

Conflict Management Strategies in Higher Education Institutions: Public Sector Universities in Kpk Province, Pakistan

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Abstract

Conflict is a vital thing in any organization and no organization is safe from it. Higher education institutions are also not free from this. The conflict mostly takes place between the faculty and administration. Many scholars have urged that the educators must learn the conflict management skills so as to overcome it, every individual use different type of conflict styles. This research aims to cover the different conflict management strategies used by faculty and administrations of different universities of Khyber Pukhtoonkhwa including the causes of conflict, demographic characteristics of individuals concerned (age, gender, designation, experience, type of university), the nature of conflict (type and intensity) and the result of these differing styles leads to different consequences such as positive and negative effect on the planning, organizational effectiveness, job quality, creativity, decision quality, trust, anxiety, satisfaction, commitment, fear and anger. A detailed questionnaire is designed using liker scale in order to collect the data. Three public universities will be selected in which questionnaire will be distributed. Description, correlation and chi square are used for analysis.

Key words: Conflict, management, strategies, Administration, Human resource management

Introduction

A large part of research on the organizational conflict has been carried out in the typical organizations, which have non-academic settings, but it does not mean that educational institutions are free from conflict (Hearn & Anderson, 2002). Conflict exists in the educational institutions, which is considered a negative force and its existence in the departments is strongly disliked by faculty members. (Browman, 2002)

Sources of conflict fall into three main categories i.e. Personal behavior, Structural and Communication factors (Bondesio, 1992). Some common sources of conflict pertaining to structure are competition, hierarchy, stressful work environment, and changes in the structure of the university or units within it (Barsky, 2002). Some other common sources of conflict in the departments of higher education institutions, which are responsible for provoking jealousy, rupture, uneasiness and maltreatment, are appointments, merit and promotion processes, system for annual appraisal and tenure (Barsky, 2002), faculty hiring decisions, inadequate space, personality conflicts, belief systems held by faculty, limited resources, faculty retention, diversity issues etc (Stanley & Algert, 2007).

Competition among faculty members takes place due to insufficient resources, shrinking funds and undue division of resources, which is responsible for conflict in the universities (Barsky, 2002). These insufficient and limited resources may be in the form of financial, manpower, equipments and information resources. Competition for limited resources accounts for 29% of conflict and interdependence accounts for 19% of conflicts in the organizations (Henry, 2009).

According to Folger and Shubert (1995), "colleges and universities are no longer seen as quiet enclaves free from the conflicts that arise in all hierarchical organizations 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".

Many scholars suggest that conflict can both be constructive and destructive, Constructive conflict is known as functional conflict while destructive conflict is known as dysfunctional conflict. Functional conflict is defined as "constructive challenging of ideas, beliefs, and assumptions, and respect for others' viewpoints even when parties disagree" (Massey & Dawes; 2007). It is considered useful for the organization and is therefore welcomed while dysfunctional conflict is considered damaging and is therefore discouraged in the organizations. Dysfunctional conflict is thought to increase dissatisfaction and decrease the affective well-being of the employees and decline the organizational efficacy (Rahim, 2000; Guerra et al., 2005).

Conflict Management Styles

Conflict management style is someone's behavioral pattern, which he tends to exhibit while facing a conflict (Moberg, 2001). Rahim and Bonoma (1979) have classified the conflict management on five styles based on two basic dimensions: Concern for Self and Concern for Others. These five different styles of managing conflict are Competing, Integrating, Avoiding, Obliging and Compromising. Competing style represents high concern for self and low concern for others and identified with a win-lose orientation. This style is not liked by majority of conflict management theorists. They consider it inappropriate style because it gives rise to frustration and harbinger of more conflict (Rahim, 2002) and blocks the road to new experiences (Richardson, Utlay, & Pilkington, 1989). Those people who use competing style are considered less effective by their subordinates (Van de Vliert, Huisman, & Euwema, 1995). Integrating/Collaborating/Problem Solving style represents high concern for self and others and identified with a win-win orientation. When someone uses this style, he tries to satisfy the desires and concerns of all parties and search for equally advantageous outcome. When both parties concerns are important and can't be compromised (Rahim, 2000; Robbins, 2001). Avoiding: style represents low concern for self and low concern for others and identified with a lose-lose orientation. This style is used when someone does not want to assert himself, does not cooperate or avoids the conflict altogether. This can prove to be a good style to use if one is dealing with a difficult person or when there is no urgency to make a decision. This style can also be used when the issue of conflict is insignificant or some other important issues need attention (Rahim, 2000; Robbins, 2001). Obliging/Accommodating style represents low concern for self and high concern for others and identified with a lose-win orientation. In this mode, one party tries to give priority to the concerns of his opponents without asserting one's own concerns and when the relationship preservation is more important than ones concerns / interests. This style can also be used when someone finds his position to be wrong and wants to maintain cooperation (Rahim, 2000; Robbins, 2001), Compromising style represents intermediate concern for self and others. In this style, each party to the conflict works cooperatively and gives up something to arrive at a compromised solution to the conflict. In this, there are no winners or losers. It is useful method for temporary solutions to difficult problems and when time is too short to arrive at a detailed and thorough solution (Rahim, 2000; Robbins, 2001).

In universities, conflict may bring both positive and negative outcomes. Conflict can have positive consequences for the academic departments in helping to "define issues, resolve issues, increase group cohesion, establish alliances with other groups, and keep faculty alert to one another's interests" (Gmelch, 1995). Conflict also helps in developing organizational effectiveness, development (Eisenhardt & Schoonhoven, 1990) improving creativity and job quality in a group (e.g., Amason, 1996; Nemeth, 1986). Conflict within teams helps in improving financial performance, strategic planning, decision quality and organizational development (Eisenhardt and schoonhoven, 1990; Bourgeois, 1985).

Research regarding gender in the conflict management has confused many researchers because different researchers have obtained different results. Male academics in the higher education institutions use accommodation style of conflict management more (Cetin & Hacifazlioglu, 2004b), while Balay (2007) found that male teachers avoid conflicts more than female teachers. Sutschek (2002) argues that males use obliging and dominating conflict management strategy more than females while females use avoiding and integrating conflict management styles more frequently. The females employ compromising strategy more frequently in managing conflict situation. Vokic and Sontor (2005) have found gender, marital status and parenthood significantly related with the accommodating conflict management styles (Vokić & Sontor, 2005).

Age, experience and designation are also considered important factors that influence the conflict management style of teachers and administrators. Aged teachers use integrating style more often than those who are younger (Balay, 2007). Academics with 11-20 years of experience use accommodation style frequently. (Cetin & Hacifazlioglu, 2004b). According to another research inexperienced females use the compromising strategy more often than their male counterparts do (Sutschek, 2002). Assistant Professors use collaboration conflict management styles more often than Associate Professors (Cetin & Hacifazlioglu, 2004).

Conflicts in the higher educational institutions are rampant and ubiquitous. Some years back, there was no proper training in the field of conflict management for teachers and administrators in the universities but now most of universities are running conflict management training programs. Know-how of Conflict management is considered one of the important skills for administrators and teachers. Interpersonal conflicts are now common phenomena in the higher education institutions. These institutions are working to stop these conflicts from further expansion. For this purpose academic grievance procedures have been adopted (Ludeman, 1989), ombuds people have been engaged (Harper & Rifkind, 1992) diversity initiative (Volpe & Witherspoon, 1992), harassment programs have been launched (Fitzgerald, 1992), psychotherapists and conflict specialists hired

(Wilson, 1997), conflict resolution courses have been designed (Lewicki, 1998), dispute resolution centers have been setup (Jameson, 1998).

University has a complex and unique structure. It is a mixture of horizontal and vertical elements such as lines of authority, decision making, and accountability. Its structure has been described as organized anarchies, loosely coupled and equated with garbage can models. Such a structure is a befitting and suitable breeding ground for conflicts.

It is a known fact that different people use different conflict management strategies / styles while dealing with conflict. Keeping in view the unique structural arrangements of these differences in relation to teachers and administrators at public sector universities in the Khyber Pukhtoonkhwa province of Pakistan are focused in the study including the causes of conflict, demographic characteristics of individuals concerned (age, gender, designation, experience, type of university), the nature of conflict (type and intensity) and these differing styles result in different consequences such as positive and negative effect on the planning, organizational effectiveness, job quality, creativity, decision quality, trust, anxiety, satisfaction, commitment, fear and anger.

Research Hypothesis

The conflict management strategies/styles are different in public universities where teachers and administrators use varying conflict management styles that are affected by their demographic characteristics. The concerned variables to the hypothesis mentioned are conflict, causes, nature, consequences, management, styles, solutions and demographics.

DATA COLLECTION AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Social research reveals that survey approach to data collection is the “most frequently used mode of observation in the social sciences (Babbie, 1993). The potential of survey research is questionnaire, which empowers the researcher to collect every kind of data to answer every question about the topic (Yin, 1994). As to make the research more specific I have taken three public universities. Data has been collected from all the possible sources to squarely cover the related dimensions so that a comprehensive view of both the problem and solution is envisaged.

It is the main inflow of primary data through a standardized set of questions arranged in a well-structured format. For this research, a questionnaire was developed with the help of conflict literature and questionnaires developed by various scholars (Rahim,1983; Jehn, 1995; Balay, 2006). A five point Likert scale have been used. Questions have been asked about the sources, nature, consequences, solutions and styles of conflict..

Descriptive Statistics

In this chapter we will discuss the relationship among different variables which have been taken in the research. The following table shows the descriptive statistics of the variables used in the research. It is used to find out the mean and standard deviation for the research variables. In this table the names of the different variables are clearly mentioned, the second column shows the minimum value in observation for a specific variable; the third column shows the maximum value in observation for a given variable while the fifth column shows the standard deviation of the observations for a particular variable. The solution has the minimum value of 1 and maximum value of 8.83, mean is 2.3646 and standard deviation is 1.05179. The compromising style has the minimum value of 1 and maximum value of 4.75 with the mean 3.3187 and standard deviation is 0.84097.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of the variables used in the research

Variables	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev
Solution	1.00	8.83	2.3646	1.05179
Compromising	1.00	4.75	3.3187	.84097
Obliging	1.50	10.50	3.7469	1.10271
Avoiding	1.75	5.00	3.2062	.74181
Integrating	1.00	5.00	3.6219	.79256
Compensating	1.00	4.25	2.6125	.60705
Consequencies	1.00	5.00	3.2125	.84235
Causes	1.00	27.00	4.0375	2.74566
Nature	1.00	4.80	2.7825	.74575
Type of University	.00	1.00	.5000	.50315
Name of the institute	.00	1.00	.5000	.50315
Qualification	.00	3.00	1.0375	.80259
Domicile	.00	4.00	.0875	.48244

The Obliging style has the minimum value of 1.5, maximum value of 10.50, mean is 3.7469 and standard deviation is 1.10271. The avoiding style minimum value is 1.75 and maximum value is 5, mean is 3.2062 while standard deviation is .74181. Integrating style has the minimum value of 1 and maximum value of 5 while mean and standard deviation is 3.6219 and .79256 respectively. The compensating style has the minimum value of 1 and maximum of 4.25 and mean is 2.6125 and standard deviation is .60705. Consequencies have the minimum value of 1, maximum of 5 and mean and standard deviation of 3.2125 and .84235 respectively. Causes have minimum value of 1 and maximum of 27 and mean is 4.0375 and standard deviation is 2.74566. Nature has the minimum value of 1 and maximum value of 4.80 while mean and standard deviation is 2.7825 and .74575 respectively. Now in the demographic impacts the type of university and the name of institute, both have the minimum value of 0.0, maximum of 1 and mean is .5 while standard deviation is .50315. The qualification has the minimum value of 0.00, maximum of 3 and mean is 1.0375 and standard deviation is .80259. Domicile has the minimum value of 0.00 and maximum is 4 and mean and standard deviation is .0875 and .48244 respectively.

Data Analysis and Empirical Results

We start our analysis from the correlation table-2 as given bellow the relationship between designation and qualification, qualification and type of university, consequences and nature, Compensating style and nature of conflict, compensating style and consequences, integrating style and qualification, avoiding style and type of university, compromising style and consequences, compromising style and integrating style, and compromising style and obliging style are significant at level $\alpha = 0.01$ and the relationship between consequences and gender, integrating and type of university, compromising and qualification, and compromising and compensating styles are also significant at level $\alpha = 0.05$, whereas all the other variables have insignificant relationship.

Table-2: Correlations

	Designation	Qualification	Length Of service	Gender	Type of University	Nature	Causes	Consequen	Comptst	Integrat	Avoiding	Obliging	Comprom	Solution
Designation	1													
Qualification	.626**	1												
Length Of service	.114	.057	1											
Gender	-.088	-.064	.182	1										
Type of University	-.210	.360**	.103	.000	1									
NATURE	.060	-.045	.099	-.103	.125	1								
Causes	-.074	-.012	.104	.028	.194	.100	1							
Consequen	.064	-.074	.159	.228*	.075	.550**	.088	1						
Comptst	-.126	.063	.115	.023	-.083	.428**	.062	.382**	1					
Integrat	.119	-.351**	.060	.124	-.250*	.142	.065	.215	.167	1				
Avoiding	-.090	.083	.172	-.141	-.288**	.191	.013	.078	.181	.120	1			
Obliging	-.028	-.014	.001	-.015	-.083	.081	.055	.082	.145	.191	.213	1		
Comprom	.104	-.266*	.196	.143	-.097	.218	.035	.301**	.239*	.604*	-.060	.297**	1	
Solution	-.147	-.019	.042	-.018	.110	.187	.063	-.016	-.113	.195	-.177	-.065	.072	1

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

We applied qualitative Chi-square test to test the degree of association among gender and prescribed variables as listed below, the empirical results are presented in table-3 as under. **Table No. 3 Gender analysis**

	Solution	Comprom	Obliging	Avoiding	Integrat	Comptst	Consequen	Causes	Nature	Gender
Chi-Square	60.000 ^a	65.875 ^b	85.000 ^b	34.725 ^c	100.600 ^d	44.800 ^c	56.200 ^e	1.137E2 ^c	38.575 ^f	39.200 ^g
df	19	14	14	12	13	11	11	12	16	1
Asymp. Sig.	.000	.000	.000	.001	.000	.000	.000	.000	.001	.000

These results indicate high level of significant between the listed variables and gender, declaring strong relationship among these attributes because in all cases the p-value is less than level of significance $\alpha = 0.05$.

Chi-square test was applied to the degree of association among qualification with the given variables; the empirical results are as follows.

Table No. 4 Qualification analysis

	Solution	Comprom	Obliging	Avoiding	Integrat	Comptst	Consequ	Causes	Nature	Qualification
Chi-Square	60.000 ^a	65.875 ^b	85.000 ^b	34.725 ^c	100.600 ^d	44.800 ^e	56.200 ^e	1.137E2 ^c	38.575 ^f	30.900 ^g
df	19	14	14	12	13	11	11	12	16	3
Asymp. Sig.	.000	.000	.000	.001	.000	.000	.000	.000	.001	.000

These results indicate high level of significant between the listed variables and qualification, declaring strong relationship among these attributes because in all cases the p-value is less than level of significance $\alpha = 0.05$.

Table 5. Age Analysis

Test Statistics

	Solution	Comprom	Obliging	Avoiding	Integrat	Comptst	Consequ	Causes	Nature	Age
Chi-Square	60.000 ^a	65.875 ^b	85.000 ^b	34.725 ^c	100.600 ^d	44.800 ^e	56.200 ^e	1.137E2 ^c	38.575 ^f	46.700 ^g
Df	19	14	14	12	13	11	11	12	16	3
Asymp. Sig.	.000	.000	.000	.001	.000	.000	.000	.000	.001	.000

These results shows high level of significant between the listed variables and age, declaring strong relationship among these attributes because in all cases the p-value is less than level of significance $\alpha = 0.05$.

Table 5.Designation Analysis

	Solution	Comprom	Obliging	Avoiding	Integrat	Comptst	Consequ	causes	nature	designation
Chi-Square	60.000 ^a	65.875 ^b	85.000 ^b	34.725 ^c	100.600 ^d	44.800 ^e	56.200 ^e	1.137E2 ^c	38.575 ^f	7.200 ^g
df	19	14	14	12	13	11	11	12	16	1
Asymp. Sig.	.000	.000	.000	.001	.000	.000	.000	.000	.001	.007

These results in the above table shows high level of significant between the listed variables and designation, declaring strong relationship among these attributes because in all cases the p-value is less than level of significance $\alpha = 0.05$

Concluding Remarks

Keeping in view the unique structural arrangements of the higher education institutions, these differences in relation to teachers and administrators at public sector universities in the Khyber Puktoonkhwa province of Pakistan are focused in this study including the causes of conflict, demographic characteristics of individuals concerned (age, gender, designation, experience, type of university), the nature of conflict (type and intensity) and these differing styles result in different consequences such as positive and negative effect on the planning, organizational effectiveness, job quality, creativity, decision quality, trust, anxiety, satisfaction, commitment, fear and anger. My hypothesis was that the conflict management strategies/styles are different in public universities where teachers and administrators use varying conflict management styles that are affected by their demographic characteristics. In all my research work and the analysis done, I found that the all of my results were significant. Demographics are considered as important factors which influence the conflict management styles. The faculty and administration uses different type of styles according to their demographics. For example the public universities have young as well as very old faculty and most of the old faculty and administration uses integrating styles. Furthermore the female uses mostly compromising style as compared to their male counterparts. The results clearly show that the age in the demographics also play important role because as discuss above the old age faculty and administration uses different type of styles as compared to the younger ones. Moreover qualification and designation also affect the style of the individuals. For example the sometimes

the higher authority uses integrating style and the sometimes competitive style among the colleagues. So the change in demographics will change the styles of the conflict. This conflict has a lot of consequences which may bring harm to the reputation of the university as well as it is beneficial in some cases. But one should have knowledge of conflict in order to deal with it.

From all the research I can conclude that demographics affect the conflict management styles and if there is any change in the demographics the conflict management styles will change. The faculty and administration of public universities adopt different type of conflict management styles. The universities are full of conflict but there is no proper treatment of the conflict. So the universities should take interest in order to get rid of this because if it is not treated from the beginning it can harm the reputation of the universities

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