

Conflict Management Styles of School Administrators of Rural State Universities in Samar Island, Philippines

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to determine the conflict management styles of school administrators of rural state universities in Samar Island, Philippines. Majority of the school administrators perceived themselves together with the faculty and non-teaching staff as avoiders. School administrators think that conflict should be avoided in favor of harmony and that conflicts may damage the harmonious relationship of the group. They are afraid that if the conflict continues, someone will get hurt and the relationship will ruin. Thus, avoiders stay away from the issues over which the conflict is taking place and from the persons they are in conflict with. With the null hypothesis being not rejected, it can be concluded that school administrators, faculty and non-teaching staff shared the same views as to the avoider conflict management style. However, since there was a significant difference between the perception of the school administrators and the faculty and non-teaching staff on the school administrators' compromiser, accommodator, controller, and collaborator conflict management styles, then it showed that these respondents have varying perceptions over the conflict management styles manifested by school administrators.

KEYWORDS: *conflict management styles, school administrators, rural state universities, Samar Island*

1. INTRODUCTION

Organizational effectiveness centers on how effective an organization is in achieving the outcomes that the organization intends to produce. For academic institutions, to achieve organizational effectiveness, it is dependent on the managerial competence of the school administrators. Within an organization, situations arise when values, opinions and perspectives clash. With this situation, conflicts arise resulting to hampered productivity, low morale, inappropriate behaviour and misunderstanding among workers. This then calls for the intervention of the school administrator to resolve conflict through applying appropriate conflict management style.

With the advent of science and technology, complexities in managing the affairs of the organization also emerge. Managing the maximum use of human and other resources of organizations have made the work of managers more complicated and challenging. Many individuals tend to compromise.

Generally, conflict occurs when a person's wants or desires do not agree with those of someone else's. Conflict is a perpetual given of life, although different views of it may be held. Some may view conflict as being a negative situation that must be avoided at all times, while others may see it as being a phenomenon which needs good management. However, this conflict as long as it is resolved effectively, it can lead to personal and professional growth. The good news is that, by resolving conflict successfully, a school administrator could solve many of the problems that are brought to the surface, as well as, getting benefits that might not at first are expected (Traveler, 2010).

Conflict is an unavoidable reality of living. But, while one may recognize this, it still does not disprove the fact that conflict is difficult to define. It is often viewed much differently today than it was a few decades ago, and is linked to, but is more than, communication. Perhaps because conflict is such an

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intangible thing, one tends to discuss it in terms of levels, reasons, and types. Within this preview, conflict management is deemed to be a concept that could deal with such an issue. Conflict management as a broad concept is broken into categories – conflict management styles and conflict management strategies.

Conflict management is important for both organizations and employees. Organizations can acquire great returns, better utilization of resources, better outcomes, improved work environment and above all better future, in general. On the other hand, employees could also reap more advantages if dealt with proper conflict management style by administrators or supervisors. Managing conflicts makes it possible for employees to interact with others in a more appropriate manner, to get work done and to do work properly with others in an efficient manner and to have better work life in organization. Individuals use various styles in handling conflicts. These styles vary from individual to individual. Handling conflicts properly increases efficiency at both individual and group levels (Tjosvold, 1998 as cited by Deutsch, Coleman and Marcus, 2006).

Conflict in an academic setting is a daily occurrence even in State Universities and Colleges setting. This is so because an agreement of opinion concerning rules governing the educational system seldom exists among the stakeholders—school administrators, faculty members, non-teaching personnel, students, and even with the parents. These parties, particularly school administrators and students, see one another as challengers, not as those working toward a common goal, as is generally the case in other organizations. In particular, the school administrators are expected to deal with conflict situations not only on a daily basis, but on an hourly basis. It is one of their major tasks to ensure that everything in their organization runs smoothly.

Hence, the objective of this study was to find out the conflict management styles of school administrators of state universities in Samar Island. This study would then be helpful to determine what style of conflict management that works in academic institutions in rural state universities.

2. Objectives

The study sought to:

1. determine conflict management styles practiced by the school administrators as perceived by the school administrators themselves, faculty members/non-teaching personnel, in terms of Jay Hall's classification:

- A. competing/controlling style;
- B. accommodating style;
- C. avoiding style;
- D. collaborating style; and
- E. compromising style; and

identify the significant difference between perception of the school administrators themselves and faculty members/non-teaching personnel on their practiced conflict management styles.

3. Review of Literature

Conflict is certain as long as there is a human element present. Thus, conflict is a pervasive aspect in both social circles and professional interactions. "Conflict exists in all human relationships: it always has and probably will" (Landau, 2001). Conflict is not a phenomenon; it is inevitable when more than one person is involved in any enterprise or endeavor (Burnside, 2008). Conflict is normal, natural, necessary and the problem is not the existence of conflict but how we handle it (Mayer, 2008). When conflict stirs up within the organization it creates organizational conflict. Organizational conflict could either be substantive or affective, can be divided into intraorganizational and interorganizational. Interorganizational conflict occurs between two or more organizations. When different businesses are competing against one another, this is an example of interorganizational conflict. Intraorganizational conflict is conflict within an organization, and can be examined based upon level (e.g. department, work team, individual), and can be classified as interpersonal, intragroup and intergroup. Interpersonal conflict--once again--whether it is substantive or affective, refers to conflict between two or more individuals (not representing the group they are a part of) of the same or different group at the same or different level, in an organization. Interpersonal conflict can be divided into intragroup and intergroup conflict. While the former--intragroup--occurs between members of a group (or between subgroups within a group), the latter--intergroup--occurs between groups or units in an organization (Rahim, 2002).

Another definition of conflict states that it occurs when one's actions or beliefs are unacceptable to and hence resisted by the other (Forsyth, 2009). Conflicts exist when tension develops because one person's ideas or opinions are incompatible with those of another. Conflicts may also arise when a person's wants and/or needs are not in harmony with those of someone else's. Conflict per se may not be all that negative, but needs to have an overall conflict management, aimed to minimize affective conflicts at all levels, attain and maintain a moderate amount of

substantive conflict, and use the appropriate conflict management strategy--to effectively bring about the first two goals, and also to match the status and concerns of the two parties in conflict (Rahim, 2002).

In order for conflict management strategies to be effective, they should satisfy certain criteria. The following criteria as pointed out by Batcheldor(2000) are particularly useful not only for conflict management, but also decision making in management, namely: organization learning and effectiveness - in order to attain this objective, conflict management strategies should be designed to enhance critical and innovative thinking to learn the process of diagnosis and intervention with the right problems; needs of stakeholders - sometimes multiple parties are involved in a conflict in an organization and the challenge of conflict management would be to involve these parties in a problem solving process that will lead to collective learning and organizational effectiveness, organizations should institutionalize the positions of employee advocate, customer and supplier advocate, as well as environmental and stockholder advocates; and ethics - a wise leader must behave ethically, and to do so the leader should be open to new information and be willing to change his or her mind. By the same token subordinates and other stakeholders have an ethical duty to speak out against the decisions of supervisors when consequences of these decisions are likely to be serious. "Without an understanding of ethics, conflict cannot be handled".

Taylor and Hardman (2004) posit that "gender must be seen as more than an individual's sex; it must be seen, simultaneously, as: a characteristic of languages; sets of expectations for individuals' behaviors, attitudes and feelings; sets of social structures created and recreated through human interactions; complex webs of relationships; ideology; interactive outcomes of perceptions and self-presentations, thus always in progress and in relations". With increasing number of women moving into decision making positions in organizations, coupled with the obvious importance of conflict management skills in providing effective leadership, there has been an increased focus on the gender differences in managing conflict (Neubert& Palmer, 2004).

Montana (2008) suggests strategies for managing group conflicts, to wit: avoidance - a management strategy which includes non-attention or creating a total separation of the combatants or a partial separation that allows limited interaction; smoothing - technique which stresses the achievement of harmony between disputants; dominance or power intervention

- the imposition of a solution by higher management, other than the level at which the conflict exists; compromise - strategy that seeks a resolution which satisfies at least part of the party's position; and confrontation - strategy featuring a thorough and frank discussion of the sources and types of conflict and achieving a resolution that is in the best interest of the group, but that may be at the expense of one or all of the conflicting parties.

Several approaches are available in managing conflict. The first approach is avoidance of differences. This selects and promotes individuals whose experiences are similar, who have had similar training, and who come from the same school and institution. Another approach in managing conflict is to repress differences, that is, open expression of differences among members of a unit are not allowed to emerge by continuous emphasis on loyalty, cooperation, teamwork, and other similar values within the group. Converting differences into conflicts is another approach. There is recognition of differences and differences are brought forward into the arena for the conflicting parties to "fight it out." The last approach in managing conflict is making differences creative. In this approach, contending parties pool their information together to see the problem clearly, wholly and in perspective. This approach is most useful when it comes to choosing courses of action for a given problem. This approach, however, requires time (Andres, 1995).

4. Methodology

A descriptive-correlational research design was used in this study. It made use of a standardized questionnaire as an instrument to obtain the information sought to answer the problems posed in the study. Specifically, it determined the conflict management styles of the school administrators in the rural state universities in Samar Island, Philippines.

The study focused on four (4) state universities in Samar Island. Specifically, these state universities were University of Eastern Philippines (UEP) in Northern Samar, Eastern Samar State University (ESSU) in Eastern Samar, and from the Samar province, the state universities, Northwest Samar State University (NwSSU) and Samar State University (SSU), were chosen as school-respondents.

The study was undertaken during the Second Semester of School Year 2011-2012. The statistical tools that were used in the analysis of data are frequency counts, percentages, mean, bivariate correlative, t-test, Pearson r and Multiple Regression (MR) Analysis.

5. Results and Discussion

Conflict Management Styles Practiced by the School Administrators as Perceived by the Respondents'

Table 1: Conflict Management Styles Practiced by the School Administrators as Perceived by the Respondents'

Conflict Management Styles	Respondents					
	Administrators		Faculty/Non-Teaching Personnel		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Controller	10	10.6	75	27.6	85	23.2
Accommodator	22	23.4	68	25.0	90	24.6
Avoider	60	63.8	113	41.5	173	47.3
Collaborator	1	1.1	7	2.6	8	2.2
Compromiser	1	1.1	9	3.3	10	2.7

Table 1 illustrates the frequency and percentage distribution on conflict management styles of the school administrators as perceived by the respondents. From the administrators' perspective, majority of the school administrators were "avoiders" in managing conflict which is 60 or 63.8 percent. Twenty-two or 23.4 percent considered themselves as "accommodators" while 10 or 10.6 percent were controllers. Only one collaborator and one compromiser considered themselves as such.

From the perspective of faculty and non-teaching staff, 113 or 41.5 percent perceived that the administrators were "avoiders" in managing conflict. While 75 or 27.6 percent opined that administrators were "controllers". Sixty-eight or 25 percent of the faculty and staff considered their superior as "accommodators" and 9 or 3.3 percent said that their supervisors were "compromisers" and 7 or 2.6 percent viewed the school administrators as "collaborators".

The over-all results based on the perception of the school administrators and faculty/non-teaching personnel obtained a description of "avoiders". The school administrators together with their faculty and non-teaching personnel viewed themselves as avoiders. This would mean further that the school administrators gave up their goals and relationships and stayed away from the issues over which the conflict was taking place and from the persons they were in conflict with. They believed it is easier to withdraw from a conflict than to face it and in time, the conflict will subside and will be forgotten. The observation was valid vis-a-vis the Filipino culture that the superiors do not give attention to the problem, rather they stay away from them.

Significant Difference between Perception of the School Administrators and Faculty Members/Non-Teaching Personnel on their Practiced Conflict Management Styles

Table 2: Significant Difference between Perception of the School Administrators and Faculty Members/Non-Teaching Personnel on their Practiced Conflict Management Styles

Conflict Management Styles	Total Score	Respondents				Mean Diff	Df	t-computed	p-value
		Administrators (n = 94)		Faculty/Non-Teaching Personnel (n = 272)					
		Mean	Sd	Mean	Sd				
Controller	7,075	16.65	20.26	20.26	7.210	-3.608**	364	-4.312**	.000
Accommodator	12,359	39.37	15.343	31.83	12.460	7.541**	364	4.3018**	.000
Avoider	4,442	9.67	6.359	12.99	8.990	-3.891**	364	-3.891**	.000
Collaborator	8,960	23.07	8.692	24.97	9.943	-1.752 ^{NS}	364	-1.752 ^{NS}	.082
Compromiser	10,949	31.28	7.368	29.44	8.673	1.982*	364	1.982*	.049

** = Highly Significant at .05 level (p < .01) * = Significant at .05 level (p < .05) NS = Not Significant at .05 level (p > .05)

Table 2 shows the comparison of the mean scores on the perceptions of the respondents on the conflict management styles of the administrators. T-test for independent samples was utilized to test the comparison on the perceptions of the respondents on the conflict management styles of the school administrators. For collaborator variable, result of

analysis showed that the computed value was -1.752 with a significance value of 0.082 which was greater than the 0.05 alpha level. The null hypothesis therefore was not rejected which means that there was no significant difference between the perception of administrators and faculty members and/or non-teaching staff. For compromiser conflict management

style, the t-computed was 1.982 and a significance value of 0.049 which was less than the 0.05 alpha level. The null hypothesis was rejected in favor of the alternative hypothesis that there was a significant difference on compromiser conflict management style perception between the two groups of respondents. Table 4 showed that school administrators (mean=31.28) have higher perception on this style than the teaching/non-teaching staff (mean=29.44).

Moreover, for the accommodator conflict management style, the t-computed value is 4.301 and high significance value is 0.00 that was less than 0.05 alpha level. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected which means that there was a significant difference between the perception of the administrators and faculty and/or non-teaching staff. For the controller conflict management style, the result of analysis revealed that t-computed value was -4.312 and a significance value was 0.00 which was less than the alpha level of 0.05. Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected and that there is a significant difference on controller conflict management style perception between the administrators and the non-teaching staff. On the avoider conflict management style, the t-computed value was -3.891 and a significance value of 0.00 which less than the 0.05 alpha level. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. Thus, there was a significant difference in the perception of the administrators and faculty/non-teaching personnel on the avoider management style. The results imply that both the school administrators and the faculty/non-teaching personnel viewed the school administrators as “collaborators” in handling conflicts. Both groups viewed conflict as a problem to be solved and to seek solution that achieves both their goals and the goals of the other party. On the other hand, the two groups differed in perceptions on the “compromiser”, “controller”, “accommodator”, and “avoider” conflict management styles of the school administrators. The school administrator may view themselves as such but the faculty/non-teaching personnel viewed their conflict management the other way around.

6. Conclusions

On the basis of the findings of the study, it can be concluded that majority of the school administrators perceived themselves together with the faculty and non-teaching staff as avoiders. School administrators believed that conflict should be avoided in favor of harmony and that conflicts may damage the harmonious relationship of the group. They were afraid that if the conflict continues, someone will get hurt and the relationship will be affected. Thus, avoiders stayed away from the issues over which the

conflict was taking place and from the persons they were in conflict with.

With the null hypothesis being not rejected, it can be concluded that school administrators, faculty and non-teaching staff shared the same views as to the avoider conflict management style. However, since there was a significant difference between the perception of the school administrators and the faculty and non-teaching staff on the school administrators’ compromiser, accommodator, controller, and collaborator conflict management styles, then it showed that these respondents have varying perceptions over the conflict management styles manifested by school administrators.

7. Recommendations

On the basis of the conclusions of the study, the hereunder recommendations are set forth.

1. School administrators of state universities should be more aware of their personality types in order for them to adapt and cope with the conflicts that may arise in their schools.
2. Training workshops on the awareness of the personality types of the school administrators, faculty and non-teaching staff must be held.
3. The school management should provide development program for school administrators, faculty and non-teaching staff on handling conflicts.
4. An open communication within the organization must be practiced in order to clarify issues, concerns, and misunderstanding of the employees involved.
5. Related studies with wider scope and different methodologies are highly recommended.

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