

Human Resource Managers' Role Perception and Their Conflict Management Style

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Abstract

This study describes the relationship between three role perceptions and three conflict management styles among human resources managers in a high-tech and low-tech organizations. Three different role perception approaches were identified: the "mechanic" approaches, the "organic" approach, the "strategic" approach, which focuses on the HR manager as a strategic partner. In addition, three distinct conflict management styles were identified: the competitive style: "win-lose", the compromising style and the integrative style: "win-win" situation. The research method was qualitative. Data was collected by semi-constructed interviews of 19 HR managers in low tech and high tech industries. Findings show that Most HR managers which were characterized with "Mechanic" approach, tend to resolve conflict in a competitive style; Most HR managers which were characterized with an "organic" approach, tend to resolve conflicts in a compromising style; and most HR managers which were characterized with a "strategic" approach tend to resolve conflict in an integrative style. Additionally, the type of organization affects the relationship between role perception and conflict management style. This paper contributes both to the methods of qualitative research area and the newest theoretical aspects of human resource role in organizations.

Keywords: Human resource, role perception, conflict, conflict management, conflict resolution, organization research approach.

The established approach for handling of human resources in organizations has undergone numerous changes over the years during which organizations have existed in modern and postmodern societies. From an engineering-technical "human resource" management style that prevails in industrial enterprises and emphasizes effective control of the "human resource's" efficiency, to modern management styles that on the one hand emphasize the organization's strategic needs, while on the other, emphasize employee needs as a critical organizational resource.

In the previous decade certain voices came out claiming HR management was in fact a profession for all purposes. The appearance of academic programs, specifically designed for Human Resource Management is a solid evident for that. Although nowadays most organizations do maintain an institutionalized function for management of human capital, it appears that role perceptions of HR managers - are wide and varied. This study examined the role perception of HR managers that are employed in several organizations and the relationship between this perception and their conflict management style within the organization.

1. The "Role" Concept and Role Perceptions of Human Resources Managers

The term "role", according to the functionalist approach, is defined as a series of norms, rules and values that determine an individual's behavior within the society. Such behavioral norms are adopted by the individual during the socialization process, as argued by Parsons (1951), and by many others to follow, such as Edgar & Sedgwick (2007).

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In their attempt to unite the structural and interactional approaches into one, Berger & Luckmann (1972) assumed that on the one hand, society norms and values are imposed onto the individual and dictate his actions, while on the other, the individual's personal identity stems largely from the social roles that he plays. The more cohesive his role, the less flexibility is possible.

Ever since the establishment of industrial organizations following the Industrial Revolution, in addition to the roles within the society, the term also refers to "positions" within organizations. In this age, it appears the organizational role is most often used as a part of the individual's identity and as a component in his social-economic status. Consequently, the basic description of "role" was expanded to include additional components such as: adaptation, pleasure, degree of satisfaction and degree of human adjustment to the organizational system (Biddle, 2013). One might infer that the concept of "role" also incorporates the definition of behavioral expectations by the organization, both formal and informal, and the interpretation of the individual himself, based on his own personal tendencies which involve his own expectations from the role he plays or will play in future (Kristof-Brown, 2005). It may be possible to expand the definition of "role" by quoting the work of Neale & Griffin (2006) who argued that the role of the individual within the organization is a product of three sources of expectations: expectations by the "system" which are enforced by way of organizational rewards and sanctions, "role authorities" which exist within workers who are entering a new position and are derived from their own, broader, social world such as academic education, visual communication channels, stories, performances, etc., and "notion of oneself", which is based on the description of features and personal characteristics. In the early 20th century, the role of HR Managers was characterized as one that is designed for handling of organizational administration issues. This was a result of the impact scientific management and corporate bureaucracy had at the time. Later on, in the 60s, several new approaches that addressed both social and psychological needs of workers emerged, and as a result, the role of HR Managers was characterized as one that represents the individual needs of the workers (Ulrich & Wayne, 2005; Mash & Gutman, 2016).

In the late modern era and early post-modernist era, numerous markets witnessed the emergence of new employment patterns that were more dynamic and less stable by nature. Permanent tenure at the workplace had become far less common, initiated by both organizations - which were now forced to implement more frequent changes due to the many environmental changes that affect them - and by the workers themselves whose commitment to the organization had considerably diminished. As a result, organizations were forced, and many still are, to limit themselves to execution of short-term planning practices which by nature included frequent recruitment and dismissal of employees. The role perception of modern day HRMs is on the one hand characterized by the pursuit of a partial partnership in the organization's strategic planning efforts, and execution of various efforts to conserve and motivate employees on the other.

Recent years have seen the emergence of new critical approaches that deal with employee motivation within the organization, arguing that the employees are in fact exposed to exploitative manipulation in ways that bypass their awareness, and as a result, influence their ability to make a free choice (Shenhav, 1995; Kunda, 2006). This study deals with the questions: How, if at all, have the different approaches to organizational studies affected the role perception of HR Managers, and how, if at all, does the role perception of HR Managers influence the organization's conflict management style.

2. Different Approaches to Organizational Studies and their Relationship with the Role of HR Managers

At the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries, many organizations in European states were established under strong national influence. This influence resulted in the establishment of a national work culture that was best expressed by education that emphasized the importance of observing schedules and obedience, worker training, and the establishment of manufacturing processes. Over time, this culture also influenced trade unions and the relationship between management and employees (Morgan, 2006). In his book, "The Principles of Scientific Management", Taylor implemented principles of engineering theory into the field of managerial role perception (Shenhav, 1995). Accordingly, Taylor argued that one must distinguish between the 'management function' and the 'performance function', and that it would be best to simplify and divide corporate objectives into routine activities that could be measured both quantitatively and qualitatively using standard time intervals (Daft, 2015). The attitude towards workers was one that considered them as no more than 'just another factor' in the organization's production process, and the organizational role of workers was determined by a clearly defined set of rules and procedures (Samuel, 2005).

Problems involving work relations between employees and management, or between the employees themselves, were treated in a "mechanical" way, an approach that is more common in solution of problems that affect production processes (Shenhav, 1995).

At a time, the role of HR Managers, which were commonly referred to as 'Personnel Managers', was primarily characterized by administrative tasks such as: handling of wages, registration of working days, holidays, compensation, recruitment of employees, preparation of employee reports etc. (Mathis & Jackson, 2004). The relationship between workers and their employer was influenced by the loyalty and productivity of those workers' who were employed by the organization until their retirement. The need to deal with layoffs, resignations and recruitment was rare and took up little time from the organization, and as a result, such matters were not a part of the HR Manager's role (O'Brien & Linehan, 2014). This approach remained dominant in the field of organizational research until the early 60s (Daft, 2015), and its characteristics still prevail in a limited number of industrial plants today.

The "Human Relations" approach, which is also known as the industrial psychology approach, was developed in a chronological manner after the scientific management approach was implemented within many organizations. There are those who believe it was in fact a response to it. Towards the end of the 1930s, many researchers, led by Elton Mayo, presented organization managements with a "new" type of employee - one that is social and which replaces the "economic man". The need to connect with and respond to group norms was discovered to be stronger than the need for financial reward (Shenhav, 1995). Researchers in the field of psychology had discovered that in general, people had various psychological and social needs and their level of satisfaction or non-satisfaction influenced work productivity levels and quality. As a result, many organizations adopted the 'Organic Approach' which focused more on the employee, on a flexible organizational structure, and on innovation (Daft, 2015).

During the 50-60 of the 20th century, along with the development of legislation in various social and labor-related fields, the role of HR Managers was expanded to include representation of workers, management of compensation payment programs, employee recruitment and training, personal safety, handling of worker complaints, and all this while preserving worker interests and addressing their welfare needs (Mathis & Jackson, 2004). Correspondingly, various studies had generated new methods for streamlining procedures handled by HR Managers, such as training, recruitment, professional development and worker rewards (Noe et al., 1997).

Further evidence of the aforementioned changes that the role of HR Managers has undergone originates from other researchers from the field of industrial psychology such as Maslow (1966), and Herzberg (1966). They too saw the satisfaction of a worker's psychological and sociological needs as a precondition for an increase in motivation and productivity. Accordingly, they proposed an approach that promoted the modification of roles such that they would be more suited to the individual worker, unlike the Scientific Management Method which argued that the worker was the one that should change in order to qualify for the role. According to this method, employee responsibilities would increase and they would be more motivated to perform their role as best they can. Furthermore, this method also enriches the content of the role and its components. Recent breakthroughs resulting from new developments and innovations in IT technologies have significantly reduced the administrative tasks required of HR managements within organizations. There is a rise in the number of people who acquire academic education in industrialized countries, resulting in a higher level of education among workers. Organizations have become more sophisticated and the role of HR Managers has received a strategic dimension. Organizations now place more emphasis on building human capital for the purpose of ensuring a competitive advantage in a global environment. The concept of permanent tenure has been diminished and the psychological contract between the worker and the organization and vice versa has changed. In the postmodern era, there is no certainty that workers tie their own fate with that of the organization (Wright & Bosrell, 2002).

As a result of such dynamics and organizational uncertainty, HR Managers are forced to participate in strategic processes that take place within their organization (Strategic Human Resource Management). Such involvement is best expressed in the integration between the four main functions of modern management systems, namely: recruitment and screening, evaluation of worker performance and improvement thereof, wages and compensation and personal development & training (Moore & Gardner, 2004). HR Managers are now required to function as agents that are capable of identifying problems and preparing future plans for implementation (Ulrich & Wayne, 2005). Furthermore, they are expected to be skillful and proficient in prediction of labor market trends, work environment development and design, provision of advice in matters pertaining to mergers, acquisitions, and strategic compensation payment planning (Mathis & Jackson, 2004).

They must also be knowledgeable in legislative matters pertaining to labor law and must be capable of managing and resolving disputes and lawsuits that are related to employee rights (Van Gramberg & Teicher, 2005). Studies indicate that in practice, in many organizations, there is a wide gap between the definition of a HR Manager as a strategic partner and their status in reality. In reality, most HR Managers consider themselves as operational by nature and act in accordance with the organization's needs and requirements (Molineux, 2013).

3. Different Styles of Conflict Management within Organizations

The existence of conflicts and power struggles between people in general, and between work colleagues in particular, is a natural phenomenon (Pfeffer, 1981). Already in the early days of organizational research, back when the Economic Approach was still prevalent, Lawrence & Lorsch (in: Scott and Davis 2015) had already discovered that different sub-units within the same organization had different interests, functions, relevant environments and different employee characteristics. At the time, this discovery contradicted the prevailing approaches which argued that there was in fact harmony between different units of a given organization, and ignored ranking conflicts and economic approaches that argued that all members of a single organization shared the same interests.

Daft (2015), went on to point out two types of organizational conflicts, the first: a horizontal conflict that exists between groups or departments of similar ranking within the organizational hierarchy and are a product of the work environment, namely the size of the department and its objectives, structure and technology. The second type of conflict is vertical by nature and exists between different hierarchy levels within the organization. He also believed HR Managers are involved in both types of conflicts.

In this context, Rahim (1985) claimed that effective management of inter-organizational conflicts may in fact advance the organization, encourage innovation and promote change. Accordingly, he suggested two basic approaches for conflict intervention in organizations: The 'Behavioral Approach' and the 'Structural' approach. The Behavioral Approach emphasizes the increase in organizational efficiency by way of leading a cultural change among its workers, while the structural approach emphasizes the increase in organizational efficiency by way of changing the organizational structure, communication systems and employee rewards.

Both approaches suggest that the role of HR Managers is pivotal regardless of whether they are involved in changes of organizational structure (addition of new posts, layoffs, job mobility, etc.) or in the conflict itself (Grissom, 2014).

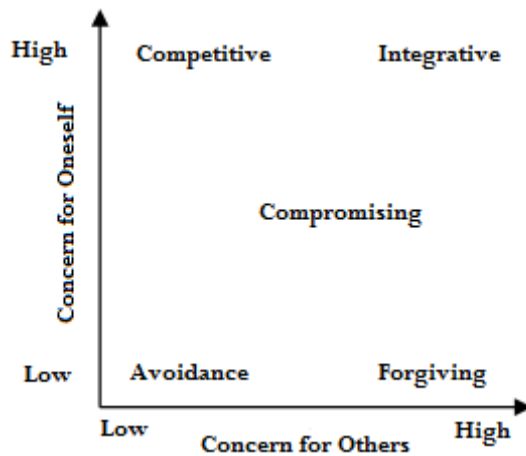
In their study, Blake & Mouton (1964) were the first to point out five different conflict management styles. Later on, Kilmann & Thomas (1975) divided these five styles into two categories: 'Destructive Styles' and such competition, forgiveness and avoidance – and 'Constructive Styles' such as compromising and integrative.

Based on these two studies above, Rahim (1983) developed a model for dealing with interpersonal conflicts. In his study, he identified five conflict management styles, three of which were employed by this study for the purpose of identifying conflict management styles used by HR Managers:

- 1) The "Integrative Style" (problem solving) defines a situation in which both dimensions are of senior level, in other words, satisfying both sides of a conflict.
- 2) The "Competitive Style" defines a situation in which one side demonstrates a high level of concern for resolution of his own problem with little concern for that of the other.
- 3) The "Compromising Style" defines a situation in which one side demonstrates a medium level of concern for resolution of his own and the opposing side's problem, such that both sides are able to make compromises in order reach an agreement.

The following chart presents different conflict management styles in a two dimensional structure (axes): Strive for achievement of personal interests and strive to satisfy the "second party".

Figure 1: A Two-Dimensional Model of Five Interpersonal Conflict Management Styles (Rahim, 1983).



4. Research Method

This study was conducted in qualitative manner, and as such, deals with questions of essence while detailing significance, interpretation, generalization, and identification of correlation between the findings and theories. In order to understand the role perception of each HR Manager and his unique conflict management style, the study included in-depth interviews with various HR Managers who offered examples and reasons for their actions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).

The sample included 19 HR Managers from 19 different medium sized organizations (organizations consisting of 100-1000 employees). Twelve of these were classified as knowledge-intensive organizations while the remaining seven were classified having Mechanic bureaucracy. Knowledge-intensive organizations were defined as such not only based on the quantity and quality of knowledge that is required in order to produce their products, but also when the organizational structure was characterized as flat, when workers switched positions with high frequency, when development was characterized as short-term, when role definitions were vague, and when human capital was perceived as central and important (Barhami & Evans, 2005).

By contrast, an organization was classified as "Mechanic" when the division of work was clear, roles and responsibilities were defined, work procedures are standardized, and many specifications are observed (Mintzberg, 1979). The primary assumption of this study was that various differences would be identified between the role perceptions of HR Managers in the two organization types. The age of all respondents was over 30 and their distribution of gender was 7 men and 12 women. The study included in-depth interviews with all HR Managers for the purpose of understanding the job experience of their position and the significance they attached to such an experience (Shakedi, 2003; Hadar & Hotam, 2012). In order to determine the type of role perception and conflict management style, the conceptual "Ideal type" technique introduced by Weber (Gerth et al, 1991) was employed. The study included review of three approaches to role perception: Mechanic, Organic and Strategic, and three conflict management styles: Competitive, Compromising and Strategic. The managers were classified as belonging to one of the three perception types whenever the majority of statements they made during their interview were compliant with one of the types. The same logic was applied for their classification into conflict management styles. The 'mechanic' role perception approach was classified based on statements which indicated that much of the manager's time was devoted to the execution of administrative tasks and procedures, as well as on statements that indicated the separation of authority between the management and employees (Shenhav, 1995), in all matters concerned with the execution of management decisions, the execution of CEO orders, management of the organization's human resource in place of immediate supervisors, and various statements that suggested a specific attitude towards workers based on their position within the organization.

The 'organic' role perception approach was classified based on statements which indicated that much of the manager's time was devoted to the handling of worker problems and was directed towards the individual, accompaniment of various organization processes, was characterized by a lesser degree of vocational independence, assistance to immediate supervisors in management of human resources, and statements that suggested the manager's high availability for handling of employee appeals.

The 'strategic' role perception approach was classified based on statements which indicated that much of the manager's time was devoted to communication with management and handling of cross-organizational problems, participation in organizational processes, open communication with the CEO and considerable vocational independence, implementation of processes for management of HR at a senior management level, and an overall system understanding from which the attitude towards employees is derived. The 'Competitive' conflict management style was classified based on statements indicating support for interests of one side of a conflict, strong resolution and firmness in situations of conflict, the importance of clarifying positions and statements that suggested a lack of concern in situations of conflict or dissatisfaction with the concerns of the other side.

The 'Compromising' conflict management style was classified based on statements that revealed the respondent's tendency to allow other managers to resolve conflict, attempts to reconcile between the parties, attempts to preserve a proper relationship between employees, a willingness to make concessions during negotiations and other statements that suggested identification of partial solutions that would satisfy both parties. The 'Integrative' conflict management style was classified based on statements that indicate the respondent's tendency to soften emotions during charged situations, the importance given to the preservation of proper interpersonal relationships and good communications, channeling of conflicts towards a more positive discourse (directing discussions towards topics on which both parties agree), bringing of conflicts to an immediate and open discussion and statements suggesting assumption of responsibility for the resolution of conflicts. Two other management styles - "Renunciation" and "Avoidance" – which were defined as part of the interpersonal conflict management styles model (Rahim, 1983) - were not employed in this study because they were not widely used by organizations because of structural constraints that require the resolution of conflicts. However, retroactively, it became evident some statements made during interviews were compliant with these styles.

5. Findings

An analysis of all statements made by the respondents (HR Managers), in accordance with the criteria for classification of role perceptions, revealed that the majority (not all) of respondents who are employed in low-tech organizations had adopted the Mechanic role perception approach. By contrast, the majority of respondents employed in knowledge-intensive organizations had adopted the Organic or Strategic approaches instead.

Table 1: Distribution of HR managers' role perceptions by organization sort

HR Managers in knowledge-intensive Organizations	HR Managers in Traditional Organizations	Role Perception
2	4	Mechanic approach
6	2	Organic approach
4	1	Strategic approach

5.1 Statements Classified as Compliant with the Mechanic Approach

Respondent N', HR Manager at a government organization that employs over 500 employees, revealed that most of her time is spent handling administrative issues and paperwork, which makes it difficult for her to promote the HR department in many areas such as: seminars and training for various worker sectors and computerization of processes. The place is old-fashioned, with old-fashioned methods.

...everything is done by hand, there is no software, the employees are of old school type ... My supervisor stops various processes, because he opposes progress ... He thinks I am his secretary and so he treats me accordingly. Everything ends up on my desk: Employees who move from one residence to another, new addresses ... I have a tray stacked with paperwork, in the next morning it is full once again.

Respondent A', HR Manager at an organization that employs approx. 100 employees, had hoped management would assign her with various responsibilities when she entered office. However, in reality, it became apparent she is not a part of the decision-making processes which are associated with HR Management - a fact which has limited her ability to manage various fields that are a part of her role. On many occasions, management decisions provoked conflicts, but she reported that it was difficult for her to back them when dealing with employees because she was not part of the decision making process to begin with. According to A', the majority of her time is spent handling administrative tasks while she would prefer to invest more time in employee development and training, but is forced to respond to concrete management requirements on a daily basis as a result of the absence of clear guidelines and advance planning.

Respondent S', HR Manager at a public organization that employs approx. 1000 employees, executes CEO instructions and handles administrative tasks and procedures. Tasks are assigned to him "from above" without him participating in their definition and design. S' is not in a position to initiate ideas or suggest modern HR management perceptions. He is primarily engaged in handling routine tasks that are assigned to him by the organization management.

We meet once a week [with the CEO – R.M and O.A.], and he assigns tasks, for example, to organize an annual work conference with an Outstanding Employee. I forward the tasks to my own managers ... and each task undergoes the same process, for example, I may be asked to lay off 10 % of the employees...

The distribution of role perceptions of the respondents is detailed in a table presented below, and as mentioned, it appears most HR Managers employed in traditional organizations were classified as having a mechanic approach. However, there are HR Managers of knowledge-intensive organizations that also fell under this category, and several managers of traditional organizations that were inclined more towards the strategic approach. The findings suggest that the type of organization in which the HR Manager is employed is a major factor affecting the perception of his role.

5.2 The 'Organic' Role Perception Approach as Expressed by the Respondents

Most HR Managers in knowledge-intensive organizations were characterized as having an organic role perception approach. From their statements it appears that much of their time is spent implementing organizational processes that are received from the organization, providing advice and support to professional managers within the organization, placement of emphasis on attitude to employees and maintaining an open door policy. For example, A', HR Manager at a knowledge-intensive organization that employs approx. 300 employees said the following:

vision a HR Manager who serves as an address for needs, for wishes, for all matters concerning company personnel, for managers, he should be the one and only address ... I was hoping to see myself as a 'one stop shop'. I am a HR Manager, an executive, an economist, that is, if the air conditioning system or telephone stops working, workers complain. If the car breaks down, it's the end of the world. If the workspace is not clean, he complains. I support workers who come to me as a 'one stop shop'

In accordance with the fundamentals of the Organic approach to perception of roles, A' supports professional managers, assists them in implementation of processes within the organization, and believes in the provision of personal and equal care for each and every employee.

My role is to assist vice presidents in managing processes ... you must have the type of personality that enables all employee' to feel comfortable walking in ... I, for example, unequivocally view managers the same as I do employees. How accountable are they? If an employee resigns am I responsible? I personally believe HR Managers are responsible for employee recruitment, preservation and happiness...

A' is involved in all processes that concern employees. He mediates between managers whenever required to do so. He feels it is important he remains available and appreciated. He believes that all managers and employees feel comfortable approaching him regarding any subject. D', HR Manager at a large food company that employs approx. 1000 employees, maintains an Organic approach to perception of roles, and supported both employees and managers during a restructuring process the organization underwent from a conglomerate consisting of several companies which conducted their business independently, to a single organization which provides shared services to all. Veteran employees, who have become customized to rigid work habits over the years, were suddenly expected to make a significant change as a result of the transition from a small family-sized business to a global organization that required innovative work methods.

As a HR Manager that is characterized by her organic role perception approach, D' is responsible for the communication between professional managers and employees at the Human Resources office. As such, D' handles all recruitment and dismissal processes, and examines the suitability of employees to their role throughout the year. D' accompanies workers during the dismissal process, after having reviewed their conformity to their role and to new requirements, which are a result of the transformation process.

M', HR Manager at a global knowledge-intensive organization, ascribes great importance to her role as supporter and adviser to managers. She assists employees and managers in coping with transitional processes within the organization, initiates training sessions and other activities for implementation of the organization's values, and directs both managers and employees to departments that are relevant to their needs.

I'm very careful to not do the manager's job. My job is to give him tools, advise him, not to do the work for him ... I'm responsible for the implementation of organizational processes: mobilization, evaluation, wage raises, promotion, executive values, formulation of a vision, administrative processes...

B', a HR Manager who is characterized by his organic role perception approach and works in a governmental organization that has been undergoing a gradual privatization process, believes his role is to assist managers in managing their human resources, to provide support and assistance to employees, and to handle various issues whenever he is requested to do so. B' considers his role as one that mediates between professional managers and their employees:

An employee requests an urgent meeting, the manager tells him to wait... I hate such situations ... When a manager approaches me and tells me we must take action against a certain employee, it is obvious to me that the manager should give me a full account of what he did regarding the matter ... When a manager tells me that he plans to give an employee a lower bonus, I ask how does this stand with the fact that he gave him a high work evaluation. If he does not go through me, there is no point in going to the CEO, I'm talking about good managers ... when you do your homework at this level, most of the requests you submit to the CEO are supported ... as part of my job, I got to know all of the employees quite well.

5.3 The 'Strategic' Role Perception Approach as Expressed by the Respondents

HR Managers who are characterized by their strategic approach to role perception devote much of their time into interaction with management and handling of cross-organizational problems. They participate in organizational processes, testify as to proper and open communications with the CEO, enjoy independence in their role, are engaged in implementation of HR management processes on a senior management level and display a broad understanding of the system. M', a HR Manager who is characterized by his Strategic approach to role perception and is employed in tourism based organization, considers his role as a leader in organizational culture, promoter of legislative issues, developer of effective relationships, trust and communications with the CEO, and divides his time accordingly.

I enjoy complete vocational independence [from the CEO – R.M. and O.A] which stems from two considerations: personal confidence and the fact that I am a professional. Work here is characterized by the need to change corporate culture. Today it is unacceptable to dismiss employees, change employment conditions or mobilize employees without a hearing. There are many issues that I promote out of belief, such as community involvement.

Y' describes a solution she had formulated for dealing with motivation problems in one of the work teams in her organization:.... *And then I started hearing that people were depressed about the move, so we decided something must be done. We formulated a process; I hired an independent consultant for a day outside the office. What happened was that the team defined to itself why the move was good, they explained to themselves what the benefits were and were successful in understanding what could be achieved by way of the process. The work accomplished was very good indeed. It was my initiative...*

S', a HR Manager who is characterized by his Strategic approach to role perception and is employed in a knowledge-intensive organization, describes his role as a consultant and partner.

Partnership is the primary tool in promotion of processes, there is nothing like it ... the significance of partnership is the added value you bring. If you are incapable of bringing added value, you are not a partner ... If the manager's experience is that he is in great need of human resource and then the experience is one of partnership.

M', a HR Manager who is characterized by her Strategic approach to role perception and is employed in a knowledge-intensive organization, believes the development of proper managers within the organization is second to no other issue in terms of importance.

Managers that were characterized as having a strategic role perception led and implemented new initiatives within their organization, pointed out good communications and trust with professional managers and CEO, considered themselves as professionals and spoke of the need for cooperation and bringing of added value to the organization.

Table 2 demonstrates that most managers employed at knowledge-intensive organizations were classified as either Compromising or Integrative in style. By contrast, a breakdown of managers employed in traditional organizations shows conflict management styles are more divided. The following data suggests that the type of organization in which the manager is employed most probably influences his approach to role perception. Most HR managers employed in traditional organizations were classified as having a mechanic approach, while most of those in knowledge-intensive organizations were classified as either organic or strategic.

Furthermore, one can see that most HR Managers employed in knowledge-intensive organizations tended towards either compromising or Integrative conflict management styles.

Table 2 - Distribution of Respondents Based on Conflict Management Style

HR Managers in knowledge-intensive Organizations	HR Managers in Traditional Organizations	Conflict management Style
1	3	Competitive
7	3	Compromising
4	1	Integrative

5.4 Statements Suggesting a 'Competitive' Conflict Management Style among HR Managers

HR Managers with a mechanic role perception approach tended to employ a competitive conflict management style which is characterized by siding with management during resolution of conflicts, assertively, out of belief that every conflict has a winning side and losing side (Fisher & Uri, 1981) and that management should be the winning side.' clarifies his position in dealing with employees: "I would tell the employee how I would have done things and then the employee has two options: to do is as you told him, or not ..."S' considers himself a mediator between the parties in conflict. Although he uses the term "tolerance", he does not allow parties to reach a solution, and does not believe that there could be two "winning" sides. According to him, he is the one that is responsible for resolving conflicts, and for this reason he sides with one side in order to make his decision.

Y' believes that as HR Manager, any employee demands concerning the terms of their employment require careful examination on his part, and basically brings about the premise phrase of "them", the workers, and "us", the management. Furthermore, it brings about an additional dimension of position that involves the protection of management against the employees. He does not consider himself as one that is there to represent employees, take care of their welfare needs or promote organizational justice. He is there solely for the purpose of protecting laws and contracts that serve the board. He stands guard, because many employees take advantage of the fact that most employment contracts are old, and hope that with the passage of time various terms and agreements that were reached with them would be "forgotten".

M', who is employed at a knowledge-intensive organization, expects his employees to resolve their own conflicts and does not consider himself an organizational mediator in any way. He supports management and believes that workers who have a bad working relationship with their immediate supervisors should leave the organization.

There are workers who report to me directly, I tell them to solve their problems on their own, if they are unable to, I make a decision ... if they are unable to think and realize that they must solve the problem on their own before approaching me.

Table 3: A comparison between expressions of integrative conflict management and resolution style and strategic approach expressions

Expressions Suggesting an Integrative Conflict Management & Resolution Style	Expressions Suggesting a Strategic Approach to Perception of Role
1. Attempts to calm matters down during charged situations. 2. Emphasis on maintaining proper interpersonal relationships and good communications. 3. Channeling of conflicts towards positive discourse (directing discussions towards topics on which both parties agree). 4. Bringing of conflicts to an immediate and open discussion. 5. Assumption of responsibility for the resolution of conflicts.	1. Most of the HR Manager's time was devoted to communication with management and handling of cross-organizational problems. 2. Participation in organizational processes. 3. Observance of open communication with the company CEO. 4. Considerable vocational independence. 5. Implementation of processes for management of HR at a senior management level. 6. An overall system understanding from which the attitude towards employees is derived.

5.5 Statements Suggesting a 'Compromising' Conflict Management Style among HR Managers

The Compromising conflict management style is characterized, among other things, by expressions that suggest a tendency to shift the responsibility for conflict resolution to professional managers,

To preserve a proper relationship between employees and to find partial solutions that would satisfy both parties during negotiations. Those who adopt this style of management stand behind the scenes, as observers, providing support and advice. They do not believe in having a joint discussion with both sides of a conflict, but in holding separate discussions. In the event of conflicts bearing heavy implications, when there is concern lawsuits may be filed, or when high ranking officials are involved, they tend to consult with external consultants. In this study, it turns out, most respondents had adopted this style, and most were employed in knowledge-intensive organizations.

B', HR Manager at a knowledge-intensive organization, is certain that the role of HR Managers is to assist managers. She does not believe that investing efforts in the employees would necessarily yield results that are beneficial to the organization. "My main role is to support managers because they are the driving force behind the organization. Empower your managers and information will flow and a good atmosphere will prevail. The key is in the managers, not the employees".

L', HR Manager who works in a traditional organization, is certain that the role of HR Managers is to assist managers in communicating with their employees. "I have to help managers think, ask the right questions, so that they would be able to drive people as they should. If I do that, the manager is not doing his job. I work with him, not in his place".

SR', a HR Manager at a knowledge-intensive organization, also demonstrates a compromising conflict management style. He does not believe his role is to manage the conflict, but rather to assist the side that approached him for help.

Essentially, the role of human resources is to bring value to managers, to help them perform their job and assist them whenever they encounter problems ... whenever a manager tells me he is unable to promote some matter, I will sit with him. In most cases I will sit with one side only ... the one that asked for assistance. It could be a manager or a worker, colleagues; it could be that the person who approached me is a senior executive or an assistant manager. I'll sit with the individual and try to understand what troubles him, what's difficult for him in the dynamics, and I will suggest my own opinion of how he should handle the matter. I won't initiate a discussion with the other side to the conflict. He who took the initiative and approached me, I will help him fulfill his responsibility. I don't call up two days later to check. I give advice; whoever wants to take it is welcome. I usually wait around to see what happens. There are those who never come back.

HR Managers who are characterized by their compromising management style will strive to achieve "industrial peace" within the organization, and as far as they are concerned, the resolution of conflicts is under responsibility of the managers. Their role primarily involves, as mentioned, the provision of assistance and advice after having been approached by managers under their own initiative, not that of the HR Manager.

Table 4: A comparison between expressions of compromising conflict management and resolution style and organic approach expressions

Expressions Suggesting a Compromising Conflict Management & Resolution Style	Expressions Suggesting an Organic Approach to Perception of Role
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Tendency of the HR Manager to enable other managers to resolve conflicts 2. Attempts to reconcile between the parties, maintain proper relationships between employees 3. Willingness to make concessions and compromise during negotiations. 4. Proposal of partial solutions that may satisfy both sides of the conflict. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Much of the HR Manager's time is spent handling employee problems and is primarily geared towards the individual. 2. Support organizational processes. 3. Lesser degree of vocational independence. 4. Provision of assistance to managers in managing the human resources working under them. 5. High availability of the HR Manager for employee needs.

5.6 Statements Suggesting an 'Integrative' Conflict Management Style among HR Managers

HR Managers who are characterized by their Integrative conflict management style place emphasis on maintenance of proper interpersonal relationships and effective communications, channeling of conflicts towards more positive discussions, initiating immediate an open discussions, assumption of responsibility for resolution of conflicts, and promoting discourse regarding agreements and understandings.

A number of HR Managers pointed out that they consider themselves mediators between managers of different departments whose primary interest is to represent the organizational interests. Only five respondents were characterized as such, four of which are employed in knowledge-intensive organizations.

Y., HR Manager at a global knowledge-intensive organization, told us how she had dealt with a certain conflict between two employees working in the same department. She believes her role is to formulate effective communication mechanisms during conflicts. She does not believe her purpose is to resolve conflicts, but rather to bring both sides of the conflict to the discussion table.

L', HR Manager at an innovative global knowledge-intensive organization who's matrix type structure results in frequent and repeated conflicts of similar nature due to the rather high mobility rate of workers between departments, told our researchers:

I feel that what allows you to resolve conflicts more smoothly is that you begin to understand how forces work and you learn to harness them ... HR management is a type of relationship specialty that requires its managers to sit within the organization and assist in improvement of various processes by injecting them with emotional intelligence whenever necessaryWhen something like this happens [an employee who wants to switch from one team to another – R.M. &O.A.], you obviously involve the manager, however you do so delicately.

M' describes the distinction between offering solutions and maintaining transparency. Professional managers expect her to provide solutions in conflict situations, however, M' believes that in a transparent process, which is aimed at bringing the parties to the table in order to find a solution on their own, managers will come up with their own solutions which are more applicable to them.

I believe you're more of a professional if you let people arrive at answers on their own ... getting them to reflect and ask questions.... One case involved two managers that could not get along for years and now they work together. Another case involved a conflict between a team leader and a very important employee. From a place of hatred, it ended up by them getting to recognize each other... I believe there should be a balance between providing immediate answers and providing tools or initiating transparency.

HR Managers who are characterized by their integrative conflict management style tend to make situations more transparent to professional managers by asking questions that are aimed at clarifying the needs of each party to the conflict for the purpose of assisting them to resolve the conflict on their own. A small number of HR Managers which were interviewed had participated in a mediation course that promotes Integrative conflict management style and have adopted this skill as part of their own role perception within the organization.

6. Discussion

As shown in table 5, HR Managers who are characterized by their mechanic approach to Role Perception (Shenhav, 1995; Morgan, 2006), tend to resolve conflicts by competitive style. Study findings indicate that out of six HR Managers who were categorized as having a mechanic approach, four were characterized as having a competitive conflict management style. It appears that HR Managers with a mechanic role perception approach, which were classified as having a compromising or integrative conflict management styles were to some extent influenced by the type of organization in which they work and the degree of vocational independence they enjoy.

Table 5: Distribution of Respondents based on their approach to Role Perception and Conflict Management Style

Strategic Role Perception Approach	Organic Role Perception Approach	Mechanic Role Perception Approach	Conflict Management Style
--	--	4	Competitive
3	4	1	Compromising
5	1	1	Integrative

HR Managers who are characterized by their organic approach to Role Perception (Daft, 2015), tend to resolve conflicts by compromising style. Study findings indicate that out of six HR Managers who were categorized as having an organic approach, five were characterized as having a compromising conflict management style.

It appears that HR Managers that were categorized as having an integrative conflict management style, employed mediation tools that provided them with a broad perspective and offered creative solutions such as: identification of the needs of one side to a conflict by employing outside experts, despite the fact that the HR Manager was in fact in possession of tools that could have been used to resolve the conflict.

In addition, it was also found that HR Managers who were characterized as having a strategic role perception (Ulrich & Wayne, 2005) tended to resolve conflicts by integrative style. Study findings indicate that out of eight HR Managers who were categorized as having an organic approach, five were characterized as having an integrative conflict management style, while three were characterized as compromising. HR Managers who have a strategic role perception approach consider themselves members of the organization's management. As such, they participate in decision-making, drive processes, and enjoy effective communication with the CEO and other executives. The model presented by Neal and Griffin (2006) described three circles that make up the role perception of HR Managers: personal experience, expectations of the organization, and personal approach. When the behavioral expectations of a given HR Manager are identical in all three circles, his role perception is coherent. When there is a difference between the behavioral expectations of the separate circles, the HR Manager must find a way to bridge the gap.

The first circle that makes up the role perception approach is that of 'personal experience'. One of the major components of 'personal experience' is that of educational and professional background. HR Managers who are characterized by career paths that do not include managerial experience, or those who have no HR educational background, were characterized as having a mechanic or strategic approach to role perceptions. By contrast, managers who came from a background including social work or organizational consultancy were characterized as having an organic role perception approach.

The second circle that makes up the role perception approach is the organization's expectations from the HR Manager. Study findings indicate that perception of roles in organizations is influenced by the type of organization in which they are employed, in other words, whether they are a government/public, private, knowledge-intensive, traditional, global or local organization.

In Government/public organizations, worker unions and other veteran employees with permanent tenure greatly influence the roles of the HR Manager. Accordingly, HR Managers employed in such organizations were primarily characterized as having a mechanic approach to role perception and a competitive conflict management style. Statements made by the study respondents are saturated with military terminology that supports the separation between management and employees ("Us" and "them") and expressions citing victory or loss (Mash, 1999). It appears that in such organizations, the HR Manager's role perception and conflict management style are not influenced by experience and socialization processes only, but also by the employment arrangements of the employees (collective agreements).

In knowledge-intensive organizations that serve as local branches of global companies, it was found that the approach to perception of roles was predominantly organic. Interviews included statements of support for employees and managers, responsibility for implementation of global processes in Israeli branches and their conformity to the relevant organizational culture. Some managers testified they chose to employ a compromising conflict management style, while others chose the integrative style. They made it clear that the management and resolution of conflicts was under responsibility of the professional managers, however, some did provide examples of cases in which they were forced to intervene in place of the professional manager.

In private organizations and global organizations which have established their headquarters in Israel, the approach to role perceptions was predominantly strategic. HR Managers defined themselves as partners, as having open and effective communication with the CEO and other executives. It appears much of their time is devoted to organizational development and support of strategic decisions. In terms of conflict management, most cited the need to initiate creative solutions in order to satisfy both parties.

Often, following several years of experience within the organization, HR Managers formulate a role perception that is consistent with the organization's corporate culture, such as: a change in their own role as a result of a corporate acquisition or privatization. One manager testified that once he understood he had an opportunity to dissolve the workers union during the privatization process, he did so. In practice, his role perception had changed and was expressed by his attitude towards the resolution of conflicts within the organization.

Generally speaking, HR Managers employed in companies that were purchased by others expressed dissatisfaction from the move because of the transition in their role from one that included relative vocational independence to one that required adherence to directives laid down by new management. HR Managers which had been serving in the same position for many years testified that their role had significantly changed over the years: collective agreements with the employees had changed into individual contracts, the power of the workers union had decreased, and new automatic systems which reduced the need for many administrative tasks were employed.

The third circle of the Neal and Griffin (2006) model is the personal approach of HR Manager to their own job. Respondents cited desirable personality traits such as integrity, role model, broad thinking and empathy. Most HR Managers who participated in this study testified that their position did provide them with a certain degree of freedom to express their own worldview. In some cases, their role perception contradicted that of the CEO and other executives. For example, CEOs who believe HR Managers should simply carry out administrative tasks, or HR Managers who are convinced it is possible to streamline administrative work and focus on the support and development of employees.

Many HR Managers pointed out that the management of HR is still not perceived as a serious discipline such as engineering and programming is. They argued there are still organizations that do not allocate any resources to HR management and perceive it as no more than an office that generates administrative reports. Some claimed there was a significant gap between the level of professionalism prevalent in development departments and that which prevails in HR and Marketing. According to them, such gaps stem up from the fact that many knowledge-intensive companies grew out of an orientation for development, while other parts of the production chain, such as marketing and HR management, only developed at a later time (Lawrence & Lorsch in: Scott and Davis 2015). Some suggested that the forgoing reality is related to Israeli culture in which every person is an HR management expert.

Notwithstanding, despite the attempt to identify a link between the perception of roles and conflict management styles, there were managers who testified that they tried to match their management style to the type of conflict at hand. There are organizations that require a certain style of management which is best suited to their specific corporate culture and employee population. One example would be that of an organization in which most conflicts are somehow connected with the power of the workers union. In such cases, HR Managers are forced to employ a competitive style, even though their own inclination would be towards a more integrative or compromising style. HR Managers are forced to respond to changes and updates in the field of labor laws. In cases where an employee threatens to file a legal suit, the attitude towards the conflict is different. It is not always possible to resolve a conflict using the tools that are at the HR Manager's disposal. Sometimes there is need for assistance by an attorney or outside consultant.

As a result, because of the power and influence of such significant intervening variables, the relationship between cause and effect, which lies at the heart of scientific research, is under great doubt. Furthermore, it's difficult to determine the "direction" of influence, like that of the famous "Chicken or the egg" dilemma. Accordingly, it remains unclear whether HR Managers adopt a given conflict management style as a result of a given situation, such as a militant workers union, or if their conflict management style is the result of their role perception, as this study originally suggested. This source of influence on the role perception of HR Managers is therefore unclear. Do HR Managers adopt a conflict management style as a result of a given situation, such as a militant workers union, or is their conflict management style a result of their own role perception, as this study originally suggested?

The constraints affecting this present study are many, and not only because of its nature as a qualitative study. Qualitative studies by nature raise questions regarding validity and reliability, and render data processing more difficult. In addition, the ability to make generalizations is limited because the size of the study sample is rather small, non-representative, and there are difficulties in separating between the variables (Hazan & Gibton, 2006). The transfer of information from interviews into written research is complex and reflective. There is no way to avoid the researcher's own interpretation, so the eventual findings that are obtained have in fact undergone many adaptations (Denzin, 2007). This study demonstrates the complexities that characterize HR management in organizations. In recent years, the field has been gaining much popularity and academic growth on a global basis and in Israel in particular. It is possible there is a gap between the "ideal" role, as studied in various academic programs, and that which exists in reality. One may consider conducting a similar study in other countries in order to compare findings regarding role perceptions and conflict management styles.

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