Resolving Conflicts: Conflict Management Strategies in Higher Education Institutions of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

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Abstract

The paper aimed to highlight a perennial conflict issue between faculty and administration staff in higher education institutions (HEIs) of Pakistan. Keeping in view the development of education sector and maintaining conducive environment in universities, the study was rightly undertaken to first discover and then present some viable solution for it. The research used the private sector universities of Khyber Pakhtunkha (KPK) province Pakistan for its analysis. For collecting the relevant data, the study used questionnaire which was distributed in six universities of KPK. The results show that age, gender, qualifications and designation matters in the issue of conflicts. Further, it was concluded that there is significant relationship between the nature of conflict, causes of conflict, consequences, demographic features and solution of conflicts. Our study found a lack of coordination and formal set-up for conflict resolution in the private sector universities. HEIs are the key players of education system in KPK, that's why it is imperative to resolve the conflicts of HEIs for the betterment of students, faculty and administration. Finally, our study provides useful suggestions to the universities' human resource management, faculty, administration staff, regulators, Higher Education Department of KPK and Higher Education Commission of Pakistan to take corrective actions and manage the conflicts to safeguard the future of young generation.

Keywords: Conflict, Human Resources Management, Faculty, Administration, Private Sector Universities, Conflict Management Strategies

1. INTRODUCTION

There is no agreement on the definitions of "Conflict" because intellectuals of different areas have given it different definitions (M. A. Rahim, 2010). In their research work, (M. A. Rahim, 2002) described the issue as "interactive procedure demonstrated in incompatibility, conflict, or dissonance within or between public companies (i.e. personal, team, company, etc)". However Ohiwerei and Omo-Ojugo (2008) have used the word for all kinds of communications filled with antagonism and resistance. It may arise in those circumstances where the thinking of different people appear to be not compatible with each other. Thus issue can simply be known as a conflict between two or more people, categories or companies.

Conflict management and conflict resolution are two different terms (Robbins, 1978) and it does not mean to avoid, reduce and sometimes completely avoid the issue but it means to design such techniques which are attractive lessening the side effects and improve valuable properties of issue (M. A. Rahim, 2002). The word conflict is something to us to be ignored while some think that it can confirm valuable if handled well (Algert & Watson, 2002). Conflict Management is a complicated fact (C. A. Stanley & Algert, 2007) and this complexness is limited to increase in a complicated atmosphere of universities where some aspects may restrict conflict management resources available to academicians (C. Stanley, Watson, & Algert, 2005). Conflict prevails in the educational institutions, which is considered as a negative power and its lifestyle in the divisions is highly hated by teachers (Bowman Jr, 2002).

Conflict has three main categories i.e. Personal behavior, communication and structural factors (Bondesio, 1992). Some typical options for conflict regarding framework are competition, structure, traumatic workplace, and changes in the framework of the university or units within it (Barsky, 2002). Some other typical options for conflict in the divisions of higher educational institutions, which are responsible for invoking envy, crack, discomfort and maltreatment, are appointments, benefit and promotion processes, system for annual evaluation and period (Barsky, 2002), staff hiring choices, insufficient space, personality disputes, belief systems held by staff, limited resources, staff preservation, variety issues etc (C. A. Stanley & Algert, 2007).

Antagonism among teachers occurs due to inadequate sources, shrinking funds and undue division of resources; these are responsible for conflict in the universities (Barsky, 2002). These inadequate and restricted sources may be in the form of financial, human resources, accessories and sources of information. Antagonism for restricted sources makes up 29% of conflict and interdependence makes up 19% of conflicts in the organizations (Henry, 2009). Folger and Shubert (1986) explained that, "colleges and universities are no longer seen as quite 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".

Universities are complicated and different kind organization as compared with common organization (Warters, 1995) and neglecting conflict in such a complicated environment may encourage many risks such as low spirits, reduced efficiency, poor presence, lack of trust, increased absenteeism, sarcasm and harmful competitors between opposite groups(Berryman-Fink, 1998). Moreover if conflict was left unmanaged or handled poorly then it can wipe out the efforts and vitality of teachers and may pressure the resources of academic organization economically (Findlen, 2000).

There are several types of conflicts based upon on the members whether they are individuals, categories, organizations or nations. Most popular among them are: Intrapersonal Issue, Social Issue, Intragroup Issue, Intergroup conflict, Inter-organizational conflict, Personal compared to team conflict, Personal compared to company conflict, Ideal Issue, Architectural Issue etc (Bondesio (1992);M. A. Rahim (2002);Vokić and Sontor (2009)). In all these conflicts, interpersonal and inter-group conflicts are very popular and common in most of the organizations. Interpersonal and inter-group conflicts when mixed records to 55% of all disputes (Henry, 2009).

A. Rahim and Bonoma (1979) have categorized the Conflict management on five designs centered on two primary dimensions: concern for self and concern for others. Competing, Integrating, Avoiding, Obliging and Compromising are the five styles of managing conflict. These five styles are the strategies which are shown by their attitude.

Those people who use competitive strategy of conflict, they have high self-thinking and they are concerned with the other party which means they have low concern for others. Most of the researchers do not like this strategy because they consider it inappropriate and they say that it give rise to frustration and indication of more conflict (M. A. Rahim, 2002) and also blocks the road to new experiences (Utley, Richardson, & Pilkington, 1989). Those who use competing strategy are regarded as less efficient by their subordinates (Van De Vliert, Euwema, & Huismans, 1995).

The other style Integrating/Collaborating/Problem Solving is to identify as a win-win orientation having high concern for self as well as others. If someone uses this style he/she tries to satisfy the desires and concern of all parties and very much advantageous for all the parties. According to Afzalur Rahim, Magner, and Shapiro (2000) and Robbins and Judge (2003) integrating strategy is that when both the parties concerns are important and can't be compromised. The third strategy or style is the avoiding style in which both the self and other concerns are low and it is identify as a lose-lose orientation. When a person does not want to be stressful, does not help or completely avoid conflict that person use this kind of strategy. This can turn out to be a good strategy to use if one is working with a challenging person or when there is no emergency to make important decisions. This design can also be used when the problem of conflict is unimportant or some other essential issues need to be addressed (Afzalur Rahim et al. (2000) Robbins and Judge (2003)).

The style with win-win orientation is obliging or accommodating style in which there is low concern for self and high concern for others. In this method, one party tries to provide concern to the issues of his competitors without saying one's own issues and when the relationship maintenance is more essential than ones issues / passions. This design can also be used when someone discovers his place to be incorrect and wants to keep collaboration. The fifth style which is compromising has the intermediate concern for self and for others. There is no win or lose situation in this kind of style. It is useful means for short-term alternatives to challenging issues and when time is way too short to find remedy for these kind of issues (Afzalur Rahim et al. (2000); Robbins and Judge (2003)).

2. Demographic Impacts on Conflict Management

Many researchers have obtained different results while addressing gender in conflict management. Mostly male academics use accommodative style of conflict management in higher education institutions (Cetin & Hacifazlioglu, 2004), while Balay (2007) discovered that male instructors avoid conflicts more than female instructors. Sutschek (2001) argues that obliging and dominating conflict management strategy are used by males more than females while females use more frequently avoiding and integrating conflict management styles. The females make use of compromising strategy in managing conflict situation more frequently. Vokić and Sontor (2009) have discovered gender, marital status and parenthood significantly related with the accommodating style of conflict management.

Age, experience and designation are considered as key elements 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, 2004). According to another analysis unskilled women use the compromising strategy more frequently than their male counterparts do (Sutschek, 2001). Assistant Professors use collaboration conflict management styles more regularly than Associate Professors (Cetin & Hacifazlioglu, 2004).

3. Conflict Resolution

Conflicts in 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 universities but now most of the universities arrange 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), ombudsman and neutral 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, 1997), dispute resolution centers have been setup (KatzJameson, 1998).

4. Analysis and Discussion

The research used primary data which was collected through questionnaire with a five point likert scale. The questionnaire was adopted from conflict management literature , previously developed by various scholars (A. Rahim and Bonoma (1979); Jehn (1995); Balay (2007)). Three hundred questionnaires were distributed among the faculty and administration staff in six private sector universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province (Pakistan). The universities include Sarhad Univrsity of Science and Information Technology, Iqra National University, Preston University, Qurtaba University, Abasyn University and CECOS University. We received two hundred and thirty responses, showing 77% response rate. Finally, the study analyzed the valid responses of two hundred and six respondents while the rest of responses were not used due to insufficient in data.

The study used different research tools from the gathered data. The primary methods of analysis used in the study are Descriptive tools, correlation analysis and chai square tests.

4.1 Descriptive Analysis

The descriptive statistics show the overall minimum, maximum, the mean and standard deviation of each variable. In Table 1, the names of different variables are clearly mentioned in the first table, the second, third. Fourth and fifth column shows the minimum value in observation for a specific variable, the maximum value in observation for a given variable, mean and the standard deviation of the observations for a particular variable respectively. The institution has the minimum value of 1, maximum of 2, mean is 1.4854 and standard deviation is 0.50101. Designation has minimum value of 1, maximum of 4, mean is 1.5680 and standard deviation is 0.52521. Qualification has minimum value of 1, maximum is 4, mean is 2.5392 and standard deviation is 1.00588. Length of service minimum value is 1, maximum is 6, mean is 2.1359 and standard deviation is 0.77835.

Table 1:   Descriptive Statistics of the variables

Variable	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Stand. Dev
Institution	1.00	2.00	1.4854	0.50101
Designation	1.00	4.00	1.5680	0.52521
Qualification	1.00	4.00	2.3592	1.00588
Length	1.00	6.00	2.1359	0.77835
Gender	1.00	2.00	1.5340	0.50006
Domicile	1.00	4.00	2.1019	0.79283
Type	1.00	4.00	1.4854	0.52941
Age	1.00	5.00	2.9100	1.45900
NOC	1.00	5.00	3.3697	0.83562
CAS	1.00	5.00	3.5194	0.78909
CONS	1.00	5.00	3.3301	0.80175
CMSC	1.00	5.00	3.3847	0.79579
CMSI	1.00	5.00	3.4017	0.79579
CMSA	1.00	5.00	3.2670	0.71803
CMSO	1.00	10.50	3.6711	0.87173
CMSCO	1.00	4.75	3.2379	0.78467
SCM	1.00	8.83	3.3390	0.98558

Where; NOC = nature of conflict; CAS= Causes; CONS= Consequences; CMSC= Conflict Management Strategies (Competing); CMSI=Conflict Management Strategies (Integrating); CMSA= Conflict Management Strategies (Avoiding); CMSO= Conflict Management Strategies (Obliging); CMSCO= Conflict Management Strategies (Compromising); and SCM =Solution for Conflict Management.

Gender has the minimum value of 1, maximum is 2, mean is 1.5340 and standard deviation is 0.50006. Domicile has the minimum value of 1, maximum is 4, mean is 2.1019 and standard deviation is 0.79283. Type of

university has minimum   1.00, maximum is 4.00, mean is 1.4854 and standard deviation is 0.52941. Age has minimum value of 1.00, maximum is 5.00, mean is 2.9100 and standard deviation is 1.45900. NOC has minimum value of 1.00, maximum is 5.00, mean is 3.3697 and standard deviation is 0.83562. CAS has minimum value of 1.00, maximum of 5.00, mean is 3.5194 and standard deviation is 0.78909. CONS has minimum value of 1.00, maximum of 5.00, mean is 3.3301 and standard deviation is 0.80175. CMSC has minimum value of 1.00, maximum is 5.00, mean is 3.3847 and standard deviation is 0.79579. CMSI has minimum value of 1.00, maximum of 5.00, mean is 3.4017 and standard deviation is 0.79579. CMSA has minimum value 1.00, maximum 5.00, mean is 3.2670 and standard deviation is 0.71803. CMSO has minimum value of 1.00, maximum of 10.50, mean is 3.6711 and standard deviation is 0.87173. CMSCO has minimum value of 1.00, maximum is 4.75, mean is 3.2379 and standard deviation is 0.78467. SCM   has minimum value of 1.00, maximum is 8.83, mean is 3.3390 and standard deviation is 0.98558.

4.2   Correlation Analysis

All the variables are positively correlated with each other. Table 2 explains that the correlation between nature of conflict (NOC) and causes of conflict (CAS) is moderate (.486), showing no week or strong relationship. The correlation between nature of conflict (NOC) and consequences (CONS) is also moderate (.56) and with causes of conflict it is (.54). The correlation between Competing strategy of Conflict management (CMSC) with nature of conflict (NOC) is 0.64, with causes of conflict (CAS) is 0.36 and with consequences is 0.59 which shows that they are moderate correlated with each other. The relation of integrating strategy of conflict management (CMSI) with nature of conflict (NOC) is 0.33, with causes (CAS) is 0.35, with consequences (CONS) is 0.38, with competing strategy (CMSC) is 0.48 which shows almost moderate relationship with each other. The relation of avoiding strategy of conflict management (CMSA) with nature of conflict (NOC) is 0.47, with causes of conflict (CAS) is 0.33 with consequences (CONS) is 0.68 and with competing strategy of conflict management (CMSC) is 0.57 and with integrating strategy of conflict (CMSI) is 0.45 which shows that all of them have moderate relationship.

Table 2: Correlation of the Variables

Variables	NOC	CAS	CONS	CMSC	CMSI	CMSA	CMSO	CMSCO_
CAS	.49**							
CONS	.56**	.54**						
CMSC	.64**	.36**	.59**					
CMSI	.33**	.35**	.38**	.48**				
CMSA	.47**	.33**	.68**	.57**	.45**			
CMSO	.30**	.41**	.40**	.51**	.49**	.47**		
CMSCO	.44**	.36**	.39**	.42**	.60**	.37**	.49**	
SCM	.63**	.36**	.39**	.55**	.36**	.42**	.30**	.38**

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

The relation of obliging strategy of conflict management (CMSO) with nature of conflict (NOC) is 0.30, with causes of conflict (CAS) is 0.41, with consequences (CONS) is 0.40, with competing strategy (CMSC) is 0.51 and with integrating strategy (CMSI) and avoiding strategy (CMSA) is 0.49 and 0.47 respectively. The relationship of Compromising strategy (CMSCO) with nature of conflict (NOC) is 0.44, with causes (CAS) is 0.36, with consequences (CONS) is 0.39, with competing strategy (CMSC) is 0.42, with integrating strategy (CMSI) is 0.60, with avoiding strategy (CMSA) is 0.37 and with obliging strategy (CMSO) is 0.49, which shows that they are moderately related to each other. The relation of solution of conflict management with nature of conflict (NOC) is 0.63, with causes (CAS) is 0.36, with consequences (CONS) is 0.39, with competing strategy (CMSC) is 0.55, with integrating strategy (CMSI) is 0.36, with avoiding strategy (CMSA) is 0.42, with obliging strategy (CMSO) is 0.30 and with compromising strategy (CMSCO) is 0.38, which elaborate that all of them are moderately related to each other and the result is significant

4.3   Chi-square Analysis

The study used Chi square analysis to test the relationship between observable variables. This will help us understand the true picture of relationship of demographic variables with the causes, nature, strategies and solution of conflict in the given universities.

Table 3: **Gender Cross Tabulation with the variables**

	CAS	NOC	CONS	CMSC	CMSI	CMSA	CMSO	CMSCO	SCM
Chi-Square	10.5	15.82	11.95	23.3	24.06	21.09	16.88	15.15	22
DF	6	11	07	15	16	16	11	09	14
Asymp.Sig	.04	.02	.03	.05	.06	.05	.03	.02	.01

The above table shows that the relationship of gender to the given variables. The results show significant relationship at P value of 5% level.

Table 4: Qualification Cross Tabulation with the variables

	CAS	NOC	CONS	CMSC	CMSI	CMSA	CMSO	CMSCO	SCM
Chi-Square	29	72	31	59	54	47	61	46	77
DF	24	50	22	38	37	31	41	18	43
Asymp.Sig	.08	.06	.03	.04	.03	.05	.05	.03	.04

The qualification has almost significant relationship with the underlying variables except that of causes of conflict (CAS) and conflict of causes where the P value is more than the standard P value (α =5 %).

Table 5: Age Cross Tabulation with the variables

	CAS	NOC	CONS	CMSC	CMSI	CMSA	CMSO	CMSCO	SCM
Chi-Square	63	35	47	49	53	39	46	69	28
DF	39	11	22	30	28	8	16	55	22
Asymp.Sig	.04	.01	.04	.05	.05	.01	.01	.08	.06

Table 5 shows the relationship of age with the variables. Age is insignificantly associated with compromising strategies (CMSCO) and solution of conflict management (SCM)

Table 6: Designation Cross Tabulation with the variables

	CAS	NOC	CONS	CMSC	CMSI	CMSA	CMSO	CMSCO	SCM
Chi-Square	22	26	25	34	42	39	23	42	52
DF	09	11	20	18	8	19	9	14	15
Asymp.Sig	.05	.04	.07	.05	.02	.05	.05	.03	.02

Designation of the respondents is associated significantly with the causes, strategies and solution of conflict. Its association is insignificant with consequences. Designation differences may not be specifically affected by the consequences.

5.   Conclusion and Future Work

The research analysis demonstrates that the demographics affect the conflict management styles and the age, qualification, designation and gender factors can be considered important for the solution. Different styles of conflict management strategies have been adopted by the administration and faculty of private sector universities. The Private Sector Universities have different level of conflicts which need proper solution to bring them at par with the efficient universities inside and outside the country. The issues of conflicts devastate the quality of education and it badly affects the students' future careers. Universities have always been considered as the harbingers of societal change. Universities create, analyze and disseminate knowledge for the social welfare, economic development and intellectual growth of society. Conflicts between faculty and administration will adversely affect the key responsibility of higher education institutions.

It is obvious from the findings that there are conflicts in private sector universities of KPK, Pakistan. It necessitates the conflict management to be implemented in its true spirit. To solve the conflicts, the universities are supposed to have training sessions, professional environment, fair and merit-based hiring/promotions, the conflict resolution centers and strong liaison with the outside world. The human resource department may be the key player in resolving the issues. The role of Higher Education Department (HED) of KPK and Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan is absolutely crucial in conflict management and resolution. Both the provincial and federal level authorities for HEIs should take serious notice of the issue and help the universities to resolve the conflicts.

The data sample was limited as this study was conducted in one province of Pakistan. The future study may incorporate other provinces in its analysis. The sample of high schools, colleges and even the Islamic schools (Madrassas) can be taken and analyzed for the sake of future research. Some other social, political and economic factors may be included in the further research studies. Future researchers may extend the study to other settings and countries. The research on Conflict management strategies can be extended to organizations other than education, like the Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other social welfare organizations.

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