It will be true to say that nowadays more and more employers and career advisers are looking for expressed soft skills in the potential job applicants along with professional expertise. In accordance with the European Reference Framework, these are largely connected with the social and civic competences and include the abilities of understanding and presenting different viewpoints, negotiating, and feeling empathy [1]. It is obvious that the development of such skills is of utmost importance for the future specialists in International Law and International Relations as their prospective occupation will involve a great deal of interaction with people both in national and multinational companies. One of the problematic areas in this respect is connected with the pursuit of effective strategies of organizational conflict management.

Organizational conflict involves different types of disagreement between employees or departments in an organization [2]. It is a widespread phenomenon which can take a multitude of forms. In fact, it is hard to imagine an organization where conflicts have never occurred. M. H. Mescon, an acknowledged specialist in the theory and practice of management, outlined the following 4 major types of conflicts: 1) intrapersonal (conflicts within an individual, e.g. in terms of selecting optimum ways for solving work-related problems); 2) interpersonal (conflicts arising amongst people of different levels or functional areas); 3) intragroup (conflicts between individuals vs. a group); 4) intergroup (conflicts between several professional groups, departments, etc.) [3].

There exist various reasons which may lead to organizational conflicts. The most common ones are the limitation of resources, interdependency of tasks, divergent visions of goals, contrasting backgrounds and values of participants, different life experience and, certainly, ineffective organizational communication [3]. Whereas conflict was previously viewed solely in a bad light, it is now considered that the absence of conflicts in organizations is impossible and even undesirable because this may lead to stagnation, groupthink and mediocrity. This, of course, is not related to dysfunctional conflicts which may be retributive in nature. Anyway, all types of conflicts are expected to be resolved at an early stage in order to boost employees’ productivity and the productivity of the organization in overall.

There exist five major ways of conflict management: avoiding, accommodating, collaborating, compromising, and competing. Differences between them are caused by varied styles of behavior of the conflicting parties. The purpose of our research was to determine the prevailing strategies of conflict resolution among our target group — International Law and International Relations students — and give relevant recommendations on improving their conflict management skills. We canvassed 66 persons by means of a questionnaire elaborated by an American Conflict Coach and Mentor, a member of the Association for Conflict Resolution Reginald Adkins, PhD [4].

According to the results of our survey, the prevailing strategy of conflict management among the target group was competing (23.5%). In general, this strategy is regarded as the least effective one because of its authoritarian nature. It means that parties to a conflict consider their interests to be paramount and tend to defend their own positions in an overt way rather than focus on the problem. This strategy is a win-lose situation, or a zero-sum game. Consequently, this approach may lead to the deterioration of relations among the parties involved [3].

The following most popular strategy in accordance with the survey was compromising (21.2%). This style is in the middle between being assertive and cooperative. Business owners frequently employ it during contract negotiations. The purpose of this style is to find a quick middle ground. However, compromise is acceptable only among the participants who are more or less equal in rank. Moreover, the application of such an approach allows to achieve the goals of all the parties involved only partially [3].

Collaboration came close with 20.7%. Regrettably, it was only the third most popular choice because this style is generally regarded as an optimum one for conflict resolution. It closely echoes the Harvard Method of Principled Negotiation which is based on 4 major ideas: separate the people from the problem; focus on interest, not position; invent options for a mutual gain; insist on using objective criteria [5]. Today such a strategy is most respected and utilized by experts, academics, and professionals in the world of negotiation. However, choosing collaboration means being prepared for...
considerable time constraints [3; 5].

Least popular choices were avoidance and accommodation — 14.6% and 20% respectively. On the one hand, it looks nice that these generally ineffective styles were not the top preferences among our respondents. However, together with competition these inefficient strategies sum up to about 60%, which testifies to a relatively low level of conflict management skills among our target group. In fact, choosing either avoidance or accommodation does not presuppose an effective solution to the work-related problems: it rather postpones dealing with important issues. The difference between the two is that in case of accommodation one of the parties is prepared to sacrifice one’s goals so as to avoid arguing and confrontation, while avoidance means a total non-involvement. Obviously, such a strategy exploits the weak and may later lead to an outburst of emotions [3].

This leads us to the conclusion that conflict management needs to be taught: in many specialities dealing with management the learners have a special integrated discipline known as business communication which includes a special module connected to conflicts. We think that the integration of the Method of Principled Negotiation, developed at the Harvard Negotiation Project, as well as case studies and RPGs will be very beneficial for upgrading these skills.

REFERENCES