% professionalism,
- 36.4% say *discipline* is and the same percentage goes to *competence* as characteristic of their job,
- 34.8% respondents ticked *communication*,
- 33.3% feel *tension* as a feature of their job,
- 30.3% - *commitment*,
- 28.8% respect,

- 25.8% chose trust and the same percentage believe *continuous learning*, are also specific to their organizational environment
- 19.7% employees in the test sample feel *rivalry* as specific,
- 16.7% *conflict*,
- 10.6% *tradition*,
- 12.1% believe they are working in an *enjoyable* but also *competitive* one,
- And only 10.6% say *satisfaction* is a treat on the prison work environment.

To summarize the answers to the sample test: the 10 features that fit most the prison work environment of the Satu Mare Penitentiary are: teamwork, stress, responsibility, effort, bureaucracy, legality, team spirit, discipline and competence. At the end of the list, we have a series of words with positive connotation: conflict, tradition, enjoyable and competitive, while *satisfaction* closes the list as the least frequent featured to be ticked by the sample.

When asked to focus on the **work itself**, the respondents chose the following characteristics: 86.4% say their activity is not *easy*, but *tiring* (75.8%), as there are too *many tasks to attend to* (57.6%). 51.5% believe it is not a *routine* work. Prison work is not creative – at least, that is what the responses of 65.2% employees in the test sample think, but it is a *useful* (72.7%) *respected* (42.4%) and competitive (39.4%) one.

Despite the high frequency of the negative treats, only 24.2% of the staff in the sample considered leaving the prison system.

Out of these, a cross-tabulation between the seniority, “it really makes me consider leaving the system” and department variables show that 16.7% of the administration personnel with 5-10 years of experience in the prison work and 50% of the respondents with 10-20 years seniority in the same field are thinking of leaving the prison system behind.

The social reintegration personnel 28.6% with 5-10 years seniority are considering leaving prison work, just like the operational staff with the same seniority. The employees activation in the operational department with 10-20 years of practice want to leave the prison system in 71.1% percentage, while none of the respondents in the same department, with over 20 years of work experience as prison employee want to leave at all.

The **relationship with peers** in general are characterized as follows: committed (75.8% of answers), opportunists (43.9%), sarcastic (30.3%), honest (80.3%), stubborn (48.5%), disinterested (25.8%), malicious (in the opinion of 36.4% respondents), intelligent (77.3%), lazy (24.2% answers) and boring (21.2%).

If we take a closer look to the “malicious” treat, one can see that most of such opinions come from employees in the operational department, and the administrative one.

Yet overall, though there is a correlation between the conflicts in the working environment and the malicious peers, we are talking about a relatively small one (Sig. - 0.175, Pearson coefficient).

Conflict \* Malicious Crosstabulation

			Malicious		Total
			Yes	No	
Conflict	Yes	Count	6	5	11
		% within Conflict	54,5%	45,5%	100,0%
		% within Malicious	25,0%	11,9%	16,7%
		% of Total	9,1%	7,6%	16,7%
	No	Count	18	37	55
		% within Conflict	32,7%	67,3%	100,0%
		% within Malicious	75,0%	88,1%	83,3%
		% of Total	27,3%	56,1%	83,3%
Total	Count	24	42	66	
	% within Conflict	36,4%	63,6%	100,0%	
	% within Malicious	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	
	% of Total	36,4%	63,6%	100,0%	

Symmetric Measures

		Value	Asymp. Std. Error <sup>a</sup>	Approx. T <sup>b</sup>	Approx. Sig.
Interval by Interval	Pearson's R	,169	,127	1,372	,175 <sup>c</sup>
Ordinal by Ordinal	Spearman Correlation	,169	,127	1,372	,175 <sup>c</sup>
N of Valid Cases		66			

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.

b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

c. Based on normal approximation.

When the **direct superiors** are concerned, the questionnaire was conceived so that regardless of the level the respondent activates on (junior officers, officers and junior commissioner) his/her answers will represent the person he is directly subordinated to. As such, bosses on all levels of the hierarchy are “evaluated” by their subordinated colleagues.

83.3% of respondents say their boss appreciates the efficiency in the activities their subordinates perform, 53.3% of respondents say their boss *asks for their advice*, that he/she is a *diplomatic* (71.2%) and *influent* (56.1%) person, who guides them (74.2%) in their day to day activities. 84.8% of the respondents evaluated their direct bosses as being intelligent and “has their back” when needed (81.8%).

74.2% believe their boss is not *hard to please*, nor *discriminating* (72.7%), *authoritarian* (42.4%), *annoying* (86.4%). 28.8% of the prison staff that participated in the survey see their bosses as being *lazy* (28.8%), and *stubborn* (34.8%). Superficiality is a trait considered appropriate for the bosses of 9.1% of respondents.

Only 18.2% of the sample believes their boss is controlling, and just above 15% feel that their hierarchical superior is not a professional. Rather, he/she has *good organizing skills*, *honest* (both of these features received 74.2% of the total opinions), and *objective* when evaluating their work (69.7%).

Communication in Satu Mare Penitentiary is described as the most important thing in team-work by 97% of the respondents, but is being made difficult by some of the employees' behavior, according to 62.1% of the members of the sample.

66.7% of the employees that participated in the survey say management messages reaches them at the right time, and unaltered.

Though a bit more than 59% of respondents of the prison staff that participated in the survey say that communication takes place mostly from superior to subordinate, 71.9% of them believe that communication works both downward and upward (so inclusively from the subordinates to superiors). They also feel free to speak their mind, knowing that my bosses will try to help me/ find a solution to my problems, though some believe that some tasks are not clearly defined by their superiors (71.2%). There are scarce misinterpretations of the messages employees send to peers and superiors (16.7%).

#### *Conflicts in the Satu Mare Penitentiary*

To talk about conflicts, we were first and foremost interested to see who the parties to a conflict within the penitentiary are.

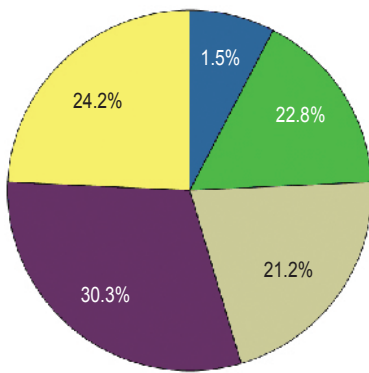
Most prison staff members that participated in the survey appreciated that there are rare conflicts between peers (42.8%), while 25.8% say such disputes are almost inexistent. Only 9.1% associate the personnel-personnel conflicts with the variable "often".

If we consider the frequency of conflicts between subordinates and hierarchical superiors, only 4.5% of the employees answered that these conflicts occur most, while 33.3% say disputes between these parties are not often nor rare. Only 6.1% of the employees believe conflict occurs between subordinates and direct bosses.

Though there is a believe that conflicts among employees in the police, military and prison environment, usually are generated by financial or other non-financial right being restricted or ill calculated, this survey points towards the fact that in the Satu Mare Penitentiary such disputes are seldom (31.8%), while 27.3% say that employees argue/ find themselves in conflict with the administrative personnel rarely or "not often, not rarely".

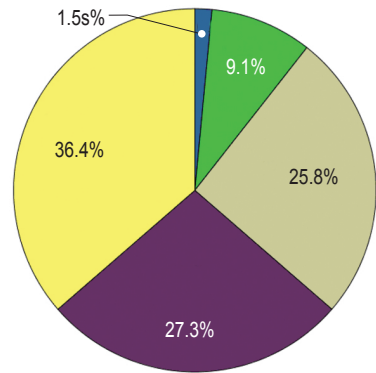
As expected, mostly the entities that find themselves in conflict with each other are offenders with prison staff, and offenders among themselves.

Offenders are the most frequent parties in conflicts within the prison environment.



Offenders-personnel conflicts

■ Almost inexistent  
■ rare  
■ not often, not rare  
■ often  
■ mostly



Offender-offender conflicts

The results of the survey show that 13 of the respondents (19.7%) have been involved in a conflict with a peer in the past three months. If we widen the time frame to one year, 12.1% of respondents admit to being *seldom* involved in a dispute with a colleague, while 1.6% mentions being *seldom* involved in a dispute with one or more of their bosses in the past 12 months.

22 of the prison staff (33%) that answered the questionnaire have witnessed a conflict between peers in the three months prior the survey. If the timeframe is removed, 31% of the respondents say that in some offices/ departments/ work shifts, colleagues dispute constantly.

As mentioned previously, as in any other organization, the penitentiary system also has specific rules for what is and is not allowed as employee behavior. It was already shown that in exceptional cases. As representatives of a public institution – one that has been long organized as a military regime, employees have certain responsibilities even outside of their working hours. Both for situations that harm the public image of the penitentiary and for breaking organization rules, employees may be sanctioned as mentioned in the previous chapter.

97% of the respondents in the survey have not been sanctioned on disciplinary causes generated by a dispute with another prison employee. Yet 22 of the prison staff that participated in the survey have knowledge about employees of the Satu Mare Penitentiary that have been sanctioned as a result of conflicts with other colleagues, while inside the facility.

37.9% respondents found a compromising solution to the conflict they were a part of, 9.1% confess to having stopped talking with the other party to the conflict, 7.6% of the sample test have asked a superior to step in and support the dispute resolution, 1.5% of the conflict referred to by respondents haven't been solved until the time of the present survey.

When the conflicts to which respondents were witnesses to are concerned, 33.3% of them mention how the conflicting parties found a compromising solution to their dispute, 1.5% say the dispute of their colleagues hasn't been solved (so far), 10.6% show that their colleagues stopped talking about the issue at stake and that 3% of the conflicting parties they know of have been sanctioned on disciplinary as a result of the conflict.

There are 7.6% of the respondents that admit to having been involved in litigation with another colleague due to a dispute that occurred at work. Another 36.4% of the prison employees that participated in the survey have knowledge of colleagues that were a part of litigation as a result of conflicts that occurred in the facility.

### *Causes of conflict*

Protecting personal interest at their job, rather the well-being of the team is a major conflict generator in the opinion of 62.1% of the prison staff participating in this survey, while another 71.2% agree to the fact that disputes/ conflicts are generated due to some employees who are not doing their adequately, exceeding or neglect their responsibilities.

A specific personal interest might be the promotion desire. In 34.8% of the cases, prison staff believes that failure to do so become the reason for conflicts to emerge among peers. Employees are not taking responsibility for their mistakes/oversights, which leads to some misunderstandings and conflicts generate conflicts for 66.7% respondents.

The ill equipment of the facility is another reason for some employees to argue (57.6%). The miscalculation of financial revenues is also a conflict generator, as 25.8% of the respondents argue in their questionnaire. The same percentage is shown when other employee rights are ill calculated.

If 33.3% of the respondents agreed with the assertion that "the measures set out by the prison management sometimes reach the respondent late and altered", 36.4% of the prison staff participating in the survey feel that many of the conflicts are generated by employees interpreting messages sent down by hierarchical bosses in different ways.

In an organization, when not only the official communication system but also the grapevine mentioned in previous chapters work efficiently, there is no wonder that 16.7% of respondents feel their colleagues constantly misinterpret their messages and 28.8% believe that tasks are not clearly defined by superiors. 66.7% of the respondents believe that misunderstandings are not causes of conflict, as they do not escalate into conflicts.

When asked to mention other causes of conflict in the Satu Mare Penitentiary, the members of the sample gave multiple answers. Though expressed in different words, the messages were similar. Besides a strong mentioning of employees being stressed,



three out of 66 of the respondents mentioned money and home related problems. Three employees believe lack of the ability of self-control of some colleagues, two mentioned the wish of being noticed by bosses, or to advance professionally without having the needed skills to do so, eight believe divergent opinions and mindsets cause disputes, one mentioned the complicated procedures in some legal aspects, 14 the lack of self-control ability of some colleagues, low education and uncivilized colleagues, employees being stressed and tired, and lack of personnel, three think gossip is a strong motive for dispute, the same respondents mentioning prejudices, and the interest of some colleagues in finding errors in the work of other employees rather than focusing on their own tasks. The large number of detainees and poor working conditions are mentioned by five respondents, and lack of specific abilities for working in the prison environment is considered a cause of dispute by nine of the prison staff involved in the survey.

When choosing a (new) job, each of us is motivated by personal stimuli. Feelings of exciting and enthusiasm about a new job generally characterize an employee in the first two-three years, during which most of the work concerned issues act as validations for these feelings. After this period, people start re-evaluating their job, motivation, priorities, etc. so that they start feeling the need to put some effort into things that previously seemed effortless. The figure below supports this information: the longer one works in the prison environment, the more they believe effort is an important issue: 1.5% of the employees with up until 2 years of seniority, 12.1% of those with 5 to 10 years, and 16.7% of those above 10 years.

Teamwork in the prison environment involves more stress and implicitly conflict, in the operational and administrative departments. Teamwork is very important in the operational line and the administrative one, we expect employees in the operational and administrative more stressed than those in the medical and social reintegration ones.

In the same way, conflict and tensions will be indicated as characteristics rather by employees in these two departments.

The survey also shows that most of the staff in the administrative and operational field characterize the relationships between prison employees as stressful, overburdening, tense, though in team work and as involving effort.

If correlating the departments of the respondents to the stress variable, it can be easily seen that in the operational and in the administrative department, stress is indeed specific to the relationship between employees. 61.1% of the respondents in Satu Mare Penitentiary's administrative area and 64.9% of those in the operational field gave this answer.

Within the medical department, 50% of the employees believe stress is characteristic to employee relation, while, in the social reintegration, 71.4% do not use this word to describe the relationship between colleagues.

According to the answers given by the respondents, there is a strong, positive correlation between stress and overburdening especially in the operational and administrative department (0.664 – Pearson coefficient in the operational field and 0.192 in the administrative one).

When correlating the effort each department must cope with, 63.9% of those in the operational field feel stressed, in comparison with 19.4% of those in the administrative, 11.1% in the social reintegration department and 5.6% of those in the medical offices. There is a strong correlation between these two variables (0.415 – Pearson coefficient)

If we calculate the correlation between the overburdening (employees having to do too many tasks at work) and their desire to leave the system, in the below figure, we can clearly notice how, there is a weak correlation between the two variables: Pearson's coefficient 0.97 for the administrative staff, 0.11 for those in the operational department, 0.203 for social reintegration officers and 0.000 for those in the medical field.

When focusing on conflict variables, contrary to hypotheses that the employees at the peak of their activity in the prison feel that prison work is generally characterized by negative words, 83.3% of the respondents don't think conflict characterizes the relationship between prison employees.

Only 12.1% (7.6% of those with 5-10 years of prison work experience, and 4.5% of those who have been working in the prison environment for 10 to 20 years) believe competition is specific to employee relationship in the prison environment, and only those with 4-20 years of seniority feel competition as relevant to their working relationships. We can assume that psychologically this might also be the case due to the facts that new recruits are still not confident enough to feel able to compete with more experienced colleagues. The same can be said of the personnel with over 20 years of experience on the job, since such employees might become more interested in "not complicating their professional activity, [but] in their remaining years up until retirement".

There is somewhat a tight of a score when bureaucracy is concerned; 53% of all respondents believe bureaucracy is affecting their relationship with colleagues, 33% think of tension as characterizing employee relations, 59.1% respondents mention stress, 71.2% do not think respect is specific to their working relationships with colleagues. This then justifies why only 12.1% believe their daily activity is performed in an enjoyable working environment.

Also, 36.4% of the respondents think they have to perform more tasks due to the incompetence of other colleagues and 60.6% of the prison employees involved in the research is very pleased with their colleagues. Just above 60% of the prison staff that answered the questionnaire are satisfied with the peers in their sector of activity.

The variable of "employees having to cope with too many tasks" is positively correlated with the stress levels they felt. Though the survey has started with the hypotheses that

most of the conflicts in the Satu Mare penitentiary are latent, only 36.4% respondents agree to this assertion. 3% of the respondents have solved the disputes they were a part of due to the order of a hierarchically superior, and 1.5% of them have unsolved issued with at least one colleague.

When the disputes the respondents have knowledge are concerned, in 12.1% of the cases, a superior has been asked to step in and support the reconciliation, 10.6% of the conflicting parties have stopped talking about the issue, 1.5% of the conflicts haven't been solved so far.

## Conclusions

According to the April monthly rapport available in the NAP official website, on the 30<sup>th</sup> of April 2015, in the NAP system there were a total of 29.557 offenders (28.046 males, and 1511 females). The annual rapport on 2014 showed that NAP had 12575 employees nationwide. Inside the NAP system there are two unions activating. Regarding the Satu Mare Penitentiary, the official website of the unit shows that in June 2015, there were over 520 detainees carrying out their sentences and 180 employees.

Between the quality of relationships in the workplace and long-term business effectiveness and success there is a direct ratio, according to Doherty and Guyler (2008, p. 4).

Though it has been largely admitted that the work performed inside the Prison Service, as it is in the Police Service, is most often extremely stressful, Bennet and Crewe believe prison officers find it difficult to admit such situations, or to feeling 'stressed'.

We believe that this survey confirmed this assertion. The two hypotheses that served as starting point for my survey have been partially confirmed. Though conflicts do exist within the Satu Mare Penitentiary, most frequently the parties of such disputes are offenders, and not employees. Though the prison staff does mention work-related stress as being one of the main causes of conflict, this variable is not directly proportional with conflicts. What's more, only 16.7% of the employees that participated in this survey believe *conflict* is characteristic of their working environment, 28.8 believe that conflict is almost inexistent in the peer relationship, while 42.2% say it is rare for employees to dispute. If we consider the frequency of conflicts between subordinates and hierarchical superiors, 33.3% say disputes between these parties are not often nor rare. Only 6.1% of the employees believe conflict occurs between subordinates and direct bosses.

Among those who admit to having been involved in a dispute, 9.1% confess to have stopped talking with the other party to the conflict, 7.6% of the sample test have asked a boss to step in and support the dispute resolution. 68.2% of the prison staff that participated in the survey think that communication between prison employees overall is efficient, though 40.9% say they seldom have the feeling of not knowing what is hap-

pening in the organization they work in. Only 36.4% participants to the survey agree with the assertion that conflicts in the Satu Mare Penitentiary are mostly latent.

Despite denying the presence of conflict overtly, clues of existing conflicts are indicated in the above chapter. Just like in any organization, in correctional institutions conflict occurs when there is competition (for control over the operating practices or the prison policies). "This may include competition for control if the rules and policies governing staff-inmate relations, or, more subtly, for control of the frame of reference used to define situations. Conflict within large-scale organizations is usually nonviolent and often covert, because membership in an organization restricts the legitimacy of property destruction, interpersonal violence, and over refusal to follow directives. When we speak of conflict in correctional institutions, therefore, we are speaking of felt but not accepted frustration or goal blockages of particular employees or groups of employees created by practices of the other groups within the organization" (Zald, 1962, p. 24). 12.1% of the respondents believed they are working in an overall competitive environment, while 39.4% say their day to day work is competitive.

Though the socio-educational staff is not characterized by "being extremely permissive" or expressing "overt rejection of certain custodial requirements" is not the case in Satu Mare Penitentiary, there is a palpable tension and disagreement coming from the custodial staff towards the "Socio-partying" staff. This term was mentioned in the interview I conducted with one of the custodial staff which refers to staff in the education, psychological and social work department, which concludes opinions of the custodial staff regarding the work and the staff in the other department. Though my survey did not target such conflicts specifically, in some points, such tension also contributes to the tensions and work related stress.

If we reconsider Zald's power balance that we spoke of earlier in this paper, we can observe that in the Satu Mare penitentiary all the preconditions that underlie his model are present: all the personnel in the Satu Mare Penitentiary have a minimal interdependence among themselves and among the (formal or informal) groups they form. If the groups had little intercommunication, the groups' members don't necessarily recognize the conflict even though their groups can be interdependent: the teachers have a more rehabilitative orientation than custodial staff, but teachers are isolated so their feelings of frustration caused by custodial staff are not so visible to others. Also, social workers, teachers and the custodial office employees have conflicting values and objectives, but the organizational adaptation, lead in some cases to the socialization of some of the personnel so that more and more get comfortable to the more dominant perspectives.

So, it is in our opinion that constantly avoiding the other conflicting party, ceasing any dialog regarding the issue is not a solution, *à la tongue*. This is but a postponement of an inevitable over-spelling, or conflict escalation, not to mention the psychological effects of constantly ignoring issues that affect our daily lives.

Since a large number of respondents indicated turning towards a higher hierarchy (a third party) in order to support with (recurrent) problem solving with both peers and superiors, we agree with Weinstein (2001) that the penitentiary as an organization would benefit if a larger group of employees would be submitted to a training session in the philosophy and process of ADR, and the introduction of a work mediation program. This would enable prison staff to cope not just with offender-offender disputes, but also improve their social and communication abilities so that overall, their working environment can shift from a tensioned one, to one where employee conflicting relationships contributes to the work-related stress.

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