

Conflict Management Styles: A Study of Organizational Politics among Professionals

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Abstract

One of the main outcome of organizational politics is organizational conflict which leads to other negative organizational behaviors. The aim of this study is to find the conflict management styles that are frequently used by the professionals working at various organizational hierarchies to reduce the conflicts to save the organizational environment. Moreover gender differences in using different conflict management styles were also explored. The sample comprised of one hundred professional teachers including lecturers, professors, associate professors and assistant professors. The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (Thomas and Kilmann, 1978) was used to measure different conflict management styles. The results of the present study revealed that the teachers mostly used the avoiding conflict management style. Moreover professors and associate professors used compromising conflict management style. But the assistant professor used the accommodating and lecturers used the avoiding conflict management style. Females more frequently use avoiding conflict management style than males. Seminars and workshops should be organized to train teachers using healthy conflict management styles; senior professors should adapt avoiding style more which can enhance work motivation of junior teachers.

Key words: Conflicts, Conflict Management Styles, Organizational Hierarchy, Professionals

Introduction

Perceived organizational support could be a mediating factor between organizational politics and negative job related outcomes. Organizational politics affects the employee's performance level which ultimately affects the overall performance of organization.

Many studies have been done which indicated an important association between negative job related outcomes and organizational politics Negative job related outcomes included different types of conflicts which leads to anxiety, stress, absenteeism and turnover intentions and lower level of organizational commitment, job performance, job satisfaction and organizational citizenship. As a result these conflicts could affect the whole organizational performance.

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Present study was designed to explore conflict management styles used by the professional teachers working upon various organizational hierarchies.

Conflict is something inevitable, daily we go through conflictual situations. These situations have an impact on our working life as Conflict management styles are of immense importance. Conflict management style is affected by the way conflict is perceived and handled. These styles confront the person and oppose a person to change because these styles are influenced by an individual's concept of the importance of the personal goals and relationship with others. Conflict is evident between the people who are working together like teachers, doctors, bankers and accountants. Teachers have daily interactions with a variety of people including staff, other teachers and students. Therefore it is important to explore how they manage their daily life conflicts.

Conflict can be defined as a person's effort over values and for the attainment of secure status, power and resources, in narrowing down the aims of opponents (Doherty & Guylar, 2008). Conflict arises in the situations which are characterized by cognitions, irreconcilable goals, or emotions and these things operate within or between individuals or groups and this leads to hostile or aggressive interaction. A form of interactions between the individuals and parties who differed in their interests and values and their approach towards they desired goals is called as conflict. Conflict is a fact of life in organizations. Every organization, family, relationship and community has conflict of ideas, values, thought and action (Janasz De, Dowd & Schneider, 2009).

There are two types of conflict. A conflict can be either positive or negative. Positive conflict is functional and supports or benefits the organizations or person's main objective (Oucho, 2002). Negative conflict is dysfunctional and hinders the organization or the person performance or ability to attain goal or objectives (Baker, 2011). Conflict refers to a process whereby one party perceives that its interests, goals, values, needs or behaviors are being opposed, disagreed with or negatively affected by another party. So many factors are responsible for creating conflict at the workplace some of them are personality, communication failure values and commitment to position, misunderstanding and the interactions made in the past (Lee & Michigan, 2008).

Conflict management is explained by the theories which are given below. The two major theories of conflict management include the traditional theory and contemporary theory. These are two basic and opposing theories. Traditional theory sees conflict as being primarily negative. According to the traditional theory perspective conflict is the result of troubling indicators and it has bad

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effects and it's better to avoid the conflicting situations. This perspective claims that a person who is facing the conflict tries to avoid the conflict by keep it under the cover and denying its existence. The other perspective is contemporary theory which views conflict as something positive. This theory suggested that conflict cannot be avoided it something inevitable. Conflict is the result of things occurs under the natural circle and if a person handles it properly it can be beneficent (Adam & Kirchhoff, 1982).

Another perspective of conflict management is attribution theory which offers us a few important take ways we can apply to our efforts to manage our conflicts well and help our employees address their own conflicts more effectively. First the awareness of the fundamental attribution error informs us that we should consciously pause and consider the situation factors that might have contributed to the behavior of another person, particularly behavior that has annoyed or offended us in some way. Secondly, we should make the effort to confirm our attributions when important decisions or outcomes may be depending on them (Collins & O'Rourke, 2005).

Other than above, Field theory has made an important contribution in the field of conflict management this theory it works against the attritional errors and emphasizes on the influence of situational factors on behavior. Field theory encourages us to look at a specific goal and examine the driving and inhibiting factors. A useful outcome would be the recognition of inhibiting factors that we might be able to minimize or eliminate (Tidwell, 1998).

People manage their conflicts by using conflict management styles. Conflict management style is affected the way conflict is perceived and handled. These conflict management styles are confronting and are opposed to change, because of the importance a person gives to his goals and relationship with others have impact on these styles (Crawley & Graham, 2007).

Black and Mouton (1964) were the first to present a conceptual framework for describing how individuals respond to interpersonal conflict situations. This frame work was created to describe the responses to a conflict a manger might utilize in their work within an organization. They identified five styles or modes in their model: forcing, withdrawing, smoothing, compromising and problem solving (Black & Scimecca, 1998).

Three groups of researchersBlake and Mouton (1974), Thomas and Kilmann (1978), and [Rahim and Bonoma \(1979\)](#) defined five basic styles that can influence the management of conflicts. These styles can also be categorized as behavioral patterns of a person. These styles are considered pioneer in the

field of conflict management despite of the changes in working environments these styles are still considered important as they give a glimpse of how people manage their daily life conflicts (Wilmot & Hocker, 2001) Competing is a conflict management style emerges when a person gives more importance to his own rights and less importance to the rights of others. When conflictual issue becomes important or to set a precedent this approach is used generally. However because one party is trying to dominate the other, this conflict manage style can escalate the conflict and the loser may try to retaliate (Strong, Devault& Cohen, 2008).

Avoiding can be perceived as passive conflict management style. In this style a person tends to avoid or ignores the conflict. This style is characterized by a person's low concern for his own rights as well for the others' rights (Nelson & Campbell, 2008).

Compromising is another conflict management style in which the person deals with the conflicting situation by sacrificing. Both parties involved in the conflict sacrifice their interests in order to solve the conflict. This middle ground style reflects a moderate concern for your own interests and the moderate concern for the interests of other party. This style is mostly used when someone have to obtain temporary solutions or have to resolve conflicts quickly and to avoid critical power struggle (Schyns & Hansbrough, 2010).

Accommodating style it is characterized when a person has low concern for his own interests and high concerns for the other party's interests. This style is preferred when the conflicting issue is more important for other party then for you. The goal of accommodating is "I lose you win." People who used the accommodating style use passive behavior (Verderber & Sellnow, 2012).

Collaborating conflict management style employs high concern for your own interests and a high concern for the interests of the other party as well. This conflict management style focuses on problem solving and a try to reach the desired outcome for both the parties (Phillips & Gully, 2011). People use these styles acceding to their choice and their choice is influenced by the interplay of various factors like age, gender, designation and working experience (Wilmot and Hocker, 2001: Valentine, 1995).

Literature Review

A wide variety of research has been conducted that utilizes or investigates various aspects conflict management styles. This section provides an overview of that literature. Chan, Monroe, Ng and Tan (2006) discovered that females tended to avoid conflict significantly more than males. In their study of

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conflict management styles among junior accountants, male were found to be more likely to choose a dominating style of conflict management than female junior accountants. Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument is used widely to evaluate the conflict management styles. The results demonstrated that mostly used conflict management style was avoiding. However, the results indicated that gaining experience intensifies the interest to avoid and disinterest to competing mode.

In the same way Cornille, Pestle and Vanwy (1999) found no differences between responses of teachers in urban and nonurban schools in conflict management styles all teachers used dominating conflict style. Furthermore Ngcongco and Phumelele (1993)'s study discovered that teachers used authoritarian and power based methods in order to manage conflicts with students. These styles rely on coercive and position power to compel students to obey.

Similarly Morris-Rothschild and Brassard (2006) conducted research on Teachers' conflict management styles and found that majority teachers used compromising style of conflict management. Another research done by Sportsman and Hamilton (2007) on conflict management styles in health professionals showed no significant difference between the frequently used conflict management styles chosen by graduate and undergraduate nursing students.

Friedmann, Tidd, Curralland and Tsai (2000) studied the impact of personal conflict style on work and how it might be related to stress. They found that individuals who used dominating or avoiding style of managing conflict were found to have increased levels of task and relationship conflict and resulting high level of stress.

The effects of gender role, biological sex, organizational status and their effect on conflict-handling behavior were examined by Brewer, Mitchell and Weber (2002). They found that masculine individuals ranked high on the scale for a dominating style of conflict management behavior and that feminine individuals scored high on the avoiding style. Cetin and Hacifazlioglu (2004) compared the conflict management styles of high school teachers versus academics in a university setting. They found that older teachers preferred to use a collaborating style of conflict management. Thirty years old and below showed a preference against using an accommodating style.

From the above theoretical framework and literature review it can be seen that people use different conflict management style to manage their conflicts.

Conflict management illustrated a wide range of skills and approaches useful in fruitfully managing conflict. Interpersonal dynamics of conflict process are inherent in daily functioning of all the individuals who work in the organization like teachers. So, they used the different conflict management styles like accommodating, compromising, avoiding, collaborating and competing in different conflicting situations.

Rationale of the study

This study are expected to establish that organizational politics give reason to increase different type of conflicts which can effect organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and turnover intentions and ultimately reduce the organizational performance. Organizational politics could affect employee's behavior negatively which create can call reasons to promote conflicts between professionals. Organizational politics is an important concept for knowing the reasons of an organization conflicts.

Conflict is derived from social beliefs and involves two or more parties who shared incompatible objectives. It is inevitable and unavoidable because it is a natural part of human relationships and it is the part of everyday professionals. This study is important as it explains which conflict management style is mostly used by the teachers. It will attract teachers to be able to select a better conflict management style which can help them to solve their conflicts easily so as to work effectively in their field by having a forewarning notion of conflicting situations

Objectives

The objectives of the present research are

- To find out the conflict management styles used by the professional teachers on the different designations e.g. lecturers, Assistant professor, Associate professor and Professors.

Research Questions

1. Which conflict management style is used more by professional teachers?
2. Are different conflict management styles used by the professional teachers on different designations?
3. Are there gender differences in the conflict management style used by the professional teachers?

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Method

Research Design/Sample

Within group research design was used in this research to investigate the conflict management styles in university teachers. The sample of one hundred professional teachers (n=100) were taken from Punjab University Lahore using purposive sampling. Male and female lecturers, professors, associate professors and assistant professors with the age range of 25 – 50 were included.

Assessment Measures

The demographic information questionnaire included information about age, gender, education, marital status, number of children, designation, monthly income, experience of job, name of department and the presence or absence of organizational politics with reference to their organization.

Thomas Kilmann Instrument (TKI) was used to measure conflict management style. It was developed by Thomas and Kilmann in 1974. It consists of 30 items, which are designed to measure five modes of conflict management competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding and accommodating. Each question consists of two statements A and B. Each scale has a maximum possible score of 12 and minimum of zero. The TKI measures the conflict management styles, in 5 scales, competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding and accommodating in two dimensions assertiveness and cooperativeness. The test-retest reliability of the TKI ranges from 0.61 to 0.68.

Procedure

Permission was taken from the author of the tool to use it in the present research. Then the characteristics of the sample and sampling strategy were selected. Before taking the information from the participants, permission was taken from the department authorities of universities. Informed consent was taken from the participants and they were briefed about the certain features of the research. Demographic information questionnaire was filled by the teachers. After these steps, the Thomas Kilmann instrument was administered on the teachers to measure the conflict management styles in university teachers. Confidentiality of information/data and anonymity of the participants were maintained. Participants were also informed that they were free to leave the research if they wanted without any prejudice and penalty. Time taken to fill the questionnaire varied from 15 to 20 minutes.

Results

Descriptive analysis and independent samples t-test were used to analyze the data

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Conflict Management Styles Used by the Teachers on the Different Designations.

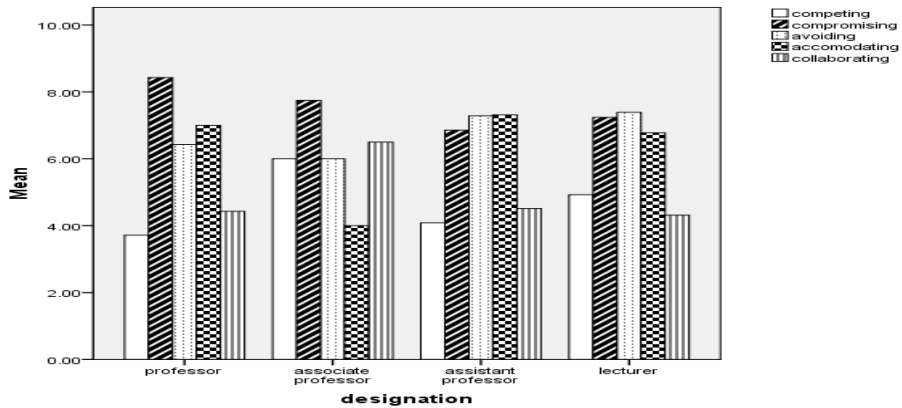
Variables	Professors		Associate professors		Assistant professors		Lecturers	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Competing	3.71	2.36	6	2.83	4.09	2.06	4.93	2.89
Compromising	8.43	1.62	7.75	1.26	6.86	1.46	7.24	1.57
Avoiding	6.43	1.51	6	2	7.29	1.62	7.39	1.71
Accommodating	7	1.15	4	2	7.31	1.78	6.78	3.41
Collaborating	4.43	2.07	6.50	.577	4.51	2.03	4.31	1.68

Note. M= Mean; SD= Standard deviation.

Table 1 indicated that professor and associate professors used compromising conflict management style more often and assistant professors used accommodating style more frequently. Similarly avoiding style is used more by the lecturers

Graph 1

Bar chart Showing the Conflict Management Styles Used by the Teachers on the Different Designations.



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Graph is showing that the professors and associate professors mostly use compromising conflict management style. The assistant professors use the accommodating conflict management style frequently while the lecturers mostly use the avoiding conflict management styles.

Table 2

Independent Sample T-Test between Male and Female of Conflict Management Styles (df=98).

Variables	Males		Females		T	p	95%CI		Cohen's d
	M	(SD)	M	(SD)			LL	UL	
Competing	4.67	(2.47)	4.49	(2.75)	.37	.71	-.84	1.24	0.07
Compromising	7.02	(1.50)	7.41	(1.59)	-1.26	.21	-1.00	.23	-0.25
Avoiding	6.86	(1.46)	7.61	(1.83)	-2.28	.02	-1.41	-.09	-0.45
Accommodating	6.90	(2.87)	6.84	(2.79)	.11	.90	-1.05	1.19	0.02
Collaborating	4.83	(1.95)	4.12	(1.65)	1.93	.06	-.02	1.42	0.39

*Note:*df= 98, CI = Confidence Interval; LL= lower limit; UL= upper limit

Above table indicates that there is a significant difference in the use of avoiding conflict management style between males and females. Females use the avoiding conflict management style more than males. On all other conflict management styles there are no differences between male and female teachers.

Summary of the findings

The results of the present study showed that the teachers on the different designation used the different conflict management styles. It was also revealed that the teachers mostly used the avoiding conflict management style. Professors and associate professors used more of compromising conflict management style. But the assistant professor mostly used the accommodating and lecturers used the avoiding conflict management style. Apart from that teachers mostly use accommodating and avoiding conflict management style. The results also demonstrated significant gender difference in the use of avoiding conflict management style. Females use the avoiding conflict management style more than males. No gender differences were found on other conflict management styles.

Discussion

One finding of the present research revealed that teachers overall used avoiding conflict management style more than the other styles. Moreover lecturers proffered this style over the other styles. This finding was supported by the study which was conducted by Boonsathorn (2007). They conducted the study in order to examine which conflict management style is more often used by the Thais and Americans in Multinational Corporation in Thailand. Findings of this study showed by the Thais used avoiding conflict management style more as compared with Americans. Balay (2006) conducted research on conflict management strategies of administrators and teachers. It was concluded that the administrators used avoiding and compromising management style more as compare to the teachers. One reason behind this finding could be the submissive attitude of the lecturers. The feel safe in staying quite as their designation demands respect for the teachers working at higher designations.

Results indicated that the teachers on the different designations used the different conflict management style. Professors and associate professors used more of the compromising conflict management style. Professors and Associate professors used more of the compromising conflict management style to manage conflict was supported by many studies. Morris-Rothschild and Brassard (2006) conducted research on teachers' conflict management styles, the role of teachers and class room management efficacy. Vokic and Sontor (2009) showed that Croatian employees mostly used compromising conflict management style. I another study conducted by Olcum and Hacifazlioglu (2004) revealed that research assistants use accommodation style more than professors but when compared to associate professors, associate professors use this technique more. One reason to explain the tendency of professors to use compromising conflict management style mostly is the role of their experience and exposure of the designation. They prefer to stay away from being harsh with others and solve the issue by caring more about the other person's rights.

Assistant professors and lecturers mostly used accommodation and avoiding conflict management style respectively. Many individuals used these styles which were supported by a study. Sportsman and Hamilton (2007) conducted research on conflict management styles in the health professions. Findings of their study showed that the nurses frequently used accommodating and compromising style of conflict management. The findings give a glimpse of the working structure of the university. Associate professors have in the middle in the hierarchy of the teaching designations. They stand in between the

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lecturers and professors. Therefore they resolve their conflicts cautiously by accommodating their rights as well as the rights of others.

The present study also examined gender differences in the conflict management style used more by the teachers. Results indicated that females used the avoiding conflict management style more than males. There were many studies supported the finding of this study. Sadia (2009) found that there was a significant difference between conflict styles in males and females. Fink and Brunner (2009) also found that there was significant gender difference in the use of conflict management styles. Brewer, Mitchell and Weber (2002) found that masculine individuals ranked highest on the scale for a dominating style of conflict management behavior and that feminine individuals scored highest on the avoiding style. This finding was inconsistent with the previous research. Copley (2008) found that the choice of conflict management styles appear to be independent of the sex of leader.

These all findings suggest that teachers mostly used the avoiding conflict management style and the teachers on the different designation also used the different conflict management styles. They used all the styles but they mostly preferred the avoiding style. There were gender differences in the use of avoiding style. Females were used more avoiding style than males. As daily they have to face so many conflictual situations and they cannot behave aggressively on each and every situation. Thus they prefer to avoid the conflict and move on in their daily routine.

From the results of this research, following implication can be drawn from this research. The results can be explained to the teachers that they should use healthy conflict management style to manage their conflicts. The research can be helpful especially in the field of teachers training. It is a fact that teachers expect their promotions but limited seats are available so the teachers find themselves in a meaningless competition. Consequently this competition minimizes their performance and creates unhealthy environment in the institutes which in a result cause so many conflicts. Thus policy makers should try to find ways of dealing with this problem. They should try to keep their moral high without hurting teachers' feelings.

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