Negative Aspects of Conflicts in Health Care Sector in Lithuania

Vilmante Kumpikaite [1+], Zivile Kondrotiene [2], Audrius Taraskevicius [3]

[1,3] Kaunas University of Technology, Lithuania

[2] R. Padegimo IĮ "RP Stomatologija", Lithuania

Abstract. Conflicts exist in every type of organizations. Conflict management requires recognition that conflict is occurring. In this paper we present analyzed negative aspects of conflicts in public health institutions of Lithuania. 94 anonymous questionnaires were sent to the top level managers of public health institutions of Lithuania in March – April of 2011. Response rate was 58 percent. In order to clarify top level managers' view towards conflicts in the public health institutions and their impact on work, a quantitative research method was chosen. The anonymous questionnaire was used. Results showed that respondents consider conflicts in organizations as negative phenomenon which decreases work efficiency.

Keywords: conflict, conflict management, value, health care sector, Lithuania.

1. Introduction

Managers understand conflict management very often just in the narrow sense, as selection and application of common conflict prevention measures to all members in organization. However, conflict management is a purposeful activity in order to remove the conflict or potential causes of the conflict to change the behavior (Rostamy, 2009). Constructive resolution of conflict can be the basis for closer and positive staff and managers in their mutual relations (Rostmany, 2009), stimulate creativity, initiative, effective communication, increased productivity (Tjosvold 2008), a greater commitment to the organization (Lenski, 2004), can help an organization or group to review the mission, rules of behavior, organizational rules and policies (Volkema and Bergmann, 2001).

Changeability and unpredictability of situations in an organization make it complex, and managers, in spite of their better and better qualifications, as well as various competences, still cannot feel comfortable. They do not know how to efficiently motivate people to work, how to solve conflicts, and how to choose an optimal management style.

Purpose of this paper is to present negative aspects of conflicts evaluated in health institutions of Lithuania.

2. Types of Conflicts

Scientific literature provides some different classifications of conflicts. However summarizing Volkema and Bergmann (2001), Tjosvold (2008), Strom - Gottfired (1998), Sportsman and Hamilton (2007), Borisoff, and Victor (1998) and other authors, we marked five main types of conflict groups in organizations: Data, Value, Interest, Structural and Relationship conflicts.

2.1. Data / Pseudo Conflicts

These kinds of conflicts deal with various misunderstandings, mostly resulting from the lack of information when people do not get information necessary to make wise decisions, are misinformed,

---

[+] Vilmante Kumpikaite Tel.: +37037323683; fax: +37037323683.
E-mail address: vilmante.kumpikaite@ktu.lt

disagree on which data is relevant, interpret information differently, or have competing assessment procedures. However, too big amount of communication can lead people to conflict too (Floyd, 2009). Some data conflicts may be unnecessary since they are caused by poor communication between the people in conflict. These conflicts can also lead to false information. Other data conflicts may be genuine incompatibilities associated with data collection, interpretation or communication. Most data conflicts will have "data solutions".

2.2. Value Conflicts

Values can be defined as broad preferences concerning appropriate courses of action or outcomes (Kumpikaite, 2009). They are an absolute or relative ethical value, the assumption of which can be the basis for ethical action. For example, if you value equal rights for all and you go to work for an organization that treats its managers much better than it does its workers, you may form the attitude that the company is an unfair place to work; consequently, you may not produce well or may perhaps leave the company. It is likely that if the company had had a more egalitarian policy, your attitude and behaviors would have been more positive (Ciarniene *et al*., 2010).

Value conflicts are caused by perceived or actual incompatible belief systems. Values are beliefs that people use to give meaning to their lives. They are connected with moral, social, political, personal values and attitudes intersection (Miller and Steinberg, 1974, Kasiulis and Barvydienė, 2005). Differing values need not cause conflict. People can live together in harmony with different value systems. Value disputes arise only when people attempt to force one set of values on others or lay claim to exclusive value systems that do not allow for divergent beliefs. It is of no use to try to change value and belief systems during relatively short and strategic mediation interventions. It can, however, be helpful to support each participant's expression of their values and beliefs for acknowledgment by the other party.

2.3. Interest Conflicts

Interest conflicts can be psychological or procedural, such as people pursue the same goals, but their methods of achieving are different (Kasiulis and Barvydienė, 2005). These conflicts are caused by competition over perceived incompatible needs. Conflicts of interest result when one or more of the parties believe that in order to satisfy his or her needs, the needs and interests of an opponent must be sacrificed. These conflicts are essential when people have different goals (Van der Molen HT, Gramsbergen - Hoogland, 2004). Interest-based conflict will commonly be expressed in positional terms. A variety of interests and intentions underlie and motivate positions in negotiation and must be addressed for maximized resolution. Interest-based conflicts may occur over substantive issues (such as money, physical resources, time, etc.); procedural issues (the way the dispute is to be resolved); and psychological issues (perceptions of trust, fairness, desire for participation, respect, etc.). For an interest-based dispute to be resolved, parties must be assisted to define and express their individual interests so that all of these interests may be jointly addressed. Interest-based conflict is best resolved through the maximizing integration of the parties' respective interests, positive intentions and desired experiential outcomes.

2.4. Structural Conflicts

Lenski (2004) states that the "structure" defines such terms as a group, organization size, leadership style, compensation system and groups of dependency on each other's. Structural conflicts are caused by forces external to the people in dispute. Limited physical resources or authority, geographic constraints (distance or proximity), time (too little or too much), organizational changes, and so forth can make structural conflict seem like a crisis. It can be helpful to assist parties in conflict to appreciate the external forces and constraints bearing upon them. According to Edelman and Crain (1997), a structural conflict is more of general nature; it's limited to certain situations or groups of people involved in the conflict. Structural conflicts will often have structural solutions. Parties' appreciation that a conflict has an external source can have the effect of them coming to jointly address the imposed difficulties. Conflicts often arise in an active group, which promotes and supports the activity differences (Van der Molen and Gramsbergen - Hoogland, 2004).

2.5. Relationship / Interpersonal Conflicts

Relationship conflicts occur because of the presence of strong negative emotions, misperceptions or stereotypes, poor communication or miscommunication, or repetitive negative behaviors. The conflict arises because of different needs, because each person has their own needs, that others are not recognized (Tafel-Viia and Alas, 2009). According to Kasiulis and Barvydienė (2005), these conflicts arise from the incompatibility of individuality and variety of communication problems. Interpersonal conflicts include psychological incompatibility; the emphasis here is behavior and individual differences. Relationship problems often fuel disputes and lead to an unnecessary escalating spiral of destructive conflict. Supporting the safe and balanced expression of perspectives and emotions for acknowledgment (not agreement) is one effective approach to managing relational conflict. According to Edelman and Crain (1997), a personal conflict is associated with particular individuals or particular approach to them. It is interesting to note is that the psychological reasons are assigned, and social - demographic factors: gender, age, educational level, dependence on ethnic groups, religious beliefs (Floyed, 2009). All this affects the different behavior during the conflict.

Summarizing, it is necessary to state that employees working together in organizations and seeking common aims depend on each other. Having different values, such as ideology, politics, religion convictions, different cultures, educational backgrounds, attitudes people often face different clash situations and conflicts. Conflict management therefore requires common recognition of principles, standards or codes in which conflict is characterized, and from which solutions, resolutions or remedies may be found.

3. Determination of Conflicts in Health Care Organization in Lithuania

3.1. Description of the Survey

94 anonymous questionnaires were sent to the top managers of public health institutions of Lithuania in March - April of 2011. Response rate was 58 percent. In order to clarify the approach of top level managers of the public health institutions towards conflicts and its resolution a quantitative research method was chosen. The anonymous questionnaire was used, which among other special questions also included Thomas - Kilmann conflict instrument (Kenneth and Killmann, 2001), commonly applied by researchers on this matter in foreign countries. The Scale of 5 was used for answers, where 1 means - never, and 5 - always. The data were analyzed using SPSS program, version 13.

3.2. Results of the Research

By evaluating a conflict according to five categories below - relationship, data, interest, structural and value - we can begin to determine the causes of a conflict and design resolution strategies that will have a higher probability of success.

**Table 1.** Reasons of Conflicts According to Gender and Age

Reasons of conflicts	Gender ($\bar{x}$ ±SD)		t(p)	Age ($\bar{x}$ ±SD)		t(p)
	Females N=40	Males N=15		Up to 45 years old N=25	Older than 46 years N=27	
Information conflicts	2,55±0,78	2,67±0,90	0,47 (p≥0,05)	2,76±0,72	2,30±0,72	**2,30 (p<0,05)**
Value conflicts	1,68±0,76	1,93±0,70	1,14 (p≥0,05)	1,48±0,65	1,96±0,75	**2,45 (p<0,05)**
Interest conflicts	1,68±0,65	1,73±0,79	0,27 (p≥0,05)	1,68±0,62	1,74±0,76	0,31 (p≥0,05)
Structural conflicts	1,90±0,87	2,07±0,88	0,62 (p≥0,05)	1,84±0,89	2,00±0,78	0,68 (p≥0,05)
Interpersonal conflicts	2,23±0,83	2,07±0,79	0,63 (p≥0,05)	2,16±0,89	2,22±0,75	0,27 (p≥0,05)

$\bar{x}$ - Mean; SD - Standard deviation; p - significance level

40 (72.7 percent) females and 15 (27.3 percent) males participated in the poll. Age of participants varied from 27 to 64 (the mean of age was 45.87 ± 10.24). According to this, it was decided to make two age groups (one – up to 45 years old, the second – 46 years and older respondents). Females' age (43.41 ± 9.77) was less than men's age average (53.23 ± 8.08). This difference was statistical significant (t (3.26), $p<0.05$).

Results showed (see Table 1) that Data and Relationship conflicts were depicted as the most common in studied organizations. It was found out statistical significant difference according Data and Value conflicts' evaluation and respondents' age. Results showed that older respondents found out value conflicts more common ($p<0.05$) than younger respondents.

Managerial respondents with higher work experience depicted value conflicts in their organizations more often than their younger colleagues. At the same time respondents with managerial educational background minded to find relationship conflicts more common than their associates without managerial background. The top level managerial respondents found out interest conflicts more often than respondents from lower levels, which depicted relationship and information conflicts as more common.
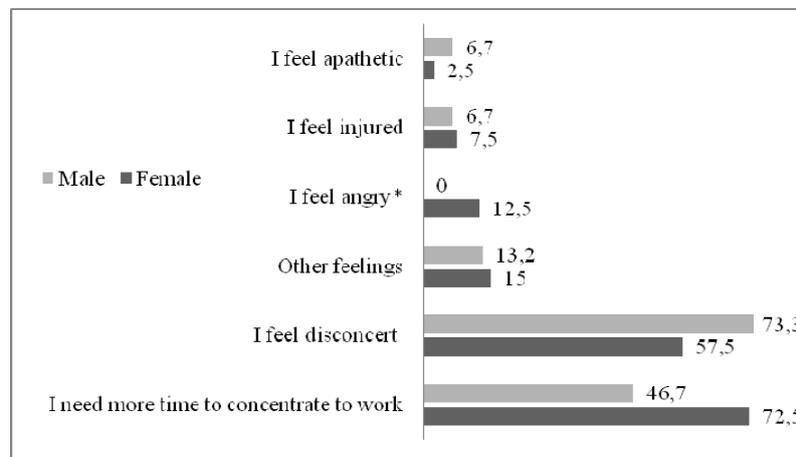
Positive answers; *$p<0.05$ statistical significant difference.
Fig. 1: Impact of conflicts according to respondents' gender, in percent

Results of the survey showed (see Fig. 1) that the biggest part of females' respondents (72.5 percent) need more time to concentrate on work after the conflict as males need (46.7 percent of positive responses). It was not found statistical difference according to gender evaluating feeling of disconcert after the conflict. However men felt disconcert more (73.3 percent) than women (57.5 percent). At the same time females feel more angry (12.5 percent) than men after the conflict. It was found statistical significant difference in this case ($p<0.05$).

4. Conclusions

Top level managers of the public health institutions of Lithuania consider the conflicts as negative phenomenon. The majority of them alleged that conflicts arise rarely (74.5 percent) in their institutions. Top level managers diagnosed basically pseudo and interpersonal conflicts. In the case of a conflict the majority of respondents feel nervous (61.8 percent) and need more time in order to concentrate for work (65.5 percent). More than a half of managers (52.7 percent) tend to resolve conflicts using avoidance strategy. Only 54.5 percent of respondents of the public health institutions tend to consider that they have enough conflict resolution skills.

The executives of the public health institutions of Lithuania tend to qualify conflicts that occur in their institutions negatively and expressed the desirability to improve their conflict management skills. Younger managers thought that informational conflicts are more often at the same time older managers found out value conflicts as more common in their organizations. Types of values include ethical/moral values, doctrinal/ideological (religious, political) values, social values, and aesthetic values. According to these results statistical significant difference was found. These results correspond with previous survey by Mirzojanc and Survutautė (2007) provided in Lithuania.

The results of this research highlight the importance to solve conflicts and to try to avoid them as people lose their concentration and ability to work effectively. However, top managers should learn that conflicts could be also positive and to help when seeking some changes in organization as De Grandpre (2010) presents in his works.

This research has its limitations. As the main of them it should be mentioned that the sample of this survey is not enough to be representative for all country's public health institutions.

Speaking about future works in this field we would like to analyze the value conflicts deeper.

5. References

[1] D. Borisoff, D.A.Victor. *Conflict management: a communications skills approach.* Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1998.

[2] R. Ciarniene, V. Kumpikaite, and M. Vienazindiene. Expectations and Job Satisfaction: Theoretical and Empirical Approach. *6th International Scientific Conference Business and Management, Business and Management.* 2010, pp 978-984.

[3] S. De Grandpre. *Three Steps to Turn Conflict Into Successful Change Management.* 2010, <http://ezinearticles.com/?Three-Steps-to-Turn-Conflict-Into-Successful-Change-Management&id=4137648> 02.03.2011.

[4] J. Edelman, MB. Crain. *Negotiation way: How to avoid conflicts and resolve them at work and daily life.* Vilnius: Margi raštai, 1997 (in Lithuanian).

[5] G. Floyd. *Conflict Management.* 2009, <http://ezinearticles.com/?Conflict-Management&id=3375897G> Retrieved 02.03.2011.

[6] J. Kasiulis, V. Barvydienė. *Leadership management.* Kaunas: Technology, 2005 (in Lithuanian).

[7] WT. Kenneth, RH. Kilmann. *Thomas – Kilmann Conflict mode instrument.* Profile and interpretive report, 2001.

[8] V. Kumpikaite. Attitudes of spirituality: pilot study from Lithuania. *The Business Review.* 2009, 13 (1): 271-277.

[9] T. Lenski. *Conflict at Work - The Hidden of Poorly Managed Organizational Conflict.* 2004, <http://ezinearticles.com/?Conflict-at-Work---The-Hidden-Costs-of-Poorly-Managed-Organizational-Conflict&id=298093> Retrieved 02.03.2011.

[10] GR. Miller, M. Steinberg. *Between People: A New Analysis of Interpersonal Communication.* Chicago: Science Research Associates, 1974.

[11] LT. Mirzojanc, D. Survutautė. Causes of conflict in preschool communities. *ACTA PEDAGOGICA VILENSIA.* 2007, 19: 147-158 (in Lithuanian).

[12] A. A. A. Rostamy. Toward Understanding Conflicts between Customers and Employees' Perceptions and Expectations: Evidence of Iranian Bank. *Journal of Business Economics and Management.* 2009, 10(3): 241-254.

[13] S. Sportsman, P. Hamilton. Conflict management styles in the health professions. *Journal of Professional Nursing.* 2007, 23(3): 157-166.

[14] K. Strom - Gottfried. Applying a conflict resolution framework to disputes in managed care. *Social Work.* 1998, 43(5): 393-401.

[15] K. Tafel-Viia, and R. Alas. Differences and Conflicts between Owners and top Managers in the Context of Social Responsibility. *Inzinerine Ekonomika-Engineering Economics.* 2009, (4): 86-94.

[16] D. Tjosvold. The Conflict - positive organization: it depends upon us. *Journal of Organizational Behaviour.* 2008, 1(29): 19-28.

[17] HT. Van der Molen, YH. Gramsbergen - Hoogland . *Communication in organization: Basic skills and conversation models.* Hove and New York, 2004.

[18] RJ. Volkema, TJ. Bergmann. Conflict styles as indicators of behaviour patterns in interpersonal conflicts. *Journal of Social Psychology.* 2001, 135(1): 5-15.