

# Coalescent argumentation in conflict

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## Abstract

The ability to manage difficult, conflictual situations is a challenging skill that one learns best through personal mistakes. The cumulative experience gained from conflicts that have been resolved successfully for both parties helps shape a positive attitude towards conflicts as situations that can always be resolved. The greater the experience in positively resolving conflicts, the more open the participants are to confrontation, explaining their own point of view, and being willing to listen to the other side. The aim of this article is to systematize knowledge about coalescent argumentation, which is the art of reconciling differences—opposing arguments—in such a way as to highlight commonalities between the parties, leading them to a mutual agreement. The article emphasizes the important role that coalescent argumentation can play in conflict resolution.

## Keywords

conflict, coalescent argumentation

## Introduction

The purpose of this theoretical study is to analyze coalescent argumentation in conflict. Differences in thinking and behavior are inscribed in the interaction between people and despite the fact that they are a common and obvious phenomenon, they still often lead to disputes that stop the possibility of achieving individual goals. Promoting diversity in every organizational culture carries the risk of events of differences of opinion and communication barriers. The differentness of thinking, different experiences and everything that is the value of each person at the same time is a string of problems that people face in every sphere of their lives.

In both private and professional life, every person encounters differences that concern him directly or indirectly. These include political, worldview and cultural differences. Some of these differences do not cause direct conflicts, but the rest of them can block the development and functioning in public space. Conflicts that may accompany the events of differences can be an opportunity for substantive discussion and lead to closer cooperation. Joint problem solving strengthens relationships because it builds trust between partners who have to cooperate in difficult, crisis conditions. People naturally and often unconsciously use argumentation to resolve various conflicts by formulating reasons, drawing conclusions and using them in discussion. It is for this purpose that they present facts or claims as evidence that something is true, or arguments. Arguments are reasons articulated for or against a given proposal depending on whether it is consistent or different from their views [Mochales and Moens, 2011, p. 1].

The ability to combine differences as well as to find what unites people and not divides becomes more and more valuable. Professional environments are becoming increasingly multicultural and open to hiring employees with different, different points of view. It is thanks to this approach that innovative and innovative ideas and solutions are born. However, in order for the differences not to interfere and shape the added value, one must learn to use these new, complex and rich resources. A tool that can be used in two ways, i.e. to improve communication that can prevent conflicts and already during the conflict to develop common solutions is coalescent argumentation. The goal of the article is to present coalescence argumentation as a tool for conflict resolution and its use in the company, based on literature sources.

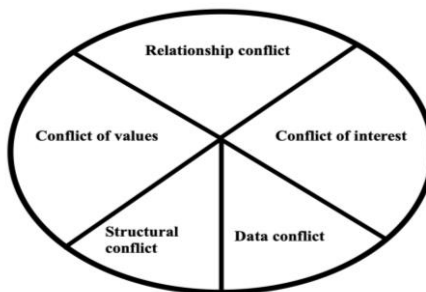
## **1. The concept of argumentation and conflict in terms of literature**

By definition, argumentation covers the term persuasion. Argumentation is when, in order to justify a thesis, a series of sentences are presented that, in the opinion of the argumentator, lead the interlocutor to a specific conclusion. Reasoning under the common name as argumentation has been the subject of deep and extremely meticulous study of logicians for two and a half thousand years [Tokarz, 2002, p. 7]. In conclusion, it can be assumed that argumentation is a form of message whose purpose is to convince someone of one's own reasons by using methods of rhetoric and referring to intellect, emotions or someone's will. We can consider the argument on different levels. On the one hand, the argument may be the type of expression and on the other the type of act of communication or the particular type of interaction as part of the communication process [Siegel, 2024, p. 470]. The act of speech itself as an action can be used in the account of the argumentation. It has

to do with the act of speech-theoretical construction of communication as an action, which aptly fits our intuitive idea of what argumentation is, namely the communication practice and the form of use of language [Oswald, 2020, p. 7].

In rhetoric, the argument has a special place as entymematic and relating to the heart of the matter. The interlocutor builds his credibility by strengthening the impact of argumentation, creating an atmosphere of trust and his authority. Strengthening emotions in communication is supposed to strengthen the persuasiveness of argumentation. There are many questions about the argumentation and how it is used. There are many arguments used, the use of which depends on different determinants and argumentative strategies [Bendrat et al., 2023, p. 2]. Argumentation is a multi-disciplinary field combining many areas such as logic and philosophy, language, rhetoric and law, psychology and computer science. Argumentation is also becoming more and more popular in the research on artificial intelligence, which gave rise to a new discipline called computational argumentation. Argumentation is also gaining popularity in some parts of cognitive science, where recent research seems to indicate that the very function of the way people reason is argumentative [Lippi and Torroni, 2016, p. 1].

The concept of conflict is primarily about the collision of differences, so it is a prelude to determining how to solve the problem. The degree of dependence of the parties to the dispute as well as the limited resources to which the conflict may affect may depend on the way of its further course. It can very quickly turn into a fight, but it can also be an attempt at discussion, exchange of views or argumentation [Chmielewski et al., 2023, p. 101]. There are a lot of types of conflicts themselves and their definition depends on the level of classification. The basic and most popular is the conflict circle developed by Ch. Moore shown in Figure 1.



**Fig. 1.** Types of conflicts

Source: own elaboration based on conducted research.

The circle of conflict shows five types that successively relate to the conflict: relationships, values, interests, structural and data. As the names themselves indicate, their sources result successively from incorrect interpretation of the behavior of the other party, differences resulting from different beliefs, upbringing or culture, competition to meet their needs, limited resources and access to other data or different interpretation of them [Jatkiewicz and Konkel, 2021, p. 77]. Very often a dispute begins with one source, but in a situation where it is not quickly resolved and lasts longer, it can develop and the reasons for its continuation may be enriched with more points from the circle of conflict. An efficient communication, including a substantive exchange of arguments, can be a way to stop the deepening of differences [Czer-niawska and Szydło, 2020].

In the face of multiculturalism, the many differences and personality complexity from which the teams working in the enterprise are built, it seems that the choice of argumentative strategy should be based on these differences. Communication among employees whose value is different experiences should fit into these differences and not only support them but also combine them. These are the features of the coales-cent argumentation, which is based on combining differences.

## **2. Conflicts in the company**

Diversity in employee teams has long been a standard that does not surprise anyone and is even a desirable phenomenon. Promoting the approach to building teams in which we have employees of different ages, genders, nationalities and experiences is therefore beginning to become more and more popular in Poland as well [Turczuk et al., 2023, p. 34]. Increasing differences dynamizes the exchange of views, which is the driving force behind innovative solutions. Unfortunately, on the other hand, people's tendency to conflict, which are a common phenomenon in any society, grows wherever the level of differences and views is high. The awareness and knowledge of executives in this area is constantly growing and thanks to this, those responsible for managing employee teams know that the conflict itself simply means a clash of differences and does not necessarily mean a negative phenomenon. Therefore, if we define conflict as a certain incompatibility and even an obstacle to the achievement of goals, the ability of managers to manage the team and the conflict in such a way that potential disputes lead not to disruptions of processes carried out by employees but to the development of cooperation [Surma-Wiśniewska, 2023, p. 122].

In addition to, personality differences and different goals, it is incorrect communication that is considered the most common cause of conflict [Połonowska et al.,

2023, p. 18]. Communication as a process of information exchange can take place in many different ways. We can distinguish communication through words, gestures, writing and electronic communicators and through social media. Because of communication, people can not only work better with each other, but also make new friends, build relationships and their own communities. One of the main sources of crisis in the enterprise, related to the management of people, is the departure from the development of communication in favor of an organizational culture in which pathological competition and aggression are promoted [Moczydłowska, 2013, p. 348]. The most mature phase of personnel policy development is considered to be Employee Relationship Management, with which behavioral leverage is inextricably linked. Its essence is precisely to support the value of long-term relationships between employees and communication errors perceived as an internal source of crisis [Moczydłowska, 2013, p. 346]. Incorrect communication carries the risk of many misunderstandings but also high stress and the growth of serious problems [Emetumah Faisal et al., 2023, p. 23]. One of the elements of communication that appears already at the initial stage of misunderstandings is the argument understood as part of the statement, aimed at presenting one's own thesis and proving it with arguments. The ability to argue is extremely important for people because it is naturally used to deal with a difficult, conflicting situation or when they find that they have a deficit of information on a given topic. Then they reach for the use of arguments to give meaning to the situation, reach an agreement or defend and promote an individual position [Atkinson et al, 2017, p. 25]. The argumentation therefore occurs both at the stage of communication not threatened by the conflict and gains strength when the first information noise appears.

### **3. Assumptions and stages of coalescent argumentation**

Definitions of argumentation usually classify it as various forms of expression aimed at influencing one person on another. This means that the main pressure is the verbal aspect of the communication process. Non-verbal or contextual communication was usually included as a complement to verbal communication. It was only in the modern theory of argumentation that all forms of communication began to be combined with social contexts and a sense of rationality. The argumentative process consists of various messages and it is believed that they are "icons of attitudes" chosen by the parties to the dispute. Argumentation in communication is therefore the tip of the iceberg - because it touches on the problem, but not the essence of the matter [Gilbert, 1994, p. 159].

A different style of argumentation is Michael Gilbert's coalescent argumentation that seeks to increase understanding of the other side by finding mutual intentions more richly and then seeking and negotiating a common position based on understanding and mutual exchange of information [Garcia- Mila et al., 2013, p. 29]. This approach is characterized by specific features that are based on cooperation and argumentation based on the combination of differences of opinion [Kuhn et al., 2013, p. 27]. Coalescent argument does not contain statements that attack the other side. Its assumption is to reach an agreement by analyzing the points of contention in such a way as to discover their differences and common features. What is very important, this theory points to the great importance of non-verbal communication taking into account the emotions of the parties and the attempt to interpret their intentions. All this in order not to focus on the very content of the message heard but on the attempt to actually understand the meaning of the statement. This is crucial and very important because in order to combine two different positions, it is not enough to know the attitudes themselves, but more effort should be put into understanding them, i.e. what is really important for the other side and why she used this argument. Coalescent argumentation consists of three stages based on answers to individual questions [Budzyńska and Kacprzak, 2010, p.188-189]:

1. "Why are we arguing?" It is a question to determine what the other party expects and what he feels and believes in? Not knowing the answers to these questions, it is very difficult to meet the needs of the other party and thus change her beliefs during the argument.
2. "What are we arguing about?" It is a question of examining the attitude of the other party. It is important to know why someone has adopted this attitude. To reach the source, it is necessary to examine all aspects of the argument of someone's position:
  - a) logical,
  - b) emotional,
  - c) environmental,
  - d) intuitive.

Beliefs arise for various reasons and in order to understand the full attitude of the other person, it is necessary to verify them all because it affects the beliefs and actions of a person.

3. "How can we reach an agreement?" At this stage there is an attempt at coalescent and thus a combination of various elements. The combination of dividing differences is extremely difficult, which is why we talk about the degree of coalescent, the level at which we can reconcile different views. This level usually corresponds to the level of understanding for the first question, so "Why are we arguing?"

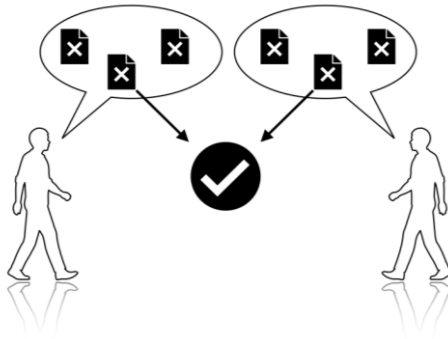
The key here is empathy and the discovery of the true motivations of the other party, without which it is difficult to come to an agreement with people, one of whom treats the argument given as irrelevant or accidental, and for the other the same argument is fundamental in the whole case.

So achieving coalescent requires understanding the beliefs and attitudes of the other party and then satisfying them as much as possible. The assumptions of coalescent argumentation fit into the problem of conflicts, perceived as a clash of incompatibility and thus lack of mutual understanding. Trying to convince the other party of one's reasons without knowing its own intentions can only intensify the conflict and consequently deepen the confrontation and will to fight.

#### **4. Coalescent argumentation in conflict**

Effective communication has a chance of success when the parties to the dispute try to understand the motivations and intentions of the other party and when they themselves speak openly about their own goals. The ability to communicate well is extremely important not only in private but also in professional life. Communicativeness is a great asset among employees and high communication skills are manifested among career-oriented employees [Sikorski, 2010, p. 48]. Unfortunately, many factors such as fear, fear, uncertainty or negative experiences from conflict situations can inhibit openness and direct both sides of the dispute towards combat. Such a situation manifests itself when the parties to the conflict try to conduct tough negotiations hiding their true goals and trying to win at the expense of the other party [Czubak and Oszust, 2016, p. 120]. The dispute will intensify and the situation will take a vicious circle, because the greater the difference of opinion and the less will to cooperate one side, the other side will focus on defending and hiding real goals. Both sides will start winding up the hidden components of their motivations that negatively affect the opponent's attitude.

The theory of coalescence argumentation is based on a combination of two different claims through the recognition and exploration of opposing positions. The figure below depicts this process by presenting two sides of the conflict that deduce different arguments designed to confirm their own reasons.



**Fig. 2.** Two sides of the conflict

Source: own elaboration based on conducted research.

According to the above figure, the arguments communicated by each party present its own position and may not necessarily bring the parties to the conflict closer to resolving the dispute. The traditional exchange of arguments can help to better understand each other or lead to the aggravation of the dispute. Only an attempt at connection, recognition and exploration can send the reader a signal that this form of argumentation is different from the one, generally known, based on critical thinking. The phrases that are used to communicate arguments in the coalescence model go far beyond: defeating, winning, criticizing, attacking, etc.[Veinotte, 2004, s. 34]. The above figure shows that the use of coalescence argumentation can mean agreement by combining two different arguments. The assumptions of coalescence argumentation presented in figure 2 indicate how important it is to understand the beliefs and attitudes of the other party, which is all the more difficult because coalescence concerns extreme differences. It requires a lot of commitment and willingness to compromise to achieve a connection between diametrically different views.

At the initial stage of the conflict, its participants try to talk and argue their reasons. The lack of agreement on the matter that the parties, feeling that they are not understood and the conversation distances them from the assumed inch, begin to treat the argumentation as an attack or an attempt to forceful conviction. Coalescent argumentation can help to get out of a difficult situation because in the course of analysis of disputed points can be used to reach an agreement. Combining different positions is done by discovering the relationship between the content of the message and the attitude adopted by the person giving this message. On this basis, the parties



to the dispute have the opportunity to accurately recognize and analyze what they have in common and what divides and deduce from the dispute even at its advanced level.

## **Conclusion**

When communicating in conflict, empathy and the awareness that certain beliefs, attitudes, situations and intuitions are common to both parties to the dispute are very important [Placha, 2020, p. 232]. That is why it is so important in the conflict to know the assumptions of coalescent argumentation, which is based on establishing a common knowledge of each attitude. It is these assumptions that help to understand why the other party behaves in a certain way, how important such an attitude is in the worldview of the person who represents it, and what needs such an attitude satisfies. It is extremely difficult to conduct conversations that would lead to an agreement with people, one of whom treats the argument as irrelevant or accidental, and the other considers the same argument to be fundamental. A step to achieve coalescent requires understanding the beliefs and attitudes of both parties to the dispute and then satisfying, as much as possible, their needs and desires.

Coalescence argumentation is seen in the context of mutual exchange of information based on a confirmed misunderstanding. It is then that the coalescence model focuses on bringing extreme arguments to an agreement, combining their positions in as many ways as possible [Godden, 2003, p. 220]. The conflict itself, very rarely, concerns directly spoken words. Unfortunately, they are a manifestation of the helplessness of the parties and an attempt to use the arguments not to get out of the conflict but to defend their position. Paradoxically, the understanding of the other side is favored by the discovery of as many aspects as possible related directly and indirectly to the position presented and openness to understanding the aspects of the other side. Coalescent argumentation in a conflict helps to focus on where the difference of opinion comes from, why someone thinks so and why they have such a view. The effectiveness of the argumentation manifests itself in influencing the entire human attitude, while the attack on the statement itself will not bring the expected results. Focusing on the content of the message, without making an effort to understand another person, usually leads to moving the emphasis to another aspect of the conflict, but not to its resolution.

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## Argumentacja koalescencyjna w konflikcie

### Streszczenie

Umiejętność radzenia sobie w ciężkich, konfliktowych sytuacjach jest trudną sztuką, której każdy uczy się najlepiej na własnych błędach. Suma doświadczeń wyniesiona z konfliktów, które zakończyły się pomyślnie dla obu uczestników sporu kształtuje pozytywne nastawienie do konfliktów jako sytuacji, które zawsze można rozwiązać. Im większe doświadczenie w pozytywnym rozwiązywaniu sytuacji konfliktowych, tym większa otwartość uczestników sporu na konfrontację, wyjaśnianie własnego punktu widzenia i chęć słuchania drugiej strony. Celem artykułu jest systematyzacja wiedzy na temat argumentacji koalescencyjnej, która jest sztuką łączenia różnic- przeciwstawnych argumentów w taki sposób, aby pokazać co łączy ze sobą strony, żeby doszły do wspólnego porozumienia. Artykuł wskazuje jak ważną rolę w konflikcie może odgrywać argumentacja koalescencyjna.

### Słowa kluczowe

konflikt, argumentacja koalescencyjna