Conflict Treatment in the Equal Employment Opportunity Human Resource Management

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Abstract   Human resource management is a new scientific field, the content of which only developed in the last decades of the twentieth century. In a relatively short period it evolved spectacularly. Private knowledge, typical approaches, and methods appeared; it has its own research field and distinct scientific trends, even its own schools. A different orientation may appear towards new, special areas in the twenty-first century. A typical, prospective trend may occur in the field of handicapped and changed-capacity labor employment and its human resource management.

The research objective of the dedicated "Equal Employment Opportunity Human Resource Management" is to reveal employment and management tasks, characteristics, processes, and methods. The aim of this article is to present conflict management at organizations that employ disabled persons.

Keywords   handicapped pensioner**,** changed capacity labor, conflict, communication, human resource management

Introduction

This kind of research is important, since more than 500,000 persons are statistically registered as handicapped in Hungary. Taking a look at the statistics of handicapped pensioners and changed-capacity labor, we estimate their number at a million, and they are underemployed. Revitalization of this labor source will be an important national economic question in the coming years and decades.

A changed life situation causes the loss of a workplace in many cases, but after a sickness or injury has run its course or healed and work becomes possible again, finding a job can be quite difficult. Additionally, the situation of disabled persons is determined in large part by how others think of them, what kind of information society has about their life situation, their abilities and aims. Unfortunately, negative

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beliefs, prejudices and discrimination that are general in society can also be found in the world of work. Because of these, a false judgment of disabled persons is often formed by employers. But, from the viewpoint of working, it is not important what kind of sickness somebody has, but what kind of job he/she would like to do, and what kind of job he/she is able to do.

Countries try to inspire employers to hire disabled persons. In accordance with international and EU tendencies, the Hungarian government has written much legislation to assist disabled persons in finding employment.

Research was launched by University of Debrecen's Faculty of Agricultural Economics and Rural Development and the Department of Management and Labor Sciences in the framework of a project financed by the Chances for the Handicapped State Foundation. Examinations enabled us to insert theoretical and statistical knowledge into a program for the management of the handicapped, and it was tested by a pilot education program. Prospective trends and aspects were corrected by participants' experiences, opinions, and expectations. As a sequence, a private research program enabled us to carry out questionnaire interviews among managers and human resource experts of organizations employing handicapped and changed-capacity labor (24 different organizations).

In Hungary organizations are still unwilling to employ disabled persons. The first question is whether this kind of employment is an advantage or disadvantage, and what value it has for employers. In connection with disabled persons and their employment, the most other typical questions are how they will perform, how manageable they are, how often they will be sick, and how they can interact with their healthy colleagues *(Fedor et al., 2007)*. These uncertainties give rise to many conflicts. Two questions deal with the issue of conflicts in our questionnaire. First we examined the adjudication of conflict-generating factors, and, secondly, the effectiveness of conflict management methods in the employment of disabled persons.

Sections of the conflict procedure

Conflicts inevitably accompany organizational life. Changes in technology, new product introduction or other environmental factors require organizational transformation. This process brings the redraft of positions, the alteration of authorities and the re-division of the organization's internal resources. This usually results in the disturbance of interests. Conflicts and conflict management themselves release unpredictable forces.

Most conflicts occur at work when subordinates do not agree with the manager's or members of others units' points of view. Avoiding conflicts inside the company is almost impossible – one should count on them – but their number and scale can be decreased. Conflict resolution is the manager's job, and it can take most of his time.

In the past decades, people's perceptions of conflicts have changed. Today it is obvious that conflicts are harmful in some circumstances, but there are forms of conflicts or effects from conflicts that can further the attainment of an organizational goal, that is, conflicts can be beneficial. Successful management aims both to generate conflicts and to apply strategies to eliminate them. To achieve positive results in a conflict situation, the conflict should first be identified; many times this is not an easy

job. Conflict is not a static state but rather a dynamic process, which can be divided into many stages and results depending on authorities' personal skills.
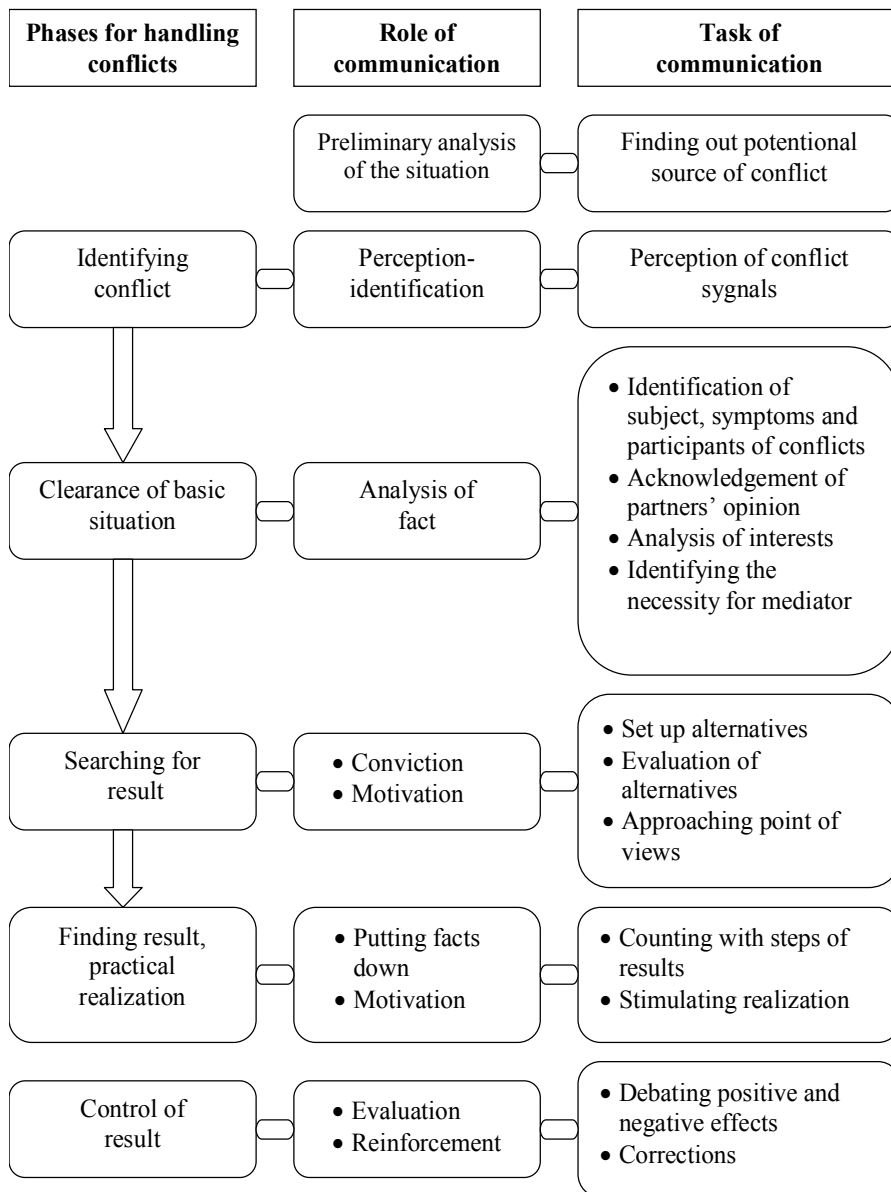
Communication has a continuously determining role from the point of recognizing a conflict to the successful resolution of it, and communication controls the result. Moreover, proper communication inside the organization can do a lot in avoiding confrontations: it is able to illuminate the source of potential conflict. Conflicts can be identified by different communicational signals. The precondition for resolution is the mutual intention to agree. The first step toward resolution is the mutual conviction of partners, gained through discussion, that the release of tension will be beneficial for all.

The process of conflict development can be divided into six sections. The role and task of communication in treating conflicts are illustrated in *Figure 1*.

The understanding of the basic situation, the seeking of results, the working out of steps toward resolution is usually most successful in face-to-face talks. Timing this starting conversation requires cautious balancing. Conflicts cause emotional excitement that is harmful to objective analysis of the situation. The start of the treatment should not be suppressed or delayed, since, as emotions deepen and allies are organized into camps, the crisis is deepens rapidly. The other important factor in analyzing the conflict and holding resolution-seeking conversations is the tone. In our culture an open, objective, and direct style can support the analysis of symptoms and subject, the acquaintance with opponents' points-of-view, the description of their expectations, and the drafting of resolution alternatives. Disputants have to say how they feel and what they want from one other. The participation of a neutral, third partner can be important to communication too. Disputants are lucky if they do not need a mediator and they can find a constructive result. In a complicated, bad, or multifaceted problem, an objective mediator can do a lot to achieve a result.

The strategy of the conflict handler is a determining factor, since the aim of conversation is finding a mutually acceptable result, not a scapegoat. The sweeping victory of one causes the disappointment of the other and brings about another conflict situation.

Communication has different roles in different phases of handling a conflict. Information collecting and need-analysing conversations help to determine a developing tension or the source of conflict, so they have an important role in prevention. In active phases of conflict handling: the understanding of the basic situation, the seeking of a resolution, the working out of necessary steps and practical realization, an open, convincing and motivational function succeeds. The understanding of a basic situation such as a conversation about a performance evaluation requires empathy, skill, and active listening *(Elbert et al, 2001)*.

Phases for handling conflicts	Role of communication	Task of communication
	Preliminary analysis of the situation	Finding out potencial source of conflict
Identifying conflict	Perception-identification	Perception of conflict sygnals
Clearance of basic situation	Analysis of fact	• Identification of subject, symptoms and participants of conflicts • Acknowledgement of partners' opinion • Analysis of interests • Identifying the necessity for mediator
Searching for result	• Conviction • Motivation	• Set up alternatives • Evaluation of alternatives • Approaching point of views
Finding result, practical realization	• Putting facts down • Motivation	• Counting with steps of results • Stimulating realization
Control of result	• Evaluation • Reinforcement	• Debating positive and negative effects • Corrections

Figure 1. Model for treating conflicts
Source: Elbert et. al. (2001)

Conflict Sources

The incomplete realization of disabled persons' labor market integration points to the fact that employers do not have basic information that could help to increase the em-

ployment ratio of these people. It can be assumed that employers in many aspects are apprehensive about employing disabled persons.

To effect a successful return of disabled workers to the labor market, we have to take notice of the possibilities of these persons and the demands of employers.

Once we identify the problem, the reasons for that problem should be found. What can be the source of conflict? This is difficult to answer, as there are many possible answers. In organizational life many situations can be the reason for the conflict. For example, work conditions or changes can be *(Berde, 2003)*.

Among the possible reasons for conflict inside an organization, influential factors can be divided into 2 main categories *(Bakacsi et al, 1991)*.

1. Influencing factors and reason for conflicts connected to personality or personal skill.
2. Environmental factors:
    A.) General (macro, micro) environmental factors;
    B.) Characteristics originating from the structure of the organization and its internal skills.

In the case of disabled persons, we have to emphasize that conflict sources are often related to physical status, sickness, and environment's lack of tolerance. Additionally, we have to handle accentuated conflict sources in communication problems, an over-organized work order, and a lack of material conditions for work. Because the capability of disabled person may cause a project to take longer, or if that person has to perform activities that are too various or too complicated, conflict can arise.

Figure 2. shows the summarized results of conflict formative methods. Qualification of results is summarily low. Two explanations are possible for this result. First, there could be relatively few conflicts in the examined organizations and that is why enumerated sources qualification is low.
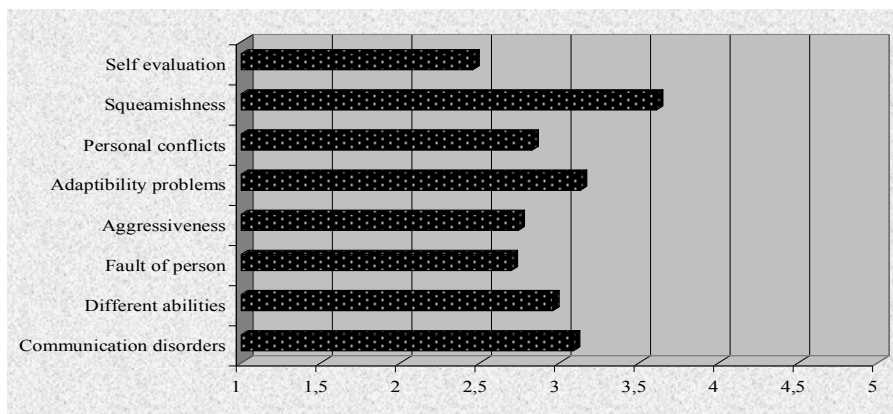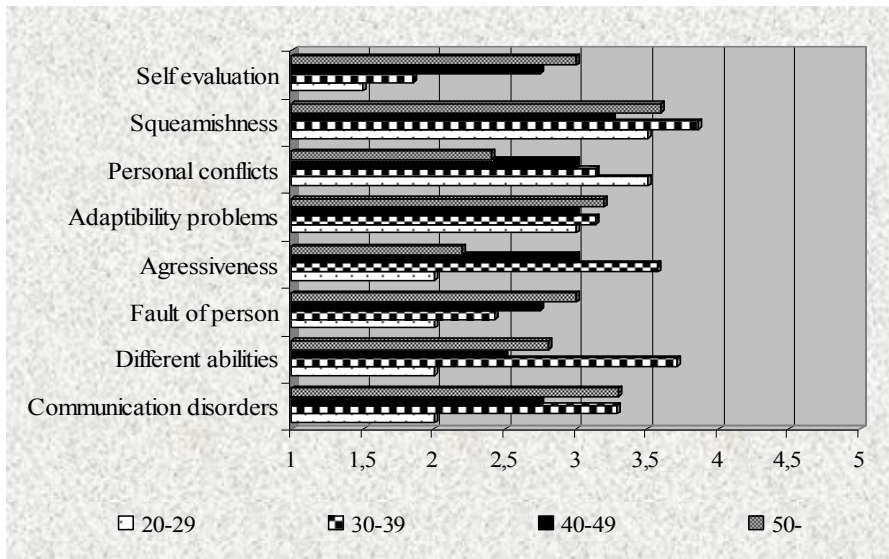

Figure 2. Adjudication of conflict formative factors in case of disabled employee
Source: Own examinations

On the other hand, it is possible that leaders do not like to draw attention to problems in the organization and, as a result, they qualified these sources low. Squeamishness had the highest summarized average. Adaptability problems and

communication disorders got a value over 3. The fewest conflicts issued from self-estimation problems.

Figure 3. shows the adjudication of age-groups. For people under 30, squeamishness and personal conditions cause conflicts. Respondents in group age 30-39 besides squeamishness emphasized different abilities with an over 3.5 value. The age group over 40 qualified all factors with a value less than 3, except squeamishness. People over 50 qualified, besides squeamishness, communication disorders with the highest value.

Figure 3. Adjudication of conflict formative factors in case of disabled employee by age

Source: Own examinations

Summarily it can be established that the age group 20-29 qualified personal conflicts factor higher than other groups. The age group 30-39 qualified three factors higher than others, these are: squeamishness, aggressiveness, and personal conflicts. The age group 40-49 qualified all factors lower than any other age group, while in the age group 50+ the highest values correlated to other groups: squeamishness, adaptability problems, faults of person, and communication disorders.

Conflict treatment

Some conflicts become obvious and easy to handle, others are hidden, generating harmful tension, hard to recognize. Managers treat conflicts differently. According to most popular point of views 5 different ways for handling conflicts are identified *(Blake and Mouton, 1995)*. Conflict handling style can be examined in 2 dimensions. The five basic styles can be described by these 2 dimensions. The vertical dimension indicates how a participant of a conflict emphasizes private interests and aims. Those who are located at the upper value of this dimension mainly consider private interests

and aims before all and aim to satisfy them. The horizontal dimension shows to what degree participants respect each other's needs and aims. All conflict treatment methods have different characteristics, but certain conflict handling methods can alter the situation drastically.

Avoid: People frequently avoid or step out of conflicts instead of trying to solve them. The reason for this is that they qualify a situation as too difficult to resolve, do not consider the question important, or consider the consequences irrelevant.

Adjustment: One accepts the other's opinion in this case. The adjusting partner gives up his or her opinion without accepting possible consequences.

Competition: Each opponent aims to validate his or her own private interest without respecting the others'. They do not cooperate; victory remains important for both. During solution, opponents apply many tactics, from arguing to threats to full exercise of power. This handling of conflict can be successful in crisis situations, when there is no time for listening to one another or discussing opinions or in situations where necessary and unpopular decision should be made.

Compromise: In this case both sides realize they can not achieve their private goals. They aim to find a solution they can both accept; their goals are both more or less reached. Both win and lose in this case. It is a frequent method for handling conflict and beneficial, as conversation is saved, correction is possible, and the realization of conversation is in the parties' mutual interest.

Cooperation: Participants respect both private and other interests and aim to reach goals that satisfy all interests. The basis for the application of this method is mutual trust and communication ability. This process requires thorough and time-consuming work as disputants reach mutual and general goals.

Introduced methods for handling conflicts do not occur as described above; they are mixed up. In the process of handling a conflict, many can turn up. So none of them can be considered the best, any style can be effective in a certain situation.

The questionnaire examined the effectiveness of conflict management methods too. The summarized results are shown in *Figure 4*. It is unambiguous that examined leaders prefer to uncover the sources of conflicts, but reorganizing groups is an effective method too.

The results on different leader levels show that high level leaders qualified all conflict management methods higher than subordinate leaders did, except in the case of making a deal. The most rarely used methods are buying and force. Presumably employers know that in the case of disabled persons force is not a useful method because it only causes opposition. Forced coalitions and leader judgment got a quite low value too, respondent leaders qualified these methods as much less effective.
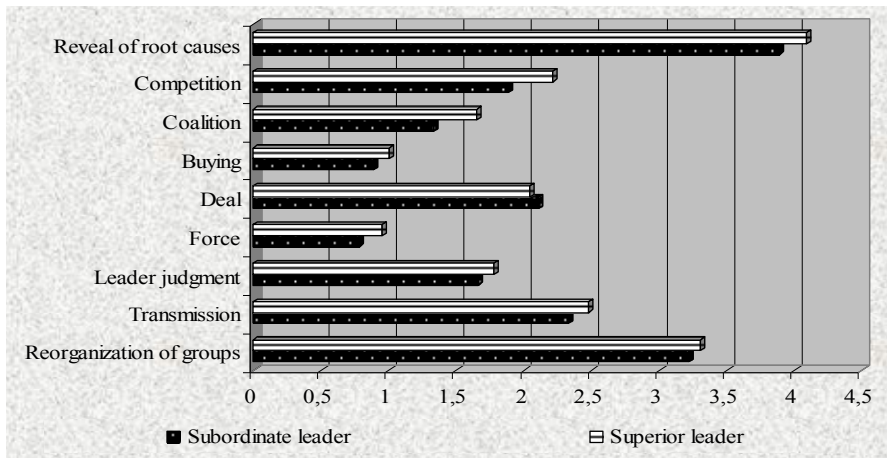
Figure 4. Adjudication of conflict management methods effectiveness by leader levels

Source: Own examinations

We can find differences according to the education level of the respondents *(Figure 5.)*. Respondents with a university degree qualified revealing the root cause as the most effective means of conflict resolution. After this came reorganizing groups and transmission. Other respondents qualified force, leader judgment, and buying with higher values.
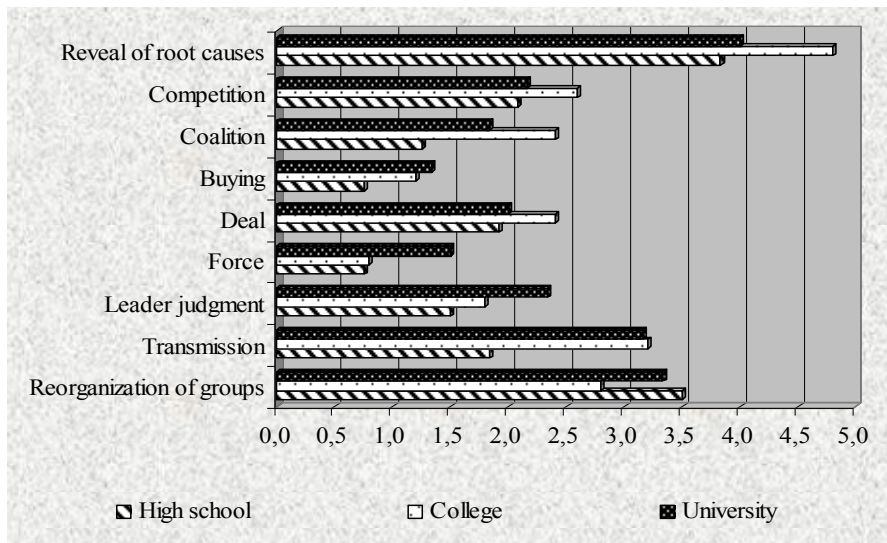
Figure 5. Adjudication of conflict management methods effectiveness by school qualification

Source: Own examinations

Respondents with a college degree gave the highest value to the method of revealing the conflict's root cause, at almost 4.8. Otherwise, they qualified with high values the effectiveness of competition, coalitions, deals, and transmission. Respondents with high school degrees gave the highest value after "reveal root causes" to reorganizing groups. This method got a higher average according to other respondent groups.

Summary

It can be established that the most common conflict sources are squeamishness, adaptability problems, and communication disorders, while the most effective strategies for conflict resolution are revealing the root causes and reorganizing groups.

Although we can do a lot to prevent conflicts, total elimination is not only impossible but would mean harm for the organization. Managers have to consider conflicts as natural symptoms of work and have to do their best to solve them.

In solving conflicts there is no substitute for human conversation. Problems should be analyzed until each understands the other's feelings and arguments, and talk should be carried on until participants consider each other partners in solving a problem instead of opponents. In reality, many methods of handling conflict will be used at once. Generally, the common, complex use is suggested. Proper organizational communication should be established to achieve this.

As disabled persons are a special group of the labor market, some of their specialties and demands are different from those of healthy employees. Because of this, organization leaders should prepare for special problem situations with possible methods for solution and correct treatment by special people. By these measures we can form those parameters of human resource management that improve disabled people's reception, permanent employment, and raise their work performance.

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