

QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF STRATEGIES USED IN INDIVIDUAL APPROACH WITH LONG-TERM UNEMPLOYED CLIENTS

Lenka Caletková*, Marie Pindáková

Faculty of Social Studies, University of Ostrava, Československá 16, Ostrava 702 00, Czech Republic

Abstract

Previous research on the application of the individual approach in social work service organisations shows that institutional guidelines of the profession operate in social work practice in different organisational contexts. The paper's intention is to describe the organisational barriers and supportive conditions that professional counsellors face, and the strategies of conduct they use when trying to apply an individual approach to their long-term unemployed clients. Based on the identified themes arisen in past qualitative research representing modifications of the individual approach by counsellors as a response to perceived organisational barriers and supportive conditions, we formulated our hypotheses. We chose a quantitative research strategy. The research sample was formed through a total sample of all workers holding a position in organisations providing professional counselling and/or social services to the long-term unemployed in the Moravian-Silesian region. The region has for long been ranked among those regions with the highest number of job seekers and a high proportion of the long-term unemployed. To collect data, we opted for an online questionnaire survey. A design of the online questionnaire was thematically divided into areas according to the sub-research questions: characteristics of an individual approach, organisational barriers, and supportive organisational conditions in its provision. We used a statistical method of data analysis. The sub-results of the research point to the importance of the reactions of counsellors who, through their actions and conduct, create change in institutional guidelines.

Keywords: individual approach, long-term unemployed, social work, counselling, labour office

1. INTRODUCTION

Today, the long-term unemployed are a very heterogeneous group, often facing complex challenges and accumulated problems in their life situation. Extensive research carried out in the Czech Republic and abroad clearly and repeatedly shows that the majority of long-term unemployed job seekers are persons with multiple social, educational, or health disabilities (Sirovátka, Winkler & Žižlavský 2009; Sirovátka 2011; Kotíková 2003; Percy-Smith 2000). Thus, when providing assistance to the long-term unemployed, the need for the involvement of different types of professionals active in various types of organisations and the importance of addressing their life situations in an individual and non-standardised way becomes apparent.

Social work service organisations, i.e., organisations providing specialized counselling and/or social services to long-term unemployed clients, create space for individual casework with this group of clients, thus constituting one of the possibilities to increase their labour market involvement. The provision of these services is based on an individual approach as an important institutional rule of the helping professions. However, the institutional rule is one thing and its implementation in concrete helping activities and services is another. It is therefore very important to pay attention to the performance of these services, which is defined not only by the professional institution but also by the broader societal and organisational conditions, the context of which it takes place (Healy 2005; Fook 2002).

Thus, this paper aims to describe the organisational barriers and supportive conditions that counsellors face and the strategies they employ in applying an individual approach to long-term unemployed clients.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Organisational forms of assistance to long-term unemployed clients

Long-term unemployment accompanies the development of the labour market in all developed countries. Often, despite favourable economic growth, it presents a persistent problem. The reasons for this can be seen in the links between factors and processes that contribute to its formation, as well as in the need for individualised and comprehensive tools to address it. Long-term unemployment can bring a number of negative social impacts on the lives of the unemployed and thus constitutes both the current and future social problem. Groups of people at risk of long-term unemployment (people with disabilities, graduates, young people, older people, women, people with low qualifications or members of ethnic minorities) are traditionally defined as target groups of activation programmes (Winkler 2018).

Long-term unemployment has a great deal of objective and subjective causes, such as low skill set, low motivation and/or specifics of a local labour market. Exclusion from the labour market is connected with social exclusion and it is difficult to determine whether the primary problem is unemployment or whether long-term unemployment is a consequence of pre-existing social and other problems (Matoušek, Kolářková & Kodymová 2010).

The long-term unemployed (LTU) therefore represent a diverse group of persons for whom even the job search itself can be a very difficult task. Their access to the labour market can also be hindered by the attitude of employers due to prejudice, fear, lack of interest, etc. These persons are then often recurrent clients of a labour office and recipients of social benefits and allowances (Zormanová 2017).

Labour offices, implementing active employment policy instruments, are one of the organisational forms of assistance to LTU clients. The Labour Office of the Czech Republic (LO CR) is a strongly hierarchical organisation consisting of a general directorate, regional branches and contact offices. The contact offices (hereinafter referred to as labour offices) are organisational units of the regional branches.

The counselling process at the labour office includes the basic processes of job placement and counselling that aim to meet the regulations of Act No. 435/2004 Coll., on Employment, and Decree No. 518/2004 Coll., which implements this Act. These are the processes that take place after the registration of a job placement application has been completed. They involve the jobseeker and the staff of job placement and counselling divisions. If a jobseeker remains on the register for a period over 12 months, he or she is considered the long-term unemployed. It is in the interest of the job seeker to have his/her situation assessed and activated by another working professional who will discuss with him/her in an individual counselling interview the possible career options and barriers to employment (Freibergová & Vepřková 2013).

The activities of the Labour Office include counselling, job search for job seekers, and employee search for employers who offer vacancies through the Labour Office. LTU clients are also offered various projects to help them find employment and increase their competitiveness in the labour market through counselling, retraining courses, internships, and supported jobs (Zormanová 2017).

In addition to labour offices, counselling services for LTU clients are also provided by social service organisations, which are non-profit organisations that focus their activities on helping LTU clients to return to the labour market.

The social services and methods of the counselling process in social service organisations are adapted to the defined target group. An essential requirement of the counselling process is the provision of basic social counselling. These organisations are governed in their activities by the Social Services Act (Act No. 108/2006 Coll.), which defines a social service as an activity or a set of activities that provide assistance and support to persons to help with social inclusion or as a prevention of social exclusion. The social assistance provided must preserve human dignity, be based on individually determined needs of persons, activate persons, support the increase of their independence, motivate them to activities that do not lead to the long-term persistence or deepening of an adverse social situation, and also strengthen their social inclusion. Social services must follow these principles and adapt their methods in their approach to clients.

As part of the counselling process and in the performance of their profession, employment counsellors have various tools at their disposal to help LTU clients given the organisational set-up. The above laws and organisational guidelines are then reflected in their strategies of conduct when providing services to LTU clients. Thus, these workers have some space for their own interpretation of these guidelines (Lipsky 1980) and play an active role (Healy 2005, 2012) in applying an individual approach as an institutional rule of the profession.

2.2 Individual approach to long-term unemployed clients

In the real organisational and inter-organisational interactions of employment policy stakeholders, we can observe the impacts of institutional guidelines on actual activities of people in specific conditions. These institutional regulations act as part of an external environment of the organisation, but also as part of internal activities through the interpretation of their meaning in a particular organisational environment. Personal identities of individual stakeholders are also asserted in organisational relationships. These stakeholders (officials, social workers, LTU clients, employers), through the interpretation of institutional guidelines, organisational standards, but also real situations, determine their behaviour, which in turn has an impact on the implementation of the individual approach (Winkler 2011).

Employment counsellors working in social work service organisations, i.e., labour offices and organisations providing social services to LTU clients, apply an individual approach when working with clients. Available research shows that the individual approach concept in working with LTU is discussed by many authors. We can find both terms in the literature – a *personalised* approach (Kampen & Tonkens 2019) and an *individualised* approach (Nothdurfter 2016).

An individual approach in working with jobseekers must be part of any counselling work, just as it is in a job placement process. It is an approach that takes into consideration the individual needs and situation of the client and allows the worker to elicit more information from the client, which is important for future cooperation. At the same time, mutual communication between the worker and the job seeker can help to remove any barriers in the counselling process and achieve better results (Kotíková, Schebelle & Vychová 2015). The counselling activities for the long-term unemployed are intended to provide information, expert advice and assistance in choosing a suitable job and in recommending suitable retraining options. This is all done with regard to specific needs, demands, abilities, health status, and labour market situation (Schavel & Oláh 2010; Bouget et al. 2015).

Social work puts significant emphasis on the professional relationship that exists between the worker and the client. The authors Levická & Levická (2015) understand it as a system composed of three elements: social worker, client, and the environment. An individual approach is based on a proposition that a person is able to reflect on and be aware of his/her own values, while is capable of making an adequate change in order to achieve satisfaction in a particular area of his/her life (Navrátil 2001). Unemployed clients who often come to see a counsellor have employment potential but are confronted with various barriers. Based on this, there is a need for the counsellor to approach clients individually and to check his/her assumptions when working with the client (group of authors 2008). Professionals working with LTU clients must bear in mind that each client is a unique individual bearing different characteristics, problems, and needs, and therefore the procedure for dealing with his/her situation must always be set individually in relation to his/her personality, time and situational development of the problem (Kotíková, Schebelle & Vychová 2015).

Based on available surveys, *e.g., within the Microbus Project*, there is a need for constant motivation and encouragement in order not to lose the client's interest in cooperation (between client and worker) (group of authors 2008). The longer LTU clients are unemployed, the more support they are likely to need. The support and assistance offered must always be in line with the capabilities and individual needs of a particular LTU client (Bouget et al. 2015).

Using an individual approach does not mean that we deal with clients in private and alone, but primarily that we take into consideration their situation, problems, needs and limitations. The methods, forms and procedures of work must be used in accordance with the potential that clients bear. For an intervention to be effective, it is necessary to map the clients' personalities, including their abilities, competences,

skills, and expectations. At the same time, it is important that there is an adequate number of clients and workload per worker for several reasons. One of them is the fact that it is necessary for workers to have enough time to ensure individual case work with clients (Kotíková, Schebelle & Vychová 2015).

Previous research on the use of individual approach in social work service organisations (Caletková 2020) shows that professional counsellors, despite different organisational environments in which they operate, perceive some of the same characteristics of individual approach and encounter some of the same organisational barriers and supportive conditions in their profession. Institutional guidelines of the profession thus apply both, in social work practice and in different organisational contexts. The relationship between organisation's environment and workers is reciprocal. The follow-up quantitative research therefore seeks to find connections between barriers and supportive conditions when applying an individual approach and the strategies that professional counsellors subsequently apply when working with LTU clients.

3. METHODOLOGY

A quantitative research strategy was used in the research implementation (Punch 2008). The research aims to find out what types of organisational barriers and supportive conditions professional counsellors face and what strategies of conduct they use when applying an individual approach to long-term unemployed clients.

The research is based on the results of previous qualitative research (Caletková 2020), in which the themes (issues) representing modifications of individual approach by professional counsellors from a labour office and social work service organisations on perceived organisational barriers and supportive conditions were identified through semi-structured interviews. Thus, it is a sequential continuity of quantitative research to qualitative research, the findings (themes) of which, given the aim of the submitted research, were used to establish the following hypotheses:

H1: Ineffective areas of cooperation with LTU clients are related to the application of a defensive strategy of the employment service system and the structuring of individual approach by professional counsellors.

H2: Administrative barriers are related to the modification of individual approach by professional counsellors directed to help LTU clients.

H3: The specifics of the local labour market influence the use of individual approach by professional counsellors toward both, LTU clients and employers.

H4: The degree of decision-making autonomy influences the use of individual approach by professional counsellors toward LTU clients.

H5: Inter-organisational cooperation influences the use of individual approach by professional counsellors toward LTU clients.

H6: The differentiation of LTU clients by professional counsellors based on the clients' personal characteristics influences their choice of individual approach strategies.

The research sample was put together using a total sampling method in the selected administrative unit. Thus, all employees holding a position in organisations providing professional counselling and/or social services to the long-term unemployed in the Moravian-Silesian Region – the region with one of the highest numbers of job seekers and a high proportion of LTU persons. As of 31 May 2021, there were 89,741 LTU persons registered with the Labour Office of the Czech Republic, of which 18,380 were in the Moravian-Silesian Region (MoLSA 2021). We contacted a total of 22 contact offices of the Labour Office of the Czech Republic and the Regional Branch of the Moravian-Silesian Region (hereinafter referred to as labour office staff) and 57 non-profit organisations providing social and counselling services to the long-term unemployed (hereinafter referred to as social workers). A total of 125 respondents took part in a questionnaire survey, i.e., 77 employees of the labour office (62%) and 48 social workers (38%).

The data collection technique used was a non-standardized online questionnaire survey of our own design. Respondents were contacted through their work email addresses. The online questionnaire design was thematically divided into the following areas: characteristics of individual approach, organisational barriers, and supportive conditions in the organisation in using the approach. The online questionnaire included closed, semi-closed and open-ended questions. In the case of closed questions, respondents always chose from at least two predefined options. For the semi-closed questions, respondents could select multiple answers, plus the option of choosing the 'other' category, filling out their own answer. The first version of the online questionnaire was piloted by 8 respondents. Data collection then took place in June 2021.

The research used a statistical method of data analysis. Univariate analysis (descriptive statistics) was chosen for the first stage of the analysis, i.e., identification and acquisition of a description of barriers, supportive conditions, and choice of strategies (Holcomb 2016). Subsequently, bivariate, or multivariate analysis (inferential statistics) will be used in the next stage of the analysis in order to explore the relationship between barriers and supportive conditions in the provision of individual approach and the strategies that professional counsellors employ when working with the long-term unemployed.

This paper therefore presents partial results of the research that were evaluated quantitatively using descriptive analysis. Exploring the connections between barriers, supportive conditions and the choice of individual approach strategies, including open-ended answer options, will be the subject of further processing and is not part of the results presented in this paper.

The research followed the principles of ethical conduct (APA 2016) and completion of the questionnaire was voluntary and anonymous. Possible limitations of the research can be seen in the intentional sampling, which may compromise the representativeness of the research sample. Therefore, the research results cannot be generalised. Another limitation of the research can be seen in the tendency towards socially desirable answers of the respondents (Chylíková 2011).

4. RESULTS

Based on the analysis of the questionnaire survey, we found that the interviewed counsellors use an individual approach toward LTU clients in their work. 84% of the respondents stated that they always apply an individual approach, 15% tend to apply an individual approach, and 1% tend not to apply an individual approach. This shows that the individual approach is part of the respondents' work practices.

The results of the previous qualitative research indicated three areas in which professional counsellors perceive certain barriers to applying an individual approach to LTU clients: (1) barriers perceived in the behaviour and characteristics of LTU clients, (2) barriers perceived in the organisation's environment, and (3) barriers perceived in the external environment.

The perception of ineffective areas of cooperation with LTU clients led to the application of a defensive strategy of the employment service system and the structuring of individual approach by the labour office staff (H1). The research participants pointed to a conflict in expectations from cooperation on part of LTU clients and related this to their passive attitude and avoidance of the obligations arising from their registration with a labour office. According to the labour office staff, some LTU clients use the conditions of labour office registration for their own benefit and for various personal reasons want to remain in the register as long as possible without showing any interest in the offered vacancies. Most often, these "benefits" of registration are the payment of health insurance and the right to material need benefits. The perception of ineffective areas in the provision of individual approach provokes not only reactions from labour office staff in the form of adjustments to work practices, but also efforts to seek solutions to their clients' problems, such as increasing the frequency of meetings with LTU clients or intensifying labour office monitoring activities.

The partial data collected in the follow-up quantitative research shows that perceived passivity and a lack of interest on the part of LTU clients (26%) as well as conflicting expectations from cooperation (23%) are the most frequently listed sources of barriers in an individual approach to LTU clients from the respondents' perspective. A preference for no full-time employment was mentioned by 16% of

respondents, and barriers in inappropriate behaviour and deliberately influencing of the content of LTU clients' health certificates were both mentioned by 10% of respondents. Other barriers listed by respondents included e.g., pre-retirement age, distance learning, receiving an annuity, mental illness and alcoholism. Only 3% of all respondents perceived no barriers on the part of LTU clients.

Data analysis further revealed that in case of perceived barriers to an individual approach based on LTU clients' characteristics and behaviours, a total of 71% of respondents created their own variations of work practices and proposed solutions to change the client's attitude. 73% of social workers and 70% of labour office staff indicated that they try to motivate LTU clients and offer other solutions to the situation. 15% of all respondents stated that they develop their own work practices and proposals for solutions to prevent abuse of the services provided. Some respondents also reported using a combination of these two approaches. 6% of respondents reported using usual work practices. Even though the results of the two surveys agree on the perceived barriers on the part of LTU clients, we tend to reject hypothesis H1. Professional counsellors in the vast majority adapt their work practices in relation to the perceived barriers, but with the intention of changing the client's attitude and motivating him/her to solve his/her life situation.

In previous qualitative research we identified the administrative burden of professional counsellors to be one of the significant barriers to individual approach perceived in the organisational environment. Thus, some participants in previous research tended to apply work practices directed towards helping LTU clients (H2). The criteria for selecting LTU clients and including them in labour office projects and activities also appeared to limit immediate activation. Increased administration is also evident in the case of compliance or including a certain number of clients within the requirements of the supervisory authorities. Some participants pointed to the lack of consideration of the life situations of LTU clients in these regulations and showed rebellious behaviour to fulfil these work obligations.

Analysis of the quantitative research data shows a consensus in the perception of a high degree of administrative burden as the greatest source of barriers to apply an individual approach. There is less of a consensus among respondents on other barriers. Apart from the administrative burden (27%), labour office staff perceives as a barrier to an individual approach the criteria for including LTU clients in projects or activities (22%), the lack of time to use an individual approach (17%), the high number of clients per worker (15%), or shortcomings in the methodological setup of the service (11%). Social workers, on the other hand, perceive other, unlisted factors as the biggest barrier (33%) and, similar to labour office staff, high administrative burden (31%). The survey also revealed that one of the barriers is also complicated and lengthy procedures, legal limits, contradictory legal measures, and lack of cooperation between workers or departments within the same organisation.

When perceiving organisational barriers, professional counsellors choose work practices in 50% of the responses in an attempt to adapt the set rules to the client and his/her life situation (48% of labour office workers, 52% of social workers). The partial results thus far point to the acceptance of hypothesis H2 but will be subject to the next phase of result analysis.

The results of previous qualitative research also pointed to perceived barriers in the external environment, with which organisations engage in various forms of cooperation. Thus, the specifics of the local labour market came up when professional counsellors tried to apply an individual approach toward both the LTU clients and employers (H3). The labour office clients are not only job seekers but also employers who have reported vacancies in their organisations. They expect jobseeker referrals from the labour office staff. However, they often subsequently face reproaches from employers who shift responsibility for the client's inappropriate behaviour during the interview onto them. This puts labour staff workers in a conflicting situation as they are obliged to recommend LTU clients for employment despite their perceived passivity and refusal to work. The behaviour of these LTU clients makes it difficult for the labour office staff to use an individual approach not only toward their clients but also to the employers. Both, the labour office workers and social workers pointed to barriers in the external environment, which included low wages, setting conditions for welfare and social benefit payments, or perceived prejudices of employers to accept job seekers who have a disability, criminal record, and/or execution, despite their interest in the work position.

A total of 26% of respondents stated employers' bias and reluctance to employ LTU clients as the biggest source of barriers in the external environment. Other sources of barriers were identified as the limits of the local labour market, such as low wages or lack of job opportunities for LTU clients (23%) and 18% of respondents listed the lack of jobs for people with disabilities as a barrier. When comparing opinions of the labour office staff and social workers, the biggest difference was found in the case of the barrier defined as a setup of the conditions for social benefits payment. The labour office workers identified this option as the biggest barrier (25%), while the social workers saw it in employer prejudices (29%), and the setting of social benefits (13%). Answers also listed unrealistic expectations of some employers, executions, or commuting.

The respondents' responses to barriers based on the specifics of the local market is in 58% an effort to meet the needs of LTU clients as much as possible, which accounts for 75% of social workers and 47% of labour office workers. For 20% of all respondents, the aim is to try to meet the employer's requirements and to refer only suitable and competent clients. 14% of all respondents stated that they recommend vacancies to all clients regardless of their preference requirements. However, in comparison, this is a difference between respondents resulting from the characteristics of the organisations in which they work (21% of labour office workers, 4% of social workers). The partial research results so far point to the acceptance of hypothesis H3 but will be subject to the next phase of analysis of the results.

In previous qualitative research, the degree of decision-making autonomy was one of the supportive conditions for the application of individual approach by counsellors, which also influences their choice of work practices (H4). Social workers in particular perceived a large amount of decision-making space when working with LTU clients and reported that the client, rather than the organisational environment in which they provide an individual approach, holds more power to influence the form of individual approach. In contrast, labour office workers are guided in their work by the Employment Act, which they perceive as a governing law, as well as by internal directives and methodological guidelines.

The quantitative data analysis showed that social workers perceive a large space for decision-making about their choice of work practices (65%), whereas labour office workers indicated that they perceived limited discretionary space (70%). Despite the fact that a large proportion of both labour office workers (48%) and social workers (52%) try to adapt their work practices to the needs of LTU clients, the responses also show 22% of labour office workers and 27% of social workers meeting these requirements despite the perceived ineffectiveness of some organisational measures. However, the partial results thus far point to the acceptance of hypothesis H4.

Establishment of inter-organisational collaboration also emerged as one of the supportive conditions for the application of individual approach in previous qualitative research (H5). Social workers who succeeded in establishing forms of inter-organisational cooperation perceived the results of interconnected assistance to LTU clients as very effective and able to respond to diverse life situations of clients. Also, some labour office staff reacted very positively to the emerging collaboration with social service organisations and perceived its benefits and necessity.

According to the quantitative research respondents, the involvement of other professionals and interdisciplinary collaboration is a common part of their work practice, as well as providing contacts to other services (75%). Establishment of inter-organisational collaboration is not a common part of the work practices for 23% of respondents, however, facilitating contacts to other support services is done at the client's request. For only 2% of all respondents, collaboration with other professionals is not part of their common work practices and they do not provide other support services either.

The results also show that 81% of all respondents (90% of social workers, 75% of labour office workers) perceive the establishment of inter-organisational collaboration in the application of individual approach to LTU clients as beneficial and effective. 14% of all respondents have no experience of inter-organisational collaboration, and in terms of job comparisons this is more common among labour office workers (19%) compared to social workers (6%). Only 5% of all respondents perceive inter-organisational collaboration as ineffective and unbeneficial. Thus, the partial results thus far point to the acceptance of hypothesis H5.

The previous qualitative research also showed the finding that, based on everyday experiences, LTU clients are differentiated by professional counsellors into different subgroups (H6). Most often, the labour office workers differentiate LTU clients on the basis of formal criteria, e.g., according to target groups of the organisation's projects (41%), and on the basis of informal criteria, e.g., according to their characteristics and behaviour (39%). 18% of the labour office respondents stated that they differentiate LTU clients on the basis of other criteria, namely in terms of their health status or whether or not are recipients of compensation payments. Social workers most often classify LTU clients according to other categories, e.g., based on their health status, commuting options, or number of children (47%). Informal criteria for division were reported by 28% of social workers and formal criteria by 17%. 4% of the data from both groups of respondents reported that they do not divide LTU clients into subgroups. This suggests that informal and other criteria created by workers based on their LTU clients' characteristics are most represented.

Based on the analysis, it appears that almost all professional counsellors (93%) adapt their work practices to the differences in behaviour and characteristics of LTU clients if they perceive them. Only 5% of all respondents use commonly used practices and treat everyone equally. In terms of individual positions, 96% of respondents in non-profit organisations and 91% of all respondents in labour offices adapt their work practices. Only one respondent from a non-profit organisation does not adapt his practices (2%) whereas in a labour office it is 6% of all respondents. The partial results thus point to the acceptance of hypothesis H6.

As a source of supportive conditions for the application of individual approach to LTU clients, respondents mention discussions with colleagues and experience sharing (20%), sufficient time for personal meetings with LTU clients (19%), an active approach on the part of clients (18%), gradual resolution of the life situation of LTU clients (16%), involvement of other professionals (14%), as well as sufficient discretionary power, searching for suitable job offers, and sufficient competence of staff. The differences between the responses of social workers and labour office staff are negligible.

5. DISCUSSION

Based on the partial research results, it appears that an individual approach as an important institutional rule of the profession is part of the work practices of professional counsellors when working with LTU clients. The research results confirm the recommendations based on the methodology of practices in public employment services in that an individual approach should be part of any counselling services, as it considers, among other things, the barriers, the client's needs, and the client's uniqueness (MoLSA 2015).

Therefore, it is important to draw attention to the fact how the principle of individualisation of services is applied in the Czech Republic in addressing labour market insecurities. This is a relevant topic as labour market disadvantages in local labour markets and in individual casework with the long-term unemployed are caused by the intersection of local employment barriers in connection with the accumulation of individual disadvantages, and therefore require local and individualised solutions (Sirovátka, Winkler & Žižlavský 2009).

Although they are active in different types of organisations, employment counsellors face the same barriers when applying an individual approach. In terms of barriers arising from the characteristics and behaviour of LTU clients, these include passive attitudes and lack of interest on the part of LTU clients, and conflicting expectations from collaboration. In terms of barriers arising from organisational conditions, there is a high degree of administrative burden. In terms of barriers arising from the external environment, there are perceived biases on the part of employers and, particularly in case of the labour office staff, barriers arising from the setup and amount of social benefits. The employment counsellors have also agreed with each other on the list of supportive conditions for the application of individual approach.

The results also show that employment counsellors try to base their work practices on the needs and life situation of LTU clients (Hrozenská & Dvořáčková 2013). However, there is also a differentiation of

LTU clients, especially according to informal criteria created by workers based on the characteristics of LTU clients while considering the specifics of a given group of clients. Thus, the differentiation of LTU clients appears to be a certain guide for the choice of work practices (Musil & Janská 2011). It has turned out that the behaviour and life conditions of the LTU clients move helping professionals to adapt their work practices, also considerably influencing the form of individual approach.

However, social workers perceive greater discretion in choosing these work practices. Thus, it is evident that the application of individual approach by social workers is not only dynamized by LTU clients' attitudes, but also by the expertise and experience of the workers (Healy 2005, 2012). Consequently, their expertise is manifested in their efforts to modify work practices in favour of LTU clients and an effective individual approach (Hepworth et al. 2010), which may contribute to the change and introduction of new organisational rules in its use.

Labour Office workers, on the other hand, perceive limited decision-making power over the choice of work practices. From the above, it can be concluded that the labour office as an organisation requires certain administrative requirements associated with a formal, rather impersonal approach within an individual approach, but some labour office workers oppose these requirements. Thus, the modification of individual approach by the labour office staff is also predominantly aimed at helping their clients. They show a willingness to change the institutional rules for individual approach, by which they can influence and change the bureaucratic rules of working with LTU clients in favour of more individualised services.

It may also appear from the responses of the labour office staff that they perceive the long-term unemployed as their priority clients, rather than employers. There may be a reduction in using an individual approach towards clients, not targeted at employers, as the positions offered are not in line with the capabilities of different LTU groups. The results further point to the benefits of inter-organisational collaboration and coordination of the labour office activities with professional social workers as a possible complementary tool for comprehensive assistance to LTU clients (Oláh, Hučík & Hučíková 2016).

To conclude, the research confirmed the findings of the previous qualitative research and documented that the professional rules of employment counsellors are asserted and used in the execution of individual approach as well as in different organisational contexts, pointing out significant similarities that lie in their orientation towards clients and the solution of their life situation. Partial research findings point to the importance of the reactions and adaptations of counsellors, whose actions can cause changes in institutional rules and guidelines, in this case the individual approach (see also Winkler 2011). Different forms of individual approach were also found in a more bureaucratic organisation such as the labour office. The research revealed that there are other influences other than organisational ones, such as discretion in decision-making of the workers or the clients themselves, to whom even the labour office workers adapt their individual approach. Social work principles can thus be applied also in labour offices.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Every job seeker is in a specific social situation, often connected with the accumulation of multiple disadvantages. In the area of employment services, labour market activation policies should respond to these multiple problems of the long-term unemployed in order to activate this group and increase the likelihood of their return to employment (Horák 2009).

An important role is played by labour offices implementing active employment policy instruments. However, Burianová (2010) is convinced that these instruments are often insufficient, and without individual use of interventions and social work methods, some clients are unable to find or keep jobs thus returning to a labour office register. In addition to the labour office, NGOs providing social services, especially through social counselling or registered social rehabilitation services, can also help these people to return to the labour market.

Employment counsellors, i.e., counsellors in employment services at labour offices and social workers providing social services to LTU clients, as well as the organisational context in which they work, play a key role in the activation of LTU clients. The research findings point to the importance of the interaction of social workers and labour office workers together with other professionals, as restoration of client problem-solving is the basis for timely and effective social work (Oláh, Hučík & Hučíková 2016) as well as an effective application of individual approach.

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