

Investigating the Best Practice of Teachers in Conflict Management, MARA Education Institutions, Malaysia

Mohamad Johdi Salleh

Institute of Education, International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM)
Jalan Gombak, 53100 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
johdisalleh@gmail.com

Abstract

This study attempts to investigate the views, processes, and, best practice of conflict management among the MARA - *Majlis Amanah Rakyat* or Board of People Trust – teachers in the MARA education institutions. The sample of the study was 306 teachers conveniently selected from MARA education institutions in Malaysia. The data was processed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 17.0 for Windows. The finding shows that the highest perception of MARA teachers was ‘conflict can be thought as problem, we need to find the source and take the appropriate steps to solve it’ mean 4.40 and SD 0.585. In relation to the process of managing conflict, the perception was highest on ‘solution finding process is needed in conflict management’ mean 4.29 and SD 0.698. Finally, the finding indicates that the best practice of conflict management among MARA teachers was ‘conflict can be solved if there is understanding between parties and find the solution together’ mean 4.40 and SD 0.618. It is believed that if the teachers regardless of background can manage effectively the conflict in schools or colleges and foster healthy teacher-administrator relationship, teaching and learning can be improved towards facing the challenges in the era of globalization and realization of vision 2020, Malaysia, and beyond.

Keywords: Best Practice – MARA Teachers - Conflict Management

1.0 Introduction

Conflict if managed appropriately and efficiently would add important values to an organization as it act as a catalyst for change. These changes may lead to a conducive environment in workplace, foster good relationship among employees, and, over a period of time it will result in high productivity. This is important as a team, they can work hand in hand to achieve the organizational goals and increase productivity to the optimum.

2.0 Background of the Study

The government of Malaysia has established special education institutions for the students whose parents were mostly lived in rural areas. One of the prominent institutions is under the management of the Board of People Trust or *Majlis Amanah Rakyat* (MARA). The education institutions under the MARA management were MRSM (*Maktab Rendah Sains MARA* or MARA Junior Science College), KPM (*Kolej Profesional MARA* or MARA Professional College), KKTM (*Kolej Kemahiran Tinggi MARA* or High Skills College of MARA), KM (*Kolej MARA* or MARA College) and IKM (*Institut Kemahiran MARA* or Institute of Skills MARA). Since, the establishment of these education institutions in 1970s there were many prominent and excellent achievements, especially in producing professional and experts who contributed in the national and international sectors.

3.0 Literature Review

Conflict occurs whenever disagreements exist in a social situation over issues of substance, or whenever emotional antagonisms create frictions between individuals or groups. Saleh (2002) states that conflict are natural, healthy part of any organization. It can, however, be painful when not managed productively. Carrying a grudge has no positive benefits and can have negative consequences (Coser 1956, Douglas, 1998). Conflict is the struggle between incompatible or opposing needs, wishes, ideas, interests, or people. Conflict arises when individuals or groups encounter goals that both parties cannot obtain satisfactorily (Chung and Megginson, 1981, Luthans, 1985, DuBrin 2005, De Janasz, et al., 2006).

Wright (1990) states that the word conflict comes from Latin verb *configure* which literally means to beat. Sociologically, conflict is defined as social process between two or more people or groups where one party tries to eliminate the other party by destroying or rendering them helpless (Hitt, et al 2006). Conflict is present in our midst regardless of race, cultures, gender or age that happens everywhere and to every living organism (Champoux, 2003, Marc Buelens, et al 2006). To name a few, we have emotional conflict which occurs when there is clashing and contradictory emotions within a person, group conflict which occur when cliques compete against each other as well as workplace conflict between management and workers (Auerbach & Dolan 1997, Mohamad Johdi Salleh and Apitree Adulpakdee (2012).

In an organization, conflicts occur as a result of problems in communication, personal relationships or organizational structure (Cherrington, 1994). In communication between two parties, the meaning of the sentence as well as ambiguous and incomplete information leads to misunderstanding which eventually leads to conflict (McShane & Travaglione 2003, Hellriegel Don & Slocum 2007). Another reason for conflict to happen in an organization is the battle between the interests of different departments and competition to fight over resources due to limited resources (Buelens, et al, 2006).

Chung and Megginson (1981) and Slavin (2007) admitted that conflict cannot be evaded even in education as schools and colleges are a part of organizations. If conflict which arises in schools and colleges are not taken care of it will affect the educators as well as the students by creating unwanted divergence in their learning environment (Smith 1997, Douglas 1998).

Teachers need to know how to manage conflict in order to create a conducive learning atmosphere and a pleasant workplace. To be able to do this, they need to know about conflict management (Hellriegel and Slocum, 2007). Conflict management refers to the long-term management of intractable conflicts (Thomas 1992, Hitt, et al., 2006). It is the label for the variety of ways by which people handle grievances by standing up for what they consider to be right and against what they consider to be wrong (Carrell, et. al 1997, Cetin & Hacifazlioglu, 2004).

As we are in the new globalization era, we can accept that conflict in organizations will not only continue to happen but will also be more challenging. Hence, it is in the best interest of the researchers to study about the perception of MARA educators in conflict management in MARA institution based on gender so that it can be of great assistance for future prospect in the field of conflict management in MARA.

4.0 Statement of Problem

In general, teachers have experienced their shares of problems in their schools or colleges such as insufficient resources, monetarily, lack of facilities, heavy workload, dissatisfaction on management and so on. Sometimes unmanaged conflict could cause disharmony among the educators which could lead to unproductive learning environment. Therefore, this study will attempt to investigate the conflict management in MARA especially in MRSM, KPM, KKTM, KM and IKM. For the purpose of this studies, schools will encompass all the five institution mentioned before. Through conflict management, educators have opportunity to learn about mechanisms that lead to aggressive action and those that lead to peaceful resolution. Educators play a huge role in managing and solving conflict in schools. The solution for conflict cannot happen without educators' full understanding and cooperation with the administration.

Conflict if managed appropriately and efficiently would add important values to an organization as it act as a catalyst for change. This type of changes will lead to a conducive environment in workplace whereby over a period of time it will result in high productivity. Apart from that, employees will also be able to foster good relationship among them and with the management. This is important because as a team they can work hand in hand to achieve the organizational goals.

It is believed that if the educators regardless of gender can manage and solve the conflict in schools, relationship with administration, teaching and learning can be improved. For this reason, the researchers are interested to study MARA teachers' perception on conflict management in MARA institution namely MRSM, KPM, KKTM, KM and IKM based on gender.

5.0 Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this research is to study MARA educators' perception on conflict management in MARA institutions. Specifically, this study attempts to answer the following research questions:

- 1) What are the views of MARA teachers on conflict management in MARA education institution?
- 2) What are the processes of managing conflict used by MARA teachers in MARA education institutions?
- 3) What are the best practices of MARA teachers in conflict management in MARA education institutions?

6.0 Research Methodology

The sample of the study was 306 teachers conveniently selected from MARA education institutions in Malaysia. They were from MRSM, KPM, KKTM, KM and IKM across the country. There were equal numbers of male and female respondents of 153 each. The means of collecting data for this study is by using a survey questionnaire (Vockell & Asher 1998, Mcmillan 2004, Creswell 2008).

The research questions were classified into three dimensions (Thomas 1992, Rahim 2001, Rahim 2002). The first dimension is the view of conflict management between male and female educators in MARA institution. The second dimension is the process of managing conflict between male and female teachers in MARA institution. The last dimension is the best practices in conflict management between male and female teachers in MARA institution.

The researchers have measured the dimensions using 5-point Likert scale which are Strongly Disagree (SD), Disagree (D) Neutral (N), Agree (A) and Strongly Agree (SA). For the purpose of reporting analysis, the researchers have merged these five categories into three categories mainly Disagree (D), Neutral (N) and Agree (A). The third dimension is analyzed with five-category of responses namely 1=Never, 2=Seldom, 3=Sometime, 4=Frequent, and, 5=Always.

7.0 Findings of the Study:

The following sections present the findings of the study from three dimensions as stated in the research questions.

7.1 Dimension One: The Views of Conflict of MARA Teachers

Four items were employed to determine the conflict management for this 'views of conflict' dimension. A summary of MARA teachers' perception concerning the views of conflict can be observed in Table 1.

Table 1 shows, only 43.17% or 66 male teachers agreed that 'any conflict which occurs in an organization can be solved'. However, 92.2% or 141 female teachers agreed and none among them disagreed. For item 2, as high as 96.1% or 147 male teachers agreed that 'the best strategy in solving a conflict is to avoid the conflicting situation' while 58.9% or 90 female teachers disagreed. In item 3 which is 'conflict can be thought as problem; we need to find the source and take the appropriate steps to solve it', only 25.5% or 39 male teachers agreed to the statement while 94.1% or 144 female teachers agreed to it. Finally for item 4, 98% or 150 male teachers agreed that 'conflict can be solved if only one party has the power over the other party' and only 9.8 % or 15 female teachers agreed with as high as 64.7% or 99 female teachers disagreed to this statement.

Observation: Table 1 indicates that the highest perception of MARA male teachers' concerning the views of conflict was on item 'conflict can be solved if only one party has the power over the other party' with 98% or 150 of them agreed. On the other hand, the MARA female teachers perceived highest on item 'any conflict which occurs in an organization can be solved' with 92.2% or 141 of them agreed.

7.2 Dimension Two

The Process of Managing Conflict between Male and Female Teachers in the MARA Education Institution

Six items were employed to determine the conflict management for the 'process of managing conflict' between male and female teachers in MARA institution dimension. The finding is shown in Table 2.

Table 2 presents, 78.4% or 120 male and 88.2% or 135 female teachers agreed that 'both parties in a conflicting situation have to give their cooperation in order to solve the conflict'. For item 6, 35.3% or 54 male teachers agreed that 'a third party should give the best solution in case of conflict' and another 35.3% or 54 male teachers stand neutral about it. 64.7% or 99 female teachers agreed to the statement in item 6. In item 9, 62.7% or 96 male teachers agreed that 'it is better to lie a bit in order to solve a conflict' while 49% or 75 female teachers disagreed to it and 45% or 69 of them remain neutral about it.

Item 10 shows, as high as 94.1% or 144 male teachers and 62.8% or 96 female teachers agreed that 'in a conflicting situation, one party has to avoid the conflict'. While, item 11 shows, 84.3% or 129 male teachers and only 62.7% or 95 female teachers agreed that 'solution finding process is needed in conflict management'. Finally, item 14 shows, 82.3% or 125 male teachers and 88.3% or 135 female teachers agreed that 'an influential third party could solve the conflict between two parties'.

Observation: Table 2 shows, the highest perception of MARA male teachers in the process of managing conflict was on item 'in a conflicting situation, one party has to avoid the conflict' with 94.1% or 144 of them agreed to the statement. Interestingly, MARA female teachers agreed highest on two items that is 'an influential third party could solve the conflict between two parties' and item 'both parties in a conflicting situation have to give their cooperation in order to solve the conflict' with 88.3% and 88.2% or both 135 respondents agreed respectively.

7.3 Dimension Three: The Best Practices in Conflict Management between Male and Female Teachers in the MARA Education Institutions.

There were 14 items employed to determine the conflict management for 'the best practices in conflict management between male and female teachers in the MARA institutions' dimension. The implementation of the instructional leadership functions among the principals was measured through the interpretation of the mean of each task in those eleven job functions.

In this dimension, the analysis of practices of MARA teachers in the conflict management are categorized into five levels: Mean 0.00 – 0.99 is Very Low, Mean 1.00 – 1.99 is Low, Mean 2.00 – 2.99 is Simple High, Mean 3.00 – 3.99 is High, Mean 4.00 – 5.00 is Very High. This category is in accordance with the category of responses as Mean 0 – 0.99 is 'Never', Mean 1.00 – 1.99 is 'Seldom', Mean 2.00 – 2.99 is 'Sometime', Mean 3.00 – 3.99 is 'Frequent', Mean 4.00 – 5.00 is 'Always'.

A summary of MARA teachers' perception concerning the best practice in conflict management between male and female teachers in MARA education institutions is presented in Table 3.

Table 3 shows, the best practice of five items among MARA male teachers was highest on item 19 mean 4.43, and, followed respectively by item 23 mean 4.37, item 16 mean 4.35, item 21 mean 4.29, and, item 12 mean 4.10. While, the best practice of MARA female teachers according to the five highest rank was item 21 mean 4.49, item 19 mean 4.37, item 23 mean 4.29, item 16 mean 4.10, and, item 13 mean 4.00. The study shows that both MARA male and female teachers have five similar items in the best practice of conflict management in the MARA education institutions.

Adversely, the three lowest rank practiced by the MARA male teachers were item 18 mean 2.88, item 17 mean 2.96, and, item 7 mean 3.06. On the other hand, the three lowest practiced among MARA female teachers were item 24 mean 2.73, item 18 mean 2.86, and, item 7 mean 2.88. The study shows that item 17 and item 18 were both practice at the lowest level by MARA male and female teachers in conflict management in the MARA education institutions.

Observation: Table 3 indicates, both male and female MARA teachers practice the best at very high level on four items, particularly, item 16 'There is a possibility that a conflict could reoccur if we wait and have no effort to solve it', item 19 'Conflict can be solved if there is understanding between parties and find the solution together', item 21 'A conflict can be solved if both parties are opened to negotiation', and, item 'It is more noble if both parties could accept the solution peacefully'. The fifth best for MARA male teachers was item 12 'We need a clear method to solve a conflict' while female teachers was item 13 'In conflict management strategy compromising is the best method'.

On the other hand, both MARA male and female teachers practice the lowest for similar two items that is item 17 'Conflict happens all the time, therefore we should not be involved with it' and item 18 'Conflict can be manage if interaction between groups is limited and at certain times only'.

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, the study observed that both male and female MARA teachers practice the best at very high level on four items particularly, there is a possibility a conflict could reoccur if we wait and have no effort to solve it, conflict can be solved if there is understanding between parties and find the solution together, a conflict can be solved if both parties are opened to negotiation, and, it is more noble if both parties could accept the solution peacefully. The fifth best practice of MARA male teachers was the need for clear method to solve a conflict, while, female teachers strongly agreed that in conflict management strategy compromising is the best method. Hence, the study indicate that when there is conflict in the education institutions under the MARA management such as MARA Junior Science Colleges, MARA Professional Colleges, High Skills College of MARA, MARA Colleges, Institute of Skills MARA, majority of the MARA teachers choose the same method to resolve the conflict. The fundamental common practice by MARA teachers in solving conflict were discussion, investigation of the cause of the conflict, tolerance, compromise and reconciliation counseling.

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Notes

Table 1: MARA teachers' Views concerning Conflict (N = 306: Male = 153; Female = 153)

No	Item	Gender	SD	D	N	A	SA
1	Any conflict which occurs in an organization can be solved.	M	13.7% (21)	23.5% (36)	19.6% (30)	35.3% (54)	7.8% (12)
		F	-	-	7.8% (12)	45.1% (69)	47.1% (72)
2	The best strategy in solving a conflict is to avoid the conflicting situation	M	-	-	3.9% (6)	49.0% (75)	47.1% (72)
		F	11.8% (18)	47.1% (72)	13.7% (21)	21.6% (33)	5.9% (9)
3	Conflict can be thought as problem; we need to find the source and take the appropriate steps to solve it	M	11.8% (18)	37.3% (57)	25.5% (39)	15.7% (24)	9.8% (15)
		F	-	-	5.9% (9)	51.0% (78)	43.1% (66)
4	Conflict can be solved if only one party has the power over the other party.	M	-	-	2.0% (3)	58.8% (90)	39.2% (60)
		F	9.8% (15)	54.9% (84)	25.5% (39)	5.9% (9)	3.9% (6)

Key: SD-Strongly Disagree, D-Disagree, N-Neutral, A-Agree, SA-Strongly Disagree

Table 2: The Process of Managing Conflict between Male and Female Teachers in the MARA Education Institution (N = 306: Male = 153; Female = 153)

No	Item	Gender	SD	D	N	A	SA
5	Both parties in a conflicting situation have to give their cooperation in order to solve the conflict	M	-	5.9% (9)	15.7% (24)	43.1% (66)	35.3% (54)
		F	3.9% (6)	-	7.8% (12)	52.9% (81)	35.3% (54)
6	A third party should give the best solution in case of conflict	M	11.8% (18)	17.6% (27)	35.3% (54)	23.5% (36)	11.8% (18)
		F	2.0% (3)	3.9% (6)	29.4% (45)	52.9% (81)	11.8% (18)
9	It is better to lie a bit in order to solve a conflict	M	7.8% (12)	5.9% (9)	23.5% (36)	43.1% (66)	19.6% (30)
		F	15.7% (24)	33.3% (51)	45.1% (69)	2.0% (3)	3.9% (6)
10	In a conflicting situation, one party has to avoid the conflict	M	-	-	5.9% (9)	51.0% (78)	43.1% (66)
		F	2.0% (3)	7.8% (12)	27.5% (42)	47.1% (71)	15.7% (24)
11	Solution finding process is needed in conflict management	M	2.0% (3)	2.0% (3)	11.8% (18)	52.9% (81)	31.4% (48)
		F	2.0% (3)	13.7% (21)	21.6% (33)	52.9% (81)	9.8% (15)
14	An influential third party could solve the conflict between two parties	M	-	2.0% (3)	15.7% (24)	64.7% (98)	17.6% (27)
		F	2.0% (3)	-	9.8% (15)	51.0% (78)	37.3% (57)

Key: SD-Strongly Disagree, D-Disagree, N-Neutral, A-Agree, SA-Strongly Disagree

Table 3: The Best Practices in Conflict Management between Male and Female Teachers in MARA Institutions (N = 306: Male = 153; Female = 153)

No	Item	Gender	Rank	Mean	St Dev	Practices
7	It is better to tolerate with the opponent to make them feel better	M		3.06	1.173	High
		F		2.88	1.107	Low
8	The best way in dealing with conflict is by avoiding involvement in quarrel	M		3.65	1.214	High
		F		3.51	1.084	High
12	We need a clear method to solve a conflict	M	5	4.10	.831	Very High
		F		3.90	.878	High
13	In conflict management strategy compromising is the best method	M		3.96	.937	High
		F	5	4.00	.849	Very High
15	An opponent party could help in solving the conflict by being considerate	M		3.98	.648	High
		F		3.78	.642	High
16	There is a possibility that a conflict could reoccur if we wait and have no effort to solve it	M	3	4.35	.627	Very High
		F	4	4.10	.700	Very High
17	Conflict happens all the time, therefore we should not be involved with it	M		2.96	1.232	Low
		F		2.75	1.146	Low
18	Conflict can be manage if interaction between groups is limited and at certain times only	M		2.88	1.177	Low
		F		2.86	1.132	Low
19	Conflict can be solved if there is understanding between parties and find the solution together.	M	1	4.43	.608	Very High
		F	2	4.37	.631	Very High
20	The more influential we are, the more effective we became in solving conflict	M		3.78	.923	High
		F		3.06	1.190	High
21	A conflict can be solved if both parties are opened to negotiation	M	4	4.29	.642	Very high
		F	1	4.49	.543	Very high
22	A king could solve a conflict between two opponents who are quarreling.	M		3.63	.894	High
		F		3.10	1.044	High
23	It is more noble if both parties could accept the solution peacefully	M	2	4.37	.692	Very High
		F	3	4.29	.610	Very High
24	By delaying the problem, we could calm down and the problem will be solved by itself	M		3.29	1.205	High
		F		2.73	1.021	Low

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