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Compatibility of Leadership Styles with Cooperative and Non-Cooperative Conflict Management Strategies

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Abstract: Conflict among leaders and subordinates is natural meanwhile same is observed among headteachers and teachers; if it is not managed appropriately can create an adverse impact on organizational climate and subsequently on performance. A plethora of literature looked at the leadership styles that have direct/indirect influence on cooperative and non-cooperative conflict management practices. The present study examines the compatibility between leadership styles and cooperative and non-cooperative conflict management strategies of the secondary schools in Punjab. 360 randomly selected head teachers participated in this study. Two questionnaires were used, one for leadership styles and the other for cooperative and non-cooperative conflict management strategies. The results indicated that cooperative strategies of conflict management such as accommodation, collaboration and compromising are much helpful in a place where democratic leadership style was being practised, and authoritative leaders intended to follow non-cooperative such as competing and avoiding strategies in order to manage conflicts in schools. Therefore, it can be inferred that Headteachers who perceived to exhibit a more democratic style of leadership adopted cooperative strategies of conflict management. The headteachers who were perceived to exhibit a more autocratic leadership style opted for non-cooperative strategies of conflict management.

Key Words: Leadership Styles, Cooperative and Non-Cooperative Conflicts Management Strategies and Headteachers

Introduction

An organization is a union of people who find themselves in one way or the other, working together as a team for a common purpose (Thomson, 2000). The role of a leader in an organization is to perform his duties in order to maintain equilibrium among all the domains of an organization through effective management of human and material resources and to reflect an image of harmony and a well-disciplined institute (Bashir and Arif, 2007). Oboegbulem and Alfa (2013) argued that in all human interaction oriented organizations, the occurrences of conflicts are certain. As compare to other organizations, conflicts are inescapable in schools due to groups of people having diverse personalities comprised of headteachers, teachers, students and supporting staff. They interact with each other, and inevitably, disagreements,

misunderstandings, interpersonal differences, differences in interest and differences in opinions can occur from time to time (Thomson, 2000; Bano, Ashraf, & Zia, 2013; Ghaffar, 2009, Chitteri, 2013). Conflict is a word that brings discomfort, stress that may be positive and negative and affects the learning process. Albert (2001) explicated that conflicts are either constructive or destructive in nature. Constructive one affects in a positive manner and helps in building an ideal learning environment for the steady growth of the institution, whereas destructive conflicts produce malice and downfall of the institution. Therefore, it can be said that conflict is an inexorable part of professional life, and it happens during daily activities.

Conflicts have results depending upon their cause and nature. Conflict results may be negative

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or positive, so if results are positive, these may include leader towards innovative ideas, effective decisions, healthy change, diagnose the root cause of conflict, increased participation, frequent communication, high productivity and strengthen the relationships. While negative results may result in an inability to cooperate, energy wastage, workplace dissatisfaction, productivity decrease, polarization between groups, mistrust, biased decisions and inequality (May 2013). When conflict is mismanaged, it results in destabilizing the credibility of the school head. This inability of school leaders leads to negative results (Kazimoto, 2013). Hence guidance must be provided to avoid negative results.

Managing conflicts help to put an eye on internal matters of an organization, such as co-operation and teamwork, to create an environment of harmony among the members of an organization. Conflict rises due to incompatibility factors among the employees of an organization. Whenever a person feels that his viewpoint has been opposed by another member of the organization, a conflict arises. Conflict management comes in handy at this point as it limits the bad outcomes and triggers the positive aspects of such conflict ([Pondy 1967](#), [Wall and Callister 1995](#)). There are certain factors like misunderstanding, lack of planning, poor communication, poor staff, stress and frustration, which can be the cause of a conflict.

Conflict overall effect the abilities of the employees to generate their best. Conflict management is a basic tool for all the heads, educators, parents and students to understand the negative aspects of certain actions and to prevent future destructions from happening (Moran, 2001). A leader, when it comes to knows that which type of actions can trigger which changes, then he becomes a true leader ([Rahim & Banoma, 1979](#)).

According to [Saitis and Saiti \(2018\)](#), like other organizations, conflicts may arise in schools. Conflict management is considered a common activity in schools, and its effectiveness can be determined by its effect on school performance. Conflict management can be defined as the process of increasing positive outcomes of conflict while reducing negative. Effective management of conflicts leads toward resolution and positive outcomes, which increase the productivity of a

group within an organization ([Rao, 2017](#)). [Bano et al. \(2013\)](#) explicated conflict management as a process to remove cognitive barriers. Conflict Management is the phenomenon to limit the negative aspects and trigger the positive conflict in order to use it constructively. Poor conflict management can trigger certain negative aspects, which can be destructive for the organization at large.

Antecedent conditions of conflict are base for the classification of conflicts. There are many factors that contribute to the generation of conflicts, i.e. values, tasks, goals and so on. Conflicts may be classified on the basis of these resources to understand the nature and implications of conflicts. A brief description of conflict classification is given below:

Non-Cooperative Strategies: It characterizes the assertiveness and un-cooperated kind of environment the team struggle for his/her own respect gain becoming more and more selfish. This is a power-focused strategy such as competing. In this strategy, everyone works on their own without disturbing each other. This strategy may cause non-cooperation. The opposite party is not intervened in this type of approach like avoiding ([Dessler, 1998](#); [Chandramohan, 2007](#)).

Cooperative Strategies: Cooperative strategies are including compromising, collaborating, and accommodating. In collaborating strategy, co-operation is done on both ends, and a factor of assertiveness is involved. This type of approach increases mutual trust and is effective for the growth of an institute. The needs of both parties are satisfied in this type of approach, such as collaborating strategy. It is a midway strategy for conflict management as it adopts a mixture of cooperativeness and assertiveness. Both parties sacrifice a little to achieve the same goals as a compromising strategy. This is far most the most opposite style to competing strategy. In this strategy, a person or persons sacrifice for the needs of others and accommodates him in the changing environment. This strategy is adaptable where one person gives up his personal interests for the sake of others party benefit called accommodating strategy ([Dessler, 1998](#); [Chandramohan, 2007](#)).

Conflict Management Moder- Showing how Assertive and Cooperative Behaviours Inter-relate

Assertive	Competition	Compromise	Collaboration
Non-Assertive	Avoidance		Co-operative
	Non Co-operative		Co-operative

Sources: [Rahim \(2001\)](#)

Schools are microcosms of society that consolidate views of the world, tackle individual differences, influence living standards; hence it’s a platform to epitomize social differences and where conflicts may arise on a daily basis. However, researchers highlighted that teachers and headteachers are required to have sufficient knowledge about the occurrence of conflicts, how they tackle them by bringing positive outcomes and diminish negative impact ([Uchendu, Anijaobi-Idem, & Odigwe, 2013](#); [Shanka & Thuo, 2017](#)).

Due to different definitions of conflict, images of its role and attitude towards it also vary. There are different forms of conflicts in schools, e.g. teachers seem reluctant to accept extra work, moreover may not follow the rules and they seem not to obey their headteachers all the time. Pressurizing school teachers to conduct school activities in an uninterrupted manner is the authoritative style adopted by headteachers. Therefore, it’s common that conflict between headteacher and teacher may arise any time in school ([McNamara & Norman, 2010](#)). Due to frequent interaction, conflict may occur among individuals in the institution. Conflict is an expression of antagonism, hostility and misunderstanding among staff members ([Ungerleider, J. 2008](#)).

In the 21st century, school heads are directed to influence, lead change and create a productive learning environment. [Mango \(2018\)](#) declared that leadership is nothing more than a process whereby a person influences others to achieve a common purpose ([Creighton, 2005](#)). Conflict management is an approach that leaders must be capable of utilizing when needed to foster a conducive working environment ([Guttman, 2004](#)). So, where do leaders begin when they want to recognize their own conflict management styles? Therefore, this empirical study examined the compatibility

between secondary school heads’ leadership styles and conflict management practices.

Materials and Methods

In the present study, a survey was conducted to establish the compatibility between two patterns regarding the use of leadership style in cooperative and non-cooperative conflict management strategies. Compatibility was measured in terms of correlation as [Creswell \(2002\)](#) defined correlation as a statistical test to establish patterns for two variables. Based on previous literature, the key objectives of the study emerged are to determine the most frequent leadership style and cooperative and non-cooperative conflict management strategy demonstrated by heads and to measure the compatibility of leadership styles with the cooperative and non-cooperative conflict management strategies. All the secondary school’s headteachers of Punjab province constituted the population of this study. There are thirty-six districts in Punjab province, and ten male secondary schools from each district headquarter city were taken randomly. Hence, it means the size of the survey sample was (n = 360). For the executing the survey, a questionnaire comprised items of both the constructs i-e leadership styles as well as cooperative and non-cooperative conflict management strategies under school education context were developed through an intensive review of related researches and content. The tool was divided into three parts; the first part dealt with demographic information of respondents, the second part comprised 18 items about leadership styles and the third part about 30 items of cooperative and non-cooperative conflict management strategies used by headteachers. The items in the questionnaire were showed graduated responses according to a five-point rating scale ranging from “very frequently, frequently, rarely, very rarely and never”. The validation process of the research instrument was initiated in such

manners that firstly, all the items were discussed with the M.Phil and PhD scholars of educational management area and working as secondary school Heads anywhere in Punjab. Content and face validity were watched, and only valid items were retained and refined. Further, Cronbach alpha was determined through SPSS to see the

reliability, and as a whole, it was found to be 0.83. After gone through this process questionnaire was shared with the headteacher/principals serving at male secondary schools at each district headquarter city, and 100% of the response was made sure through personal contacts.

Results and Discussion

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of the Leadership Styles

Leadership Style	VF %	F %	VF+F %	N%	R %	VR %	R+VR %	Mean	SD
Authoritative	11	41	52	15	30	3	33	2.71	0.93
Democratic	3	7	10	5	58	27	85	3.93	0.58
Laissez Faire	12	45	57	13	21	9	30	2.73	0.97

VF= very frequently, F= frequently, R= rarely, VR= very rarely and N= never

The Means and Standard Deviations calculated from the response received from the headteachers for leadership a style is presented in Table 1. It can be seen that authoritative and laissez-faire having lower means in the leadership set of styles, M = 2.71 (SD = 0.93) and M = 2.73 (SD = 0.97)

respectively. From the leadership styles, democratic has a substantially higher value with M = 3.93 (SD = .58), which indicated the inclination of headteachers towards the use of the democratic leadership style frequently.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of the Conflict Management Strategies

Conflict Management Strategies		VF %	F %	VF+ F%	N %	R %	VR %	R+V R%	Mean	SD
Non-cooperative	Competing	4	41	45	18	31	6	37	2.92	0.80
	Avoiding	2	36	38	26	29	7	36	3.04	0.90
Cooperative	Compromising	2	16	18	10	68	3	71	3.53	0.79
	Collaborating	1	5	6	7	68	18	86	3.97	0.69
	Accommodating	0	9	9	13	68	11	79	3.90	0.65

VF= very frequently, F= frequently, R= rarely, VR= very rarely and N= never

The Frequency in percentage Means and Standard Deviations came as a response from the participants' i-e headteachers for Conflict Management Strategies is shown in Table 3. It was found that in case of cooperative conflict management strategies such as collaborating and accommodating have the highest mean score i-e M = 3.97 (SD = 0.69) and M = 3.90 (SD = 0.65) respectively, while not much further away is compromising with M = 3.53 (SD = 0.79).

Furthermore, in the sub-scales of non-cooperative conflict management strategies, avoiding has highest mean with M = 3.04 (SD = 0.90) and the lowest is the one of competing M = 2.92 (SD = 0.80). So it can be inferred that sub-types of cooperative conflict management strategies like collaborating and accommodating were appeared frequently administered by the headteachers in conflict management.

Tables 3. Relationship of Leadership Styles and Conflict Management Strategies

Leader Ship Styles	Management Correlational	Non-cooperative Strategies			Cooperative Strategies	
		Competing	Avoiding	Compromising	Collaborating	Accommodating
Authoritative	r	0.185	0.541	0.423	0.531	0.509
	p	0.001	0.087	0.068	0.074	0.071
Laissez Faire	r	0.902	0.397	0.175	0.15	0.305
	p	0.013	0.021	0.106	0.169	0.204

Conflict Management Strategies	Non-cooperative Strategies			Cooperative Strategies		
	Competing	Avoiding	Compromising	Collaborating	Accommodating	
Authoritative	0.169	0.642	0.378	0.511	0.361	
Democratic	0.121	0.642	0.001	0.001	0.001	

Table 3 shows that authoritative style has a meaningful connection with non-cooperative conflict management strategies i.e competing ($r=0.185$, $p = 0.001$) and avoiding ($r = 0.397$, $p = .001$). It then means that the authoritative leadership style has no relation with cooperative conflict management strategies such as compromising, collaborating and accommodating. Whereas democratic style has significant relationship with cooperative conflict management strategies like compromising ($r =0.378$, $p=0.001$), collaborating ($r = 0.511$, $p = 0.001$) and accommodating ($r = 0.361$, $p = 0.001$) except with competing and avoiding. Surprisingly, the laissez-faire style has no relation with any conflict management strategies. With regard to the significance of the correlation specified, stepwise regression was used to determine the role of each leadership style on cooperative and non-cooperative conflict management strategies of

secondary school headteachers (Table 4). The results show that the democratic leadership style is equally able to explain 66% of cooperative such as compromising, collaborating and accommodating strategies to conflict management. Due to the beta coefficient and significance levels of t, it can be said that the democratic leadership style has a direct and positive effect on the cooperative strategies to conflict management.

The analysis also indicates that the autocratic leadership style is able to explain 45% of non-cooperative such as competing and avoiding strategies to conflict management. Due to the beta coefficient and significance levels of t, it can be concluded that the autocratic leadership styles have a direct and positive effect on competing and avoiding strategies to conflict management.

Table 4. Stepwise Regression of Conflict Management Strategies Based on Leadership Styles

Conflict Management Strategies	Leadership Styles	B	t	Correlation	The coefficient of determination	F	Meaningful
Cooperative Strategies	Compromising	0.641	7.682	0.378	0.656	33.896	0.001
	Collaborating	0.611	7.432	0.511			
	Accommodating	0.602	7.212	0.361			
Non-cooperative Strategies	Competing	0.532	5.758	0.185	0.451	31.084	0.001
	Avoiding	0.51	5.542	0.397			

Conclusion

The aim of this research was to know the compatibility of leadership styles with cooperative and non-cooperative conflicts management styles adopted by the secondary schools headteachers to manage conflicts at schools.

Headteachers play a substantial role in the improvement of the school environment and performance. The most dominant leadership style perceived in the headteachers was democratic,

whereas the autocratic and laissez-faire styles were less witnessed. [Zahra M. et al. \(2019\)](#) showed that democratic leadership was used by managers. Through this study, it was found that cooperative strategies such as collaborating and accommodating were the most dominant strategies of conflict management. Most of the headteachers were likely to elude competing and avoiding in addressing the conflicts ([Riaza, M. et al., 2020](#))

Furthermore, the democratic leadership style is compatible in handling conflict through cooperative strategies, including compromising, collaborating and accommodating. It means that cooperative strategies of conflict management such as accommodation, collaboration and compromising are much helpful in a place where democratic leadership style was being practised. It is also observed that the autocratic style of leadership is compatible with non-cooperative, including competing and accommodating strategies of conflict management. It hence means authoritative leaders tend to follow the non-cooperative such as competing and avoiding strategies in order to manage conflicts in schools. Therefore, it can be inferred that Headteachers who perceived to exhibit a more democratic style of leadership adopted cooperative strategies of conflict management. The headteachers who were perceived to exhibit a more autocratic leadership style opted for non-cooperative strategies of conflict management. Finally, the headteachers professed to exhibit *laissez-faire* leadership style did not adopt any style to address conflicts with employees. The findings of these are well-matched with [Zafar \(2011\)](#) through his study.

The use of suitable conflict dealing modes in the day by day decision-making is a challenge facing by the secondary school heads. Leadership style is affected both by the school personnel and the educational environment in which the person works. Resolving conflict successfully endorse an environment that stimulates the professional development of school personal and assists in providing quality education and progress in school. Researches indicate that leadership behavior is in connection with performance and what affects disagreement, and it can somewhat evaluate the changes that commonly occur in conflict management ([Heidari and Arani, 2017](#)). Indeed, conflict management strategies adopted by the individual can be estimated based on leadership styles. In the present study, the relevance of cooperative conflict management strategies is significantly compatible with the

democratic leadership style. Democratic leaders have a general tendency to motivate highly skilled and experienced employees who are not actually afraid of expressing their point of view. [Davies and West-Burnham \(2003\)](#) say that in democratic leadership, the role of a leader is not just solving a problem but play his role importantly in managing conflicts among employees and create win-win situations.

The results of this study suggest that secondary school heads be liable to choose a conflict model that is concerned with a form of a win-lose approach. The competing model was found to be the most frequent mode used by the secondary school heads in conflict management, and collaborating was found second most frequent mode for managing the conflict and accommodating mode at third is used by the secondary school heads. Again and again, using strategies with win-lose, lose-lose and win-win outcomes will produce disharmony within the workplace. The skills most wanted in promoting the facilitation in resolving individual or group conflicts includes guidance, communication, human relations and give and take, feedback and follow up on behavior. This study was indicated that just about half of the respondents use only one mode in conflict management. Their personal choice is only one technique for resolving the conflict. Secondary school heads did not regulate their choices to precise conditions and therefore may not have managed the conflict effectively. A secondary school head should recognize which conflict management qualities and skills are most appropriate for each situation. Variables under investigation only on male headteachers of the secondary schools could be a limitation for this study. Hence, it's proposed to probe the compatibility of leadership style and conflict management strategies with regard to gender (male vs female), locality (urban vs rural) and type of schools (public vs private) so that the findings can be presented with more control and generalizability.

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