

A Study on Application of Conflict Management Styles Within Organizational Hierarchies: The Case of Debre Markos University, Ethiopia

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Abstract

This study was designed to investigate Conflict Management styles used by debremarkos University leaders. Specifically, the intent of the study was to compare the application of conflict management styles (avoiding, Forcing, accommodation, compromising and collaboration) across four organizational hierarchies of university leaders (Directorate, Faculty Deans, Officers and Department heads), in order to determine if individual's status of responsibility differences would make varies the individual's extent to apply conflict management styles when to solve problems at work place. Position holders were considered purposively from university staffs and the standardized self-report questionnaire instrument by Rahim (1983a) was utilized to assess the conflict management styles of 50 leaders in Debremarkos University, who were randomly selected from university leaders. One way ANOVA test was utilized to investigate the use of conflict management styles variation across four organizational hierarchy levels in University. Results of this study indicated the significance difference in use of avoiding and collaboration but not for forcing, accommodation and compromising styles. At directorate levels, collaboration is highly used as best style to manage conflict whereas avoiding is rarely used at this position but more likely used by department heads.

Keywords: Conflict management styles, Organizational hierarchies

1. Introduction

Conflict is not totally unnecessary, if it managed effectively. It can be positive when it encourages creativity, new looks at old conditions, the clarification of points of view, and the development of human capabilities to handle interpersonal differences but can be negative when it creates resistance to change, establishes disorder in organization or interpersonal relations fosters distrust, builds a feeling of defeat, or widens the gap of misunderstanding (Thomas K.W. and L.R. Pondy, 1977). Conflict management covers every action taken by the parties to the conflict to handle the situation. Conflict must be perceived by the parties to it; whether or not conflict exists is a perception issue. If no one is aware of a conflict, then it is generally agreed no conflict exists. Conflict, begins when one party perceives that another party has negatively affected, or is about to negatively affect, something the first party cares about (Stephen Robbins, 1996).

Colleges and universities are no longer seen as quiet enclaves free from the conflicts that arise in all hierarchical organizations because of differences in goals or plans for the allocation of resources, misinterpretation or inconsistent application of institutional regulations, breaches of formal or informal contracts, power struggles and personal antagonisms are all possible sources of conflict (Folger J, and Shubert JJ 1995).

“Conflicts on campus are growing in number, kind, and complexity; The current university context is clearly more challenging than in the past; The range of conflicts and the forums available for their management are much more far reaching than ever before; In short, society has changed... and so has the university” (Volpe MR, and Chandler D 1999). Conflict management has received increasing attention in the organizational literature because of a shift in attitudes toward conflict in organizations. The traditional view of conflict as something harmful has changed to a view that sees conflict as a reality of organizational life (Kamil Kozan, 2003). Functional levels of conflict are conducive to innovation and higher quality decisions (Robbins S. F, 1974). Conflict management skills are important for each staffs of the university to function effectively at any levels within organizations. It has been and continuous to be measured by a variety of different taxonomies. One of the first conceptual schemes for classifying conflict revolved around a simple cooperation-competition dichotomy. However, doubts were raised over the ability of the dichotomy to reflect the complexity of an individual's perceptions of conflict behavior and a new two- dimensional grid for classifying the styles was developed.

The research made by (Kamil .K. , 2003) on Interpersonal conflict management styles of Jordanian managers in 10 private and 5 public organizations indicated that general managers used collaboration style more often than others, but less use of forcing style. Compromise is positively correlated with all other styles except forcing. Again collaboration is the first preference of managers with all conflicting parties. Study in Osun State, Nigeria identified, as 80.6% of respondent's response also showed the school administrators were not knowledgeable in conflict management, coupled with the absence of laid down procedures for conflict management which contributed to the high rate, (6-10 times occurrence) of conflicts and industrial actions in the

schools. Finally they concluded that the issue of conflict management in school administration has reached a point to allow students to make necessary input into school administration (participative management) (Olu .K and Abosede .O, 2003). In Similar country Research conducted on the ‘Variability Pattern in Conflict Management Strategies among School Administrators of Secondary Schools in Nigeria showed, Clear disparity appear to exist between sampled groups, in a majority of the tested variables of avoidance, forcing, and bribing, but a clustering pattern, indicating group consonance, was observed in the application of bargaining method. They concluded from result, administrators’ preference in the use of bargaining as a conflict management tool in school districts and also on areas of dissonance, in conflict management strategy, among education managers (Peter O. I and Samuel I. A, 2009).

Conflict management practiced by private university college was analyzed by (Mulatu. M, 2007). Finally he reached on finding which showed Integrating as a best style and positive perception of staffs for functionality of conflict, however, staffs replied frequently occurrence of conflict in organization, because of personal behaviors and scarcity of resources. Especially dispute between students and academic staffs which results destructive performance in the organization.

Investigation on conflict management in public and private sector universities in Pakistan via survey method with the help of questionnaire was conducted. Result indicated that conflict was intense in the public sector universities; interpersonal conflict was more prevalent in public sector while task conflict was high in the private sector universities. Similarly faculty in both types of universities used integrating, compromising and avoiding styles simultaneously in case of conflict and no significant difference in the conflict management styles of both types of universities, however no formal system in both types of universities to manage conflict (Siraj.U, and etal, 2011).

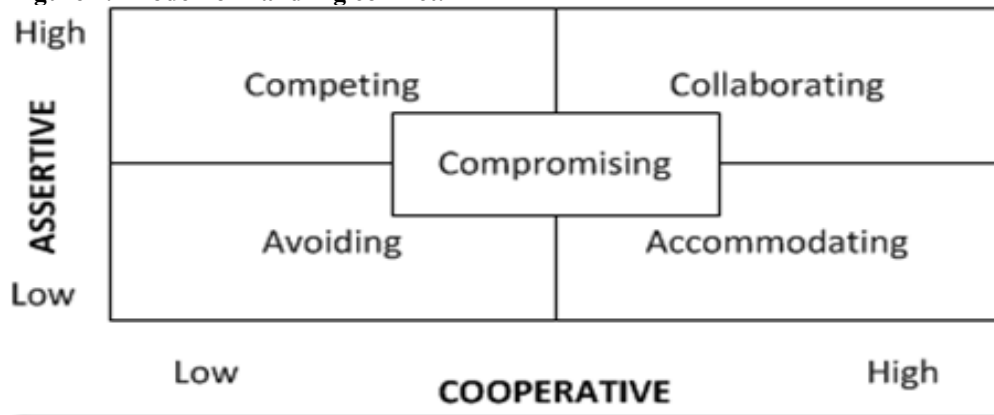
Disparity result is found to use avoiding, forcing and bribing but bargaining as best conflict management strategy in secondary school (Peter O. I and Samuel I. A, 2009). Some researchers found that collaboration management style was used as best style in higher education (Rashid .R, 2002, Siraj.U, and etal, 2011) and others found conflict management styles depends on organizational status of individual which showed that Dominating and avoiding was used highly at higher level but collaborating was at lower level (Raymond. E, 2000). However, contrast to this collaboration used mostly by upper status while avoiding and obliging used by lower status (Brewer. N and etal, 2002). Integrating, compromise and obliging were used as best style by university students and conflict management styles could made difference between sex and different ethnic groups of students (Mekonnen. E, 2007). But, contradicted with this and argued that conflict management skill intervention could made difference among individuals, rather than sex and ethnic group of individuals (Rashid .R, 2002). Therefore, still not all found common result on conflict management styles used in different institutions, especially that used by individual in different organizational hierarchy within organization.

conceptualization has been one of the most popular styles of resolving interpersonal conflict on two basic dimensions; concern for self and concern for others, the first dimension explains the degree (high or low) to which a person attempts to satisfy their own concerns, while the second dimension explains the degree to which an individual tries to satisfy the needs or concerns of others. Combining the two dimensions resulted into five specific styles of conflict management known as collaboration, accommodation, forcing, avoiding, and compromising.

Integrating (collaborating) is characterized by both high concerns for self and for others, while an avoiding style is associated with both low concerns for self and for others. An obliging (accommodation) style involves low concern for self and high concern for others; conversely, a dominating (forcing) style is characterized by high concern for self and low concern for others. Compromising is associated with intermediate concern for both self and others. Although it has been argued that individuals select among three or four conflict styles, evidence from confirmatory factor analysis suggests that the five factor model has a better fit with data than models of two, three, and four style orientations (Thomas K.W. and L.R. Pandy, 1977).

According to conflict specialist Rahim’s model, five different conflict-handling styles are identified.

Figure 1. Model for handling conflict.



Source: **Robert Kreitner and Angelo Kinicki, 2001**

Several researchers found that collaboration management style was used as best style in higher education and others found conflict management styles depends on organizational status of individual which showed that Dominating and avoiding was used highly at higher level but collaborating was at lower level (Raymond. E, 2000). However, contrast to this others identified that collaboration used mostly by upper status while avoiding and obliging used by lower status (Brewer. N, and etal, 2002). Integrating, compromise and obliging were used as best style by university students and conflict management styles could made difference between sex and different ethnic groups of students (Mekonnen. E, 2007). But, contradicted with this and showed that conflict management skill intervention could made difference among individuals, rather than sex and ethnic group of individuals (Rashid. R, 2002).

Therefore still no common formal system to manage conflict and common accepted found on factors of conflict in organization. This paper was intended to assess in detail the extent the university leaders like to apply different conflict handling styles.

Research Questions- Is there significance difference in application of conflict management styles by individual at various organizational status in DMU?

Objectives of the study- was to analyze the conflict management styles used at various organizational status in Debremarkos University, Ethiopia.

1.1. Research Method

In order to get all the necessary information on the area under which the research was conducted, both the primary and secondary sources of information was used. In order to make the sample representative, the researcher applied a purposive and simple random sampling methods. Purposively leaders were taken, hence that within hierarchy of organization 50 position holders were taken via Simple random sampling.

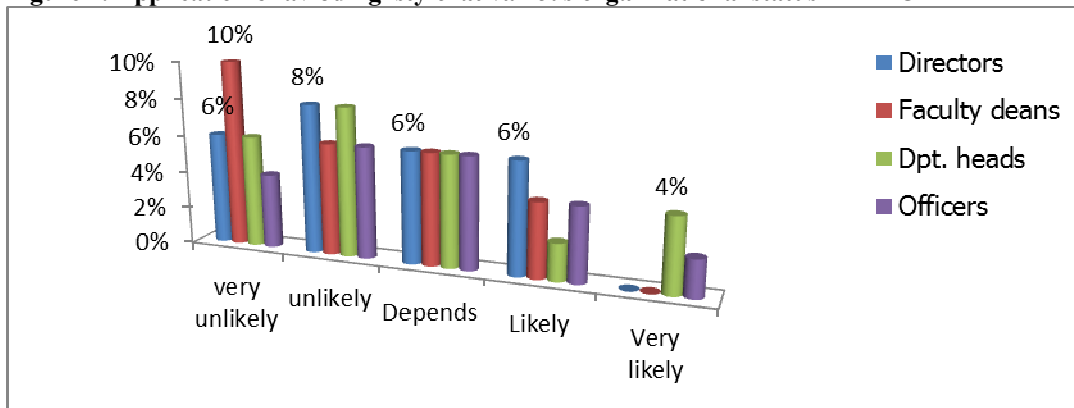
Data was collected by means of structured questionnaire from an individual who has a position in the organization. Both administration and academic staffs have been regrouped in to position holders and non-position holders, then collection of data was from 50 position holders. Conflict management style was measured by statements derived from a conflict inventory developed by Rahim (1983a). Those statements are representing, avoiding, forcing, accommodation, compromise and collaboration (Rahim M.A, 1983).

Data was analyzed through one way ANOVA test and descriptive statistics techniques like min. max, mean, standard deviation and percentage

1.2. Result

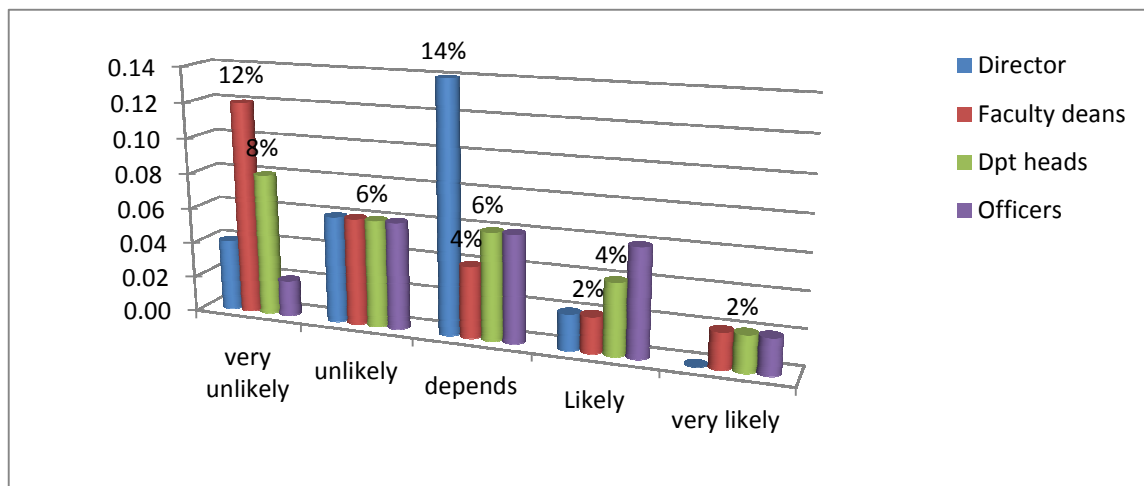
Overall reliability of items were evaluated which have 0.81 Cronbach's Alpha values. This result suggested that items are generally reliable to measure the desired issues on conflict management styles. The extent of avoiding, Forcing, accommodation, compromising and collaboration styles used by University Directors, College deans, Department heads and officers are indicated on figure 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 belows respectively. As it is indicated on the figure 2 below ,6% reflected their interest as they very like avioding styles while they made a decision and 16% also respond that, they like avioding style, but 24% of them depend on conflic situation to make decision through avioding system or other style. 54% are totally unlike or strongly unlike to solve problems by use of avioding style.

Figure 2. Application of avoiding style at various organizational status in DMU



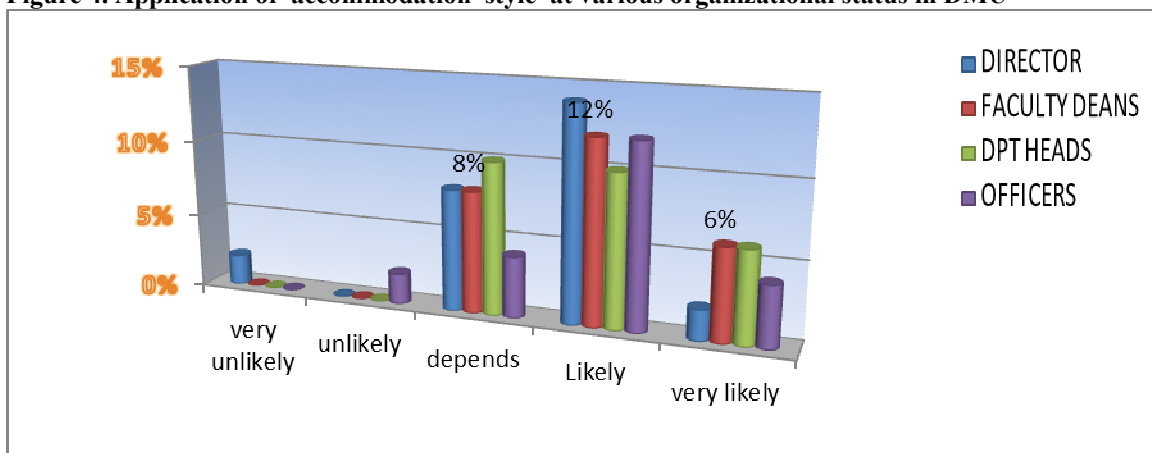
According to result on figure 3, 6% of position holders are very like forcing style while 16% of them respond as they like forcing to break any conflict problems faced to them. 30% prefer depends, means that they depend on situation to use forcing styles. However, 48% of position holders prefer strongly unlike or unlike to solve conflict via forcing style.

Figure 3. Application of Forcing style at various organizational status in DMU



Similarly on figure 4 showed as 18% reflected their interest as they very like accommodation style and 48% also respond that, they like this style. In addition to this 30% of respondents replied that they concerned others issue than them selves depend on conflict situation. Only 4% are totally unlike or strongly unlike to solve problems by use of accommodation.

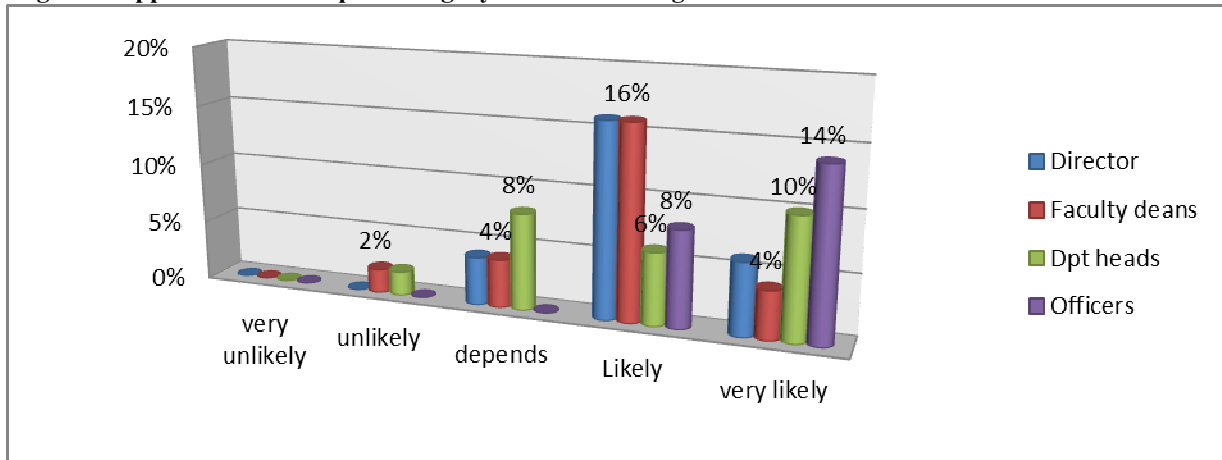
Figure 4. Application of accommodation style at various organizational status in DMU



According to information on the figure 5, 34% reflected their interest as they very like compromising style; 46% like to half concern their idea and other's and 16% make situational response or they may use depend on

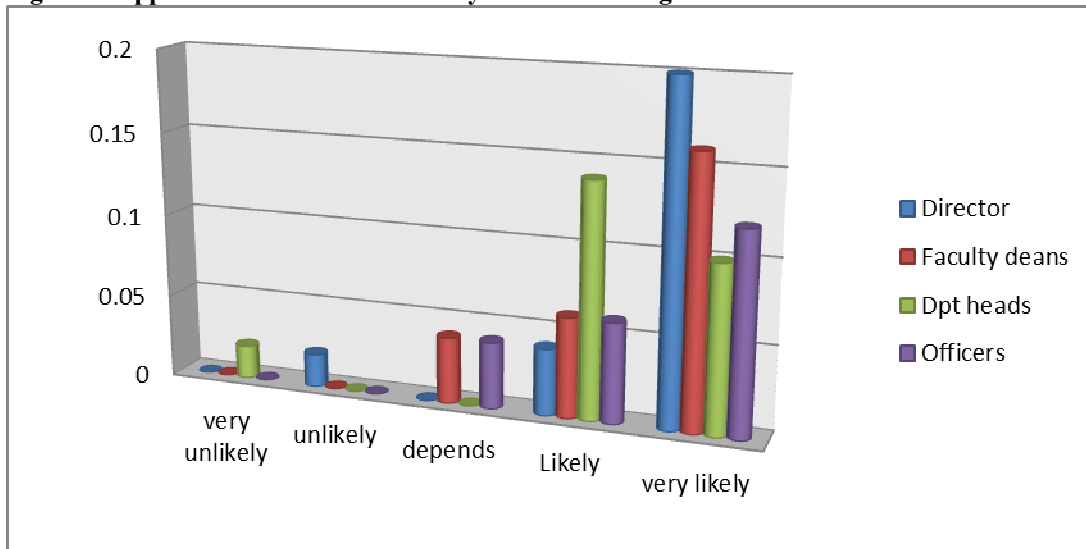
conflict situation to make decision through compromising system.4% are totally unlike or strongly unlike to solve problems by use of compromising.

Figure.5. application of compromising style at various organizational status in DMU.



The last conflict management style identified is collaboration style and the result is indicated on figure 6 below. Accordingly, 58% very like and 30% like cooperation with other peoples in conflict case, however, only 8% use it depend on situation. 4% are totally unlike or strongly unlike to solve problems by use of collaboration.

Figure 6. Application of collaboration style at various organizational status in Debremarkos University.



According to ANOVA Table 1 shows ,across or within four organizational status group (i.e Directors.Faculty Deans,Department heads & Officers) in organization ; significance difference is revealed to like avoiding (F=0.502, p=0.00683) and collaboration style (F=0.610, p=0.012). but not significance difference for using forcing (F=1.200, P= 0.320), Accommodation (F= 0.503, P=0.682) and compormising style (F= 2.411,P=0.079) across or within these organizational status group in organization.

Table 1. One way ANOVA for difference in use of five conflict management styles within four organizational status.

		Sum of square	Df	Mean square	F	Sing.
Avoiding	Between groups	2.298	3	.766	0.502	.00683
	Within groups	70.182	46	1.526		
	Total	72.480	49			
Forcing	Between groups	5.115	3	1.705	1.200	.320
	Within groups	65.385	46	1.421		
	Total	70.500	49			
Accommodation	Between groups	1.097	3	.366	0.503	.682
	Within groups	33.483	46	.728		
	Total	34.580	49			
Compromising	Between groups	4.416	3	1.472	2.411	.079
	Within groups	28.084	46	.611		
	Total	32.500	49			
Collaboration	Between groups	1.455	3	.485	0.610	.012
	Within groups	36.545	46	.794		
	Total	38.000	49			

Using the mean and standard deviation for interpretation, collaboration (m=4.12 st.dev=1.079), compromising (m=3.81, std. =1.001) and accommodation styles (mean=3.59, std. =0.953) are used as best style. However, forcing (mean=2.51, std=1.203) is used depend on conflict situation while avoiding style (mean=2.49, std=1.236) is seldom used in overall organization.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of conflict management styles.

Variables	N	Mean	Std.deviation
Avoiding	50	2.49	1.236
Forcing	50	2.51	1.203
Accommodation	50	3.59	0.953
Compromising	50	3.81	1.001
Collaboration	50	4.12	1.079

Discussion- Five conflict management techniques are examined to see their application at four organizational levels such as Directorate, Faculty Deans, Department heads and Officers in Debre Markos University. Significance difference is discovered in use of avoiding [F=1.502, p=0.0683] and collaboration style [F=1.610, P=0.012] by these target groups. But insignificance difference is identified for remaining styles. According to response on figure 6-10, around 6% of officers and Department heads avoid open discussion or low concern to themselves and to other's. Additionally at least 8% of them also applied their power only to satisfy their needs, but both styles are relatively less used at Directing and Faculty levels. Accommodation is highly used at Faculty levels but less used at Department levels; compromising is applied highly by Directors & officers and Collaboration is highly used as a best style by Directors and Faculty Deans.

Therefore, in line with result found by Brewer et al (2002), but contradict with Raymond .E (2000) collaboration is used mostly by upper status but avoiding is used at lower status in Debre markos University. Generally the order rank of conflict management styles from highly used to less used in overall organization is collaboration, compromising, Accommodation, Forcing and Avoiding.

Conclusion- The extent to apply five conflict management styles at various status in organization indicated significance difference in use of avoiding and collaboration but not for forcing, accommodation and compromising styles. However, overall collaboration is highly used as best style to manage conflict whereas avoiding is rarely used.

Recommendation- All the staff members should be given awareness about the beneficial use of conflict management in their groups or departments.

Conflict management training programs should be designed for the staff in general and lower level leaders in particularly.

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