

# LABOR CONFLICTS IN RUSSIA: NATURE, TYPES, REASONS AND CONSEQUENCES

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## Abstract

This article is about labor conflicts in Russia and foreign experience. We can see different types of conflicts: individual and collective, a rights and an interest conflicts. The article is devoted to the problems workplace conflicts and how businesses can harness it's to thrive. The important place is devoted to diagnosing and conflict prevention. In this article are analysed different reasons of conflicts. We can compare different forms of conflicts and different ways of conflict's development. We can see the connection of reasons and consequences of different types of conflicts. This article includes data of labor protests for 2008-2013 of Center for Social and Labor Rights, quantity of labor protests, their regional and branch prevalence, reasons and forms of labor protests. In conclusion we considered reasons of the destructive conflict, sectors with high strike activity are illustrated and recommendations for a conflict management. The article is very important for HR, leaders, and employees, because they need to accept their responsibility for conflicts and competent management decisions. The result of work depends on good relationship between workers and managers. The role of the trade unions is important for development of the social dialogue between them.

**Key words:** Nature and types of conflicts, workplace conflicts, conflict prevention, reasons and consequences of conflicts, labor protests

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## Introduction

Nowadays labor conflicts are considered a widespread problem in a whole world and in Russia too. First and foremost, workers at all levels must learn to accept conflict as an inevitable part of their work environment. In this article we will consider nature and types of conflicts, workplace conflicts, conflict prevention, reasons and consequences of conflicts, labor protests.

## Research

### Nature and types of conflicts

Some conflicts are individual in nature, other are collective; some conflicts are identified as conflicts over rights, others as conflicts over interests.

An individual conflict is a disagreement between a single worker and his or her employer, usually over existing rights. It can also include situations in which a number of workers disagree with their employer over the same issue, but where each worker act as an individual.

A collective conflict is a disagreement between a group of workers usually, but not necessarily, represented by a trade union, and an employer or group of employers over existing rights or future interests.

A rights conflict is a disagreement between a worker or workers and their employer concerning the violation of an existing entitlement embodied in the law, a collective agreement, or under a contract of employment. Such conflicts usually take the form of a claim by employees that they have not been provided with their entitlements with regard to such things as wages, overtime payments, holidays, and the working environment – indeed anything which is an entitlement that already exists by law.

Rights conflicts can be either individual or collective.

An interest conflict is a disagreement between a workers and their employer concerning future rights and obligations under the employment contract. In practice most interest conflicts are the result of a breakdown in the bargainin process with the parties failing to reach agreement on the terms and conditions of employment that will apply in future. Interest conflicts are generally collective in nature.

### **Workplace conflicts**

Workplace conflict is a specific type of conflict that occurs in workplaces. Conflicts can be due to personality clash (relationship conflict) or differences of opinion about tasks (task conflict) (De Dreu, C. K. W., & Weingart, L. R., 2003). The conflicts that arise in workplaces may be shaped by the unique aspects of this environment, including the long hours many people spend at their workplace, the hierarchical structure of the organization, and the difficulties (e.g. financial consequences) that may be involved in switching to a different workplace. In this respect, workplaces share much in common with schools, especially pre-college educational institutions in which students are less autonomous.

Use of different methods of dealing with workplace conflict include: disciplinary action, grievance procedures, internal or external mediation, independent arbitration, early neutral evaluation, training line managers to handle difficult conversations, troubleshooting by HR department.

### **Conflict prevention**

In the world of work, disagreements, differences, discord, dissension and conflicts between workers and employers are inevitable (Niklas L.P. Swanström, Mikael S. Weissmann, 2005). Sometimes the conflict is minor and quickly resolved within the workplace itself.

Sometimes the conflict is major, with spill-over effects beyond the immediate workplace. Conflict prevention services will not eliminate disagreements. Rather, they place disagreements in a different context, allowing the parties to resolve their problems within the workplace, without disruption to the production of goods or the provision of services. In this context, conflict prevention does not mean 'no conflicts', but rather involves various non-adversarial activities that engender peace in the workplace, so that conflicts are addressed: quickly; fairly; peacefully; and in an orderly manner.

This requires the implementation of systems in a work establishment which build dialogue and prevent the escalation of any conflicts that arise. Conflict prevention systems apply to both individual and collective disagreements and should be developed to respect the role of trade unions in such matters.

Enterprises can develop such systems on their own initiative through dialogue involving consultation, negotiation or both. Alternatively, they can call on the services of third-party specialists in industrial relations to advise on and assist in the establishment of workable systems and processes. A number of different interventions are possible, depending on the size of the enterprise, the nature of its existing systems, the prevailing industrial relations climate, and the resources available for conflict prevention activities.

The services of third-party specialists can be provided by: conflict management authority (whether a government department or an independent statutory body); private sector consultants.

The actual services provided include:

- building a platform of trust and mutual respect between workers and management and positive workplace climate where they actually want to talk to each other, through culture-building exercises, joint training, joint research, and information sharing;

- specific initiatives designed to prevent the escalation of conflicts, such as the introduction of institutional arrangements and processes that involve worker participation and allow problems to be aired and addressed. These arrangements include consultative mechanisms where problems can be presented for discussion and decisions reached that, although nonbinding, represent considered advice to management. Arrangements can also include bargaining forums where problems are raised and resolved through negotiation leading to binding decisions;

- specific initiatives designed to resolve formal, written complaints made by workers against the actions of managers, co-workers or clients within the workplace, as well as initiatives to handle informal complaints through workplace mediation. These arrangements typically require the existence of a dedicated grievance procedure that enables the complaint to be heard and resolved within the enterprise. Alternatively, the complaint may be dealt with in accordance

with the grievance procedures contained in a collective bargaining agreement, where such an agreement exists.

### **Involvement of labor conflict authority**

Conflict prevention activities are owned by the enterprise, with the role of external persons confined to facilitation and the provision of advice. There are a number of advantages in the labor conflict department or commission engaging.

The officers of the department/commission are given an opportunity to visit enterprises and interact with workers and managers, assess the industrial relations climate, and participate in the development of tailor-made systems suited to the needs of each workplace.

The officers of the department/commission can acquire a more detailed understanding of business operations in different industries, giving them the opportunity to specialize in fields such as transport, maritime, manufacturing or building and construction, if required.

The department/commission can generate income from the information, advisory, training and related services provided by its officers.

The department/commission as a whole benefits from an enhanced image and reputation as a professional organization committed to impartiality, fairness and technical competence.

From the viewpoint of the enterprise, and irrespective of whether conflict prevention services are provided by the department commission or by private sector consultants, the enterprise benefits as follows.

The enterprise voluntarily seeks assistance and has control of the system development process from the very beginning.

A tailor-made system can be developed that meets the needs of a particular enterprise.

The dialogue between workers and managers that takes place in the development of the system, particularly if facilitated by a competent and experienced person, helps build mutual trust.

Developing a workable system is relatively inexpensive.

An external third party can help identify potential 'flashpoints' for which specific advice can be given, in addition to advice on general system development.

Enterprise privacy and confidentiality can be maintained.

The provision of conflict prevention services requires specific skills on the part of the service providers. Apart from their capacity to assess an industrial relations situation with objectivity and sensitivity, officers require high-level facilitation skills that encourage interaction between workers and their managers. Officers require the skills for effective communication, the dominant, and generally possess the personal attributes that encourage trust and respect, including integrity, tact, patience, enthusiasm and, in some cases, humour.

### **Reasons and consequences of conflicts**

Reasons of conflicts are: communication problems, different expectation, problems with organizational structure, power and status, lack of agility, non-fulfillment of goals, lack of cooperation, lack of resources, disagreement regarding goals, uncertainties, different experiences, cultural differences, policy of bonus and rewards, environmental changes, lack of adaptation to work, salary comparison.

The consequences of conflicts include negative and positive aspects. Negative aspect of conflicts is also the resistance to resolve future conflicts and emotional disruption and the damage created through subjectivity and distorted judgments (Ilana Waters, 2014). However, the positive aspect of conflict is definitely the motivation for managers to actively review the activities, as well as it could be used as an indication of the need for change and management performance evaluation.

### **Quantity of labor protests**

Data of monitoring of labor protests of Center for Social and Labor Rights (CSLR)<sup>1</sup> are provided in table 1 in six years. Data on all protest actions, i.e. the events connected with actions of workers on upholding of the social and labor interests are provided in the table. The minimum form of a protest is promotion of the formulated requirements for change of a social and economic situation or the labor relations at the enterprise (in the organization). As the initiator of a protest workers (organized or not organized in trade union), undertaking (including together with representatives of other groups and the organizations) protest actions are considered. The protest actions of workers leading to a full or partial stop or delay of activity of the enterprise or the organization or to the termination of performance by workers of the functions (incomplete performance of functions) in working hours (stop actions) are especially allocated. Stop actions not always take place in a form of strikes. The stop action is understood also as a lawful form of refusal of work in connection with more than two-week delay of a salary, and termination of work by one or several workers, but not bringing to a stop of work of the enterprise or division, for example, because of use of strikebreakers. Recently, in connection with emergence of so-called "working-to-rule strikes", i.e. "works on rules", bringing to decrease in intensity of work, began to join in number of stop actions and such actions. It is supposed that delay of rate of work similar to a partial stop of works (Бизюков П., 2014).

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<sup>1</sup> Center for Social and Labor Rights (CSLR) is a Russian non-profit NGO for promotion, compliance and protection of social and labor rights <http://trudprava.ru/about/mission#eng>

Within monitoring of CSLR legality parameter isn't considered – all types of protests, and not just lawful strikes here are considered.

On the basis of data of monitoring it is possible to characterize intensity of labor protests which is characterized through average monthly number of actions and the intensity of labor protests determined by a share of stop actions in total number of protest actions (Бизюков П., 2014).

In 2013 the total of labor protests reached 277 is the second indicator for the entire period of supervision, was only year before, in 2012 (282 protests) more. The number of protests of 2013 exceeded an indicator of crisis 2009! The second year the current indicators of a protest most exceed an indicator of crisis year so now it is possible to say that level of a conflictness rose to crisis level. The quantity of protests in 2013 is 2,8% less than last year and is 1,8% more, than in 2009. Significant it is possible to consider difference of 2011 5,3% more), of 2010 35% more) and, certainly from level of 2008 (it is more than three times).

**Tab. 1: The general and average quantity of labor protests for 2008-2013**

	Total number of actions	Average monthly number of actions	Total number of stop actions	Average monthly number of the stop actions	Share of stop actions (%)
2008	93	7,75	60	5,0	64,5
2009	272	22,7	106	8,8	38,9
2010	205	17,1	88	7,3	42,9
2011	263	21,8	91	7,6	34,7
2012	285	23,8	95	7,9	33,3
2013	277	23,1	102	8,5	36,8
Total	1118	18,6	440	7,3	39,4

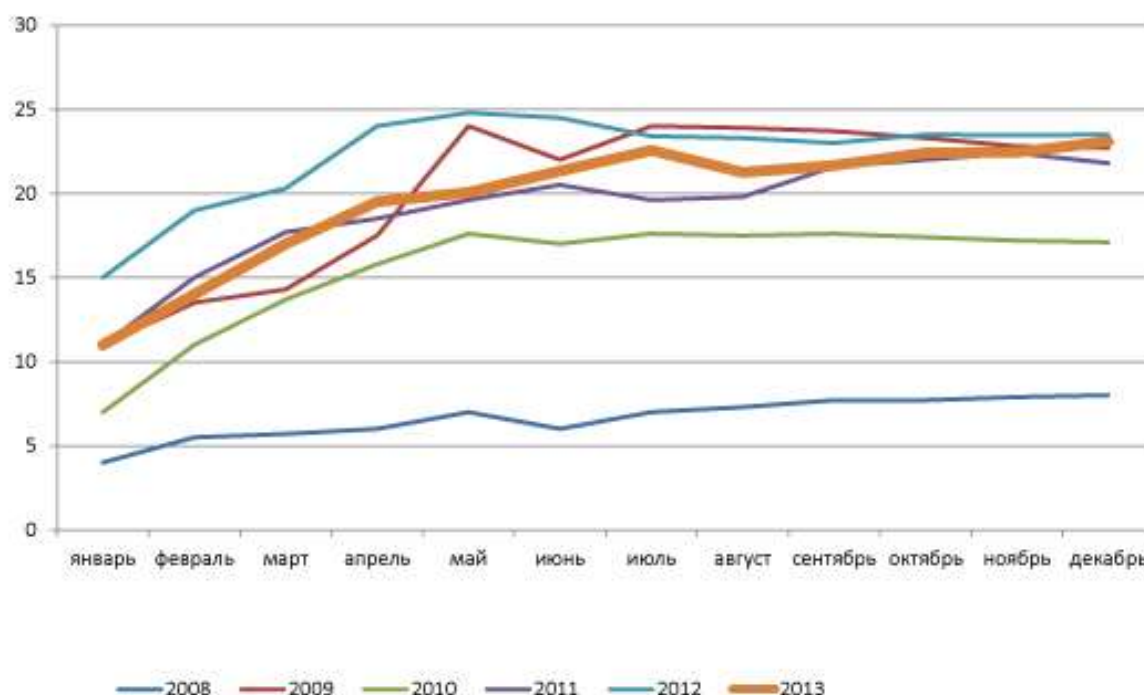
Source: Data of Center for Social and Labor Rights

It is necessary to pay attention to one feature: the most part of 2013 average monthly dynamics of protests was not really intensive (see fig. 1).

2013 unexpectedly became year with high level of a protest mood. The level of a protest mood reached in crisis 2009 was exceeded. The tendency to increase of quantity of protests is observed since 2011, thus economic shocks, such as sharp decline in production, growth of unemployment didn't occur. As well as last year, it is necessary to speak about growth of protests under the influence of the reasons which are in the enterprises, because of imperfection of the labor relations which have developed there, contradictions not solved inside. Workers are still deprived of opportunity really to participate in regulation of the labor relations, they still need to

agree or disagree with policy of employers only.

**Fig. 1: Dynamics of average monthly number of actions by years 2008-2013**



Source: Data of Center for Social and Labor Rights

### **Regional and branch prevalence of labor protests**

In 2013 the center of protests moved from Moscow to St. Petersburg.

It is connected with vigorous activity of trade unions that in St. Petersburg and in the Leningrad region which organize consecutive fight for the rights of workers.

For a victory the trade-union infrastructure the organizations with which the trade union can cooperate, information support, etc. is necessary.

Today protests occur where there is a trade-union environment.

The trade-union environment (with the organizations local, higher, with allies, with the press, etc.) becomes pledge of the effective solution of problems of workers.

In 2013 the majority of protests were organized with the assistance of primary trade-union organizations, the share of spontaneous protests significantly decreased. All previous years spontaneous protests were either a prevailing form, or the main form, or one of the main. In 2013 spontaneous protests stopped being the main form. The protests organized by trade-unions became most widespread (Бизюков П., 2014).

Change of branch structure of protests became other important structural change recorded in 2013. Labor protests and even strikes stopped being destiny of only industrial workers. Openly transport workers of different branches and state employees started fighting for the

rights. Such shift is caused by one more change – on a scene of labor protests authorities, but not as arbitrators, and as employers even more often began to appear. And protests even more often began to go against them.

### **Reasons of labor protests**

Till 2011 was the main cause of protests of "salary nonpayment" is made more than a half from all cases. In 2011 two others began to compete with "nonpayments" – "low wage" and "policy of the management".

In 2012 "low wage" was important, but not the main reason for protests.

In 2013 "the policy of the management", making 42% of total number becomes the main reason for protests (Бизюков П., 2014).

### **Forms of labor protests**

The following belongs to forms of labor protests: promotion of requirements, stop under article, stop of divisions (departments), enterprise stop, hunger strike, meeting at the enterprise, meeting out of the enterprise, pickets, processions, enterprise capture, overlapping of highways, solidarity meeting, appeal to the authorities, strike, etc.

In 2013 the most popular form of a protest there is "a promotion of requirements". We consider promotion of requirements as the minimum form of a protest.

The Russian workers found three ways which they use most often in modern social economic and political conditions. – promotion of requirements, meeting and strike.

The Russian workers in the protests are very peaceful and very seldom resort to extreme radical forms of a protest.

Modern Russian labor protests are a persistent invitation to dialogue.

### **Conclusion**

To sum up all stated above, the following conclusions can be made: the destructive conflict is not something organizations anywhere should accept as an inevitable feature of working life. If organizations invest in building the awareness of self and others on which better relationships depend, they will see the energy created by interpersonal friction generate sparks of creativity, rather than consuming flames. HR, leaders, and employees must all accept their responsibility for becoming competent conflict managers.

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