Conflict Management Styles among High School Principals

VICDAN ALTINOK

The purpose of this study is to investigate the usage ability of conflict management styles by high school principals in Konya, Turkey, based on their perceptions. For this purpose, Form B of Rahim Organisational Conflict Inventory (ROCI) II questionnaire is used. Five types of conflict management styles have been tested — cooperation, identifying the other, domination, prevention and conciliation. The results of the survey reveal that there are differences in patterns of conflict management styles among high school principals according to age, sex and type of school. The purpose of the study is to determine the correct reason of conflict and selection of an appropriate method, which is helpful for sound conflict management. Besides the personality of the principals in high school, they should also be capable at problem-solving, be efficient communicators and remain unbiased.

Vicdan Altinok is Assistant Professor in Faculty of Education, Department of Educational Sciences, Gazi University, Ankara, Turkey.

INTRODUCTION

Education is a social system that plays a role in the perpetuation of society. Meeting the expectations is dependent on the efficiency and effectiveness of the organisations within the system (Kaya, 2006). The most important responsibility of schools and its principals is to meet the goals of the education services. For this purpose, problem perception and effective problem-solving are critical. One of the problems affecting educational institutions is conflict.

Conflicts are perceived as an indispensable part of modern life. To produce solutions, awareness of the cause of conflict among the different levels and parts within an organisation are important. Conflict among schools generally arises from differences in perception, aims and reasons from the relationships arising from inter-school independence (functional relationships, contrasts from organisational task and responsibilities and line relationship). In such case, preventing and managing conflict in schools are some of the difficult problems which the administration runs up against (Kaya, 2006: 205). Therefore, principals should be conscious of the conflict and manage them for the benefit of the school and individuals. This

will help increase professional success and sustain the effectiveness of the school.

There are several ways to manage a conflict on behalf of making a contribution to the organisational aims. What is important is the resolution approach of the principal. In this respect, one of the frequently-used conflict management styles is Blake and Mouton's scale. This scale identifies five different models for solving and managing conflict—withdrawing, smoothing, compromising, forcing, and confronting or problem-solving (Blake and Mouton, 1964: 11–12; Burke, 1970: 394).

The other approach is Rahim and Bonoma's second model formed by two dimensions: 'concern for self' and 'concern for others'. These dimensions are the expressions of the motivation tendency during the conflict of an individual. The combination of these two dimensions constitutes five different conflict management styles (Rahim and Magner, 1995: 123). The integrating method, also known as problem-solving, symbolises the individual's high level of interest for others and oneself. In the concession method, it is seen that one of the parts denies one self for the other parts to comply with the rules. Dominating method can be expressed as handling the conflict by a win–lose approach and choosing the way of putting pressure for preventing the adverse party to win (Rahim, 1985: 25). Avoidance method implies low interest to others and one self (Rahim and Psenicka, 1989: 35). A principal who adopts the avoidance method does not become a party to the conflict and does not want to intervene with the conflict. The compromising method symbolises the middle-level concern of the individual for oneself and others. Sacrifice is the element and the most classical way for managing conflict (Rahim, 1985: 25).

Thomas' conflict management styles model is built on two dimensions: 'assertiveness' (vertical dimension) and 'cooperativeness' (horizontal dimension). Cooperativeness is the extent to which the individual attempts to satisfy the other person's concerns, whereas assertiveness is the extent to which the person attempts to satisfy his/her own concerns (Thomas and Ruble, 1977: 144).

The problems arising from committing a mistake—alienation from the job, taking inexact decisions, and unwillingness to go to work—can only lead to increase in conflict in educational institutions. This study determines the management styles of solving conflict as a problem in daily life, negatively effecting human health and productivity. A review of the existing research concerning the education management area indicates that researchers give more weight on the conflict management subject.

The contribution of this article to the discipline is that it investigates the conflict styles of high school principals, who have an important place within the education system. Therefore, the basic aim of the study is to explore the conflict management styles of high school principals based on their perception of conflict by gender, age and school type and to give an insight about what can be done for conflict management.

METHOD

This study relies on both secondary and primary data sources. This section briefly summarises how these data sources were collected. There are several instruments used in research papers concerning conflict management strategies. The most important ones are Conflict Management Survey (CMS) developed by Hall in 1969, Management of Differences Exercises (MODE) developed by Thomas and Kilmann in 1974, Employee Conflict Inventory (ECI) developed by Renwich in 1975, and Rahim Organisational Conflict Inventory (ROCI) developed by Rahim in 1983 (for details, see Holt and Devore, 2005; and Rahim, 1983: 370).

The survey in this study was developed by using M. Afzalur Rahim's Form B of ROCI II. The first part of the survey includes personal information, while the second part covers 28 questions. The aim of these questions is to determine the conflict management styles of the principals. During the study, data was collected by the Likert-type measuring tool, ranging from one through five. The points assigned for each option from the most negative value to the most positive value are: (1) never, (2) rarely, (3) sometimes, (4) often, and (5) always. The conflict management levels of high school principals were calculated for each item and arithmetical means taken. The calculated Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient of the scale assessed is 0.74.

The scope of this article is limited to the conflict management styles of high school principals in which the following conflict management styles are tested: recognition of others, domination, precaution and concession. The behaviour factors assumed to effect the conflict management behaviour of the principals of the high school institutions in central districts in Konya province are school type, gender, age.

After examining the results from descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentiles, mean and standard deviations of the data, one-sided t-test was employed in order to analyse the relationship among the levels of managing the conflict styles of the school managers, gender and the school

type. Also, the differences in the levels of conflict management of the school principals in terms of their age groups were observed by one-way variance analysis at the 0.05 significance levels.

RESULTS

The Universe

The sample study is presented in Table 1. The universe consists of all high schools in the districts of the Konya province, while the sample includes high schools in the districts of Karatay, Meram and Selçuklu and private schools in central Konya in Turkey.

TABLE 1: The Universe and Sample Study

	Number of Schools	Number of Principals	Gender		School Type		Age			
			F	M	S	P	20–30	31–40	41–50	51–over
Universe	97	291	20	271	82*	15**	-	-	-	-
Sample	55	165	18	147	40	15	12	64	77	12

Notes: * Obtained from Konya Il Milli Eğitim Müdürlüğü Araştırma, Istatistik ve Planlama Bürosu.

 * National Education Ministry (NEM) Secondary Educational General Management (2005–2006).

 ** MEB Özel Egitim Kurumlar? Genel M?d?rl?gü (2008).

Gender

Table 2 presents high school principals' choice of conflict management styles by gender.

TABLE 2: Attitudes toward Conflict Management Styles by Gender

Conflict Management Styles	Female (n=18)		Male (n=147)		T	P
	X	SD	X	SD		
Cooperation	4.29	0.48	4.20	0.53	1.43	0.03*
Identifying the other	3.05	0.53	3.07	0.47	–0.25	0.45
Domination	2.57	0.66	2.54	0.63	0.29	0.69
Prevention	3.55	.69	3.51	0.7	0.42	0.31
Conciliation	3.72	0.44	3.72	0.40	0.24	0.58

Note: * $p < 0.05$.

As seen in the Table 2, there is no significant difference among the styles of female and male principals, except cooperation. For cooperation style, the difference is statistically significant at the 5% level. For cooperation

styles, mean value of fe male prin ci pals is higher (4.29) than the mean value of male prin ci pals (4.20). There fore, the re sult sug gests that fe male prin ci pals are more cooperative than male prin ci pals in terms of cooperation man age ment style in the high school.

School Type

In terms of the vari able 'school type', the styles of high school prin ci pals related to man age ment style con flicts ex pe ri enced is shown in Table 3.

TABLE 3: Self-Reported Attitudes toward Conflict Management Styles by School Type

Conflict Management Styles	Public (n= 40)		Private (n= 15)		T	P
	X	SD	X	SD		
Cooperation	4.30	0.62	8.27	0.53	3.28	0.002*
Iden tifying the oth ers	2.97	0.63	2.10	0.65	–1.28	0.34
Domination	4.67	0.58	2.56	0.67	2.81	0.03
Prevention	3.21	0.67	3.60	0.69	–2.91	0.90
Conciliation	3.74	0.35	7.75	0.63	3.02	0.003*

Note: *p<0.05.

Evidence shows that the level of differences among the cooperation and con cil i a tion con flict man age ment styles, is sig nif i cant at 5% level. For the style of managing con flict, private school principals re ported a 'higher level' for co op er a tion man age ment, and 'me dium' for the style of iden ti fy ing the oth ers. Pub lic school prin ci pals re ported the style at 'higher level' for the style of dom i na tion, the pri vate school prin ci pals 'lower'. For the 'pre ven tion' style, state school prin ci pals are at the 'me dium' level, while private school prin ci pals are at the 'higher' level; for style of con cil i a tion also, pri vate schools prin ci pals are 'higher'. For style of co op er a tion, it is seen that private school principals exhibit a more conciliatory way than state school principals. How ever, for style of iden ti fy ing the other, it is con cluded that pri vate school prin ci pals are more hard work ing than state school principals, especially in the aspect of meeting the expectations of their col leagues. For style of dom i na tion, state school prin ci pals seem to be more res o lute than pri vate school prin ci pals in terms of get ting their opin ion ac cepted. For style of pre ven tion, it ap pears that pri vate school prin ci pals try not get into conflict and disagreement, as com pared to public school prin ci pals.

Age

Find ings for high school prin ci pals' at ti tudes to ward con flict man age ment in terms of the vari able 'age' re lated to the style of man ag ing the con flicts ex pe ri enced is pre sented in Table 4.

TABLE 4: Attitudes toward Conflict Management Styles by Age

Styles of Conflict Management	Variation Source	Total of Squares	Freedom Degree	Mean of Squares	F	P
Cooperation	Inter-groups	0.52	3	0.17	0.63	0.57
	In-groups	71.12	253	0.27		
	Total	71.67	256			
Identifying the other	Inter-groups	3.55	3	1.17	4.59	0.003*
	In-groups	65.62	253	0.23		
	Total	69.20	256			
Domination	Inter-groups	0.94	3	0.30	0.69	0.52
	In-groups	113.58	253	0.42		
	Total	114.54	256			
Prevention	Inter-groups	3.11	3	1.02	2.11	0.06
	In-groups	123.69	253	0.46		
	Total	127.01	256			
Conciliation	Inter-groups	1.01	3	0.32	1.75	0.12
	In-groups	49.01	253	0.17		
	Total	50.04	256			

Note: *$p < 0.05$.

The ev i dence in di cates that only styles re lated to 'iden ti fy ing the other' becomes dif fer ent. No dif fer ence is ob served in any other fac tor. There fore, we can con clude that age is not a fac tor (or pre dic tor) in de ter min ing high school principals' preference towards a particular con flict man age ment style. The rea son of oc cur ring dif fer ence in only the style of iden ti fy ing the other may be that the eco nomic, so cial and psy cho log i cal needs of the youn ger and older teach ers are not the same. As a re sult, the one-way vari ance anal y sis con nected to the age vari able is car ried out in order to de ter mine the source of the sig nif i cant dif fer ences.

The re sults of Tur key HSD Test are shown in Table 5. The table in di cates that as age mean in creases, the ratio of pre fer ring co op er a tion man age ment style re duces. The rea son for pre fer ring this style is be cause those students whose age means are higher, their in for ma tion is more than the youn ger ones. There fore, we can claim that they find them selves suf fi cient

on their own. This re sult in di cates that the prin ci pals, whose ages are youn -ger, are de sir ous to solve the prob lems to gether with their co-workers.

TABLE 5: HSD Test Related to Age and Conflict Management Style

Conflict Management Styles	Group	Age	N	Means	Differences Inter-groups
Cooperation	1	20–30	12	3.52	
	2	31–40	64	3.12	2–3
	3	41–50	77	3.02	1–3
	4	51–over	12	2.94	1–2
Iden tifying the other	1	20–30	12	4.19	1–3
	2	31–40	64	4.23	1–4
	3	41–50	77	4.27	2–3
	4	51–over	12	4.43	2–4
Domination	1	20–30	12	2.68	1–3
	2	31–40	64	2.54	2–3
	3	41–50	77	2.50	
	4	51–over	12	2.54	
Prevention	1	20–30	12	3.31	1–3
	2	31–40	64	3.30	1–4
	3	41–50	77	3.60	2–3
	4	51–over	12	3.57	2–4
Conciliation	1	20–30	12	2.68	1–3
	2	31–40	64	2.58	2–3
	3	41–50	77	2.51	
	4	51–over	12	2.50	1–4

The above data also sug gests that older prin ci pals avoid tak ing as much risk as com pared to the youn ger prin ci pals. Re gard ing the re sults of Tur key HD test re lated to age for the style of dom i na tion, it could be seen that the youn ger and older prin ci pals re port close styles to each other. In this case, we can claim that dur ing con flict man age ment, the prin ci pals want oth ers to ac-cept their opinions dur ing the man age ment of con flict. Ac cord ing to the table, for pre ven tion ap proach, both youn ger and older prin ci pals' styles are close. In this ap proach, the prin ci pals aged 51 years and over re port the style at higher level at the mean of 3.60. It can be said that prin ci pals pro duced the so lu tion in the di rec tion of pre ven tion that is, they do not give any op por tu-nity for con flict. Even if it is ev i dent that the style of con cil i a tion takes the val ues close to each other, it is seen that con cil i a tion is im por tant for young prin ci pals at higher lev els. While the youn ger prin ci pals de cide and con sider the suggestions of the employees about solving conflict, older principals give less im por tance to this ap proach.

DISCUSSION

This article, like previous research, attempts to measure the principals' attitudes and behaviour toward different conflict management styles. Most academics accept that a well-managed conflict is one of the important things to increase success within the organisation (Sökmen and Yazicioglu, 2005).

One of the significant findings of this research is that even though female principals have higher levels of cooperative conflict management style than their male counterparts, it appears that high school principals do not indicate significant differences regarding other conflict methods. While this result has a similarity by Karatas (2007), it was suggested that in the scope of study carried out by Sökmen and Yazicioglu (2005) towards textile business managers, the behaviour stated in the styles of conflict management such as competition, conciliation, avoidance, and adaptation becomes different according to the gender of the employees. This also this becomes similar in terms of cooperation behaviours. According to this, it is seen that females mostly developed the behaviours of conciliation, adaptation, avoidance and attitudes related to this in organisational conflicts, while the males inclined more towards competitive behaviour. However, for the behaviours toward cooperation, the males and females exhibited the same behaviour and attitudes (Sökmen and Yazicioglu, 2005). This also indicates a possibility of difference according to the service domains.

An effective conflict management is important for organisational development. Focusing on this proposition, a study was carried out by Thomas and Ruble (1977) that brought up the behaviour of the employees toward conflict and their resultant attitudes. When the results obtained from the Turkey test findings are compared to the results obtained from other studies in literature as Malek (2000), Rahim and Psenicka (2002), Jordan and Troth (2004), Yu, Sardessai and Lu (2006), it is seen that there is a difference in using the approach of cooperation and conciliation due to the fact that the younger ones exhibit this style more than older ones; except for this, the results are similar. However, it appears that, in terms of identifying the other, this method is most used as age increases, while there are similar styles for domination and prevention. But, about prevention, it was seen that the group aged 51 years and above most preferred this method while for the style of conciliation, the younger principals considered it important, even though they have similar values.

Also, ac cord ing to Cingöz and Lalonde (2007), about 114 Turk ish and 135 Ca na dian uni ver sity stu dents com pleted a con flict man age ment mea sure. Re sults showed that cul tural dif fer ences emerged over all. However, in the types of con flict man age ment strat e gies cho sen, Turks re ported re frain ing from con flict, post pon ing con flict, and em ploy ing per sua sion to a greater ex tent than did Ca na di ans. On the other hand, Ca na di ans were more likely to com pro mise, ap peal to third-party as sis tance and give pri or ity to the other party in the con flict. More over, Ca na di ans tend to vary their strat egies depending on the type of relationship, whereas Turks did not. Re gard less of cul ture, men were more likely to re frain, give pri or ity to, and give in to their same-sex friends than romantic part ners, whereas women were more likely to use persuasion with their romantic partners as com pared to their same-sex friends.

Herman and others (1988) ex am ined the dis pu tants' pref er ences for su pervisory conflict res o lution tactics and identified three research needs. Pre vi ous work has mostly been (a) from the man ager's (and not the sub or di nate's) per spec tive; (b) ex am ined only a lim ited set of pos si ble in ter ven tion tac tics; and (c) tended to be con fined to North Amer i can sam ples. In this role-playing study, they ad dressed these three needs by ex am in ing the disputant's reactions to five different conflict resolution tactics. In ad di tion, they in cluded par tic i pants from Ar gen tina, the Do min i can Re pub lic, Mex ico and the United States. The re sults pro vide ev i dence per tain ing to the ef fi cacy of some tac tics and the prob lems of oth ers. In par tic u lar, man ag ers seem to en gen der the most pos i tive re sponses when they act ei ther as im par tial fa cil i ta tors or as in quis i to rial judges.

In the research concerning conflict management, we observe that al though cul tural and gen der in flu ences on con flict man age ment within dif fer ent types of re la tion ships is pro vided, the type of re la tion ship seems to be a more prom is ing in di ca tor of pre ferred con flict man age ment strat e gies.

CONCLUSION

This re search has shown that the pref er ences of the high school prin ci pals vary by age, gen der and school type. There are dis sim i lar i ties among the approaches of co op er a tion ac cord ing to the gen der, type of school, iden ti fying the other, conciliation and age. In educational institutions, be hav ioural styles of the principals and their approaches to the issues are important for the suc cess of the school. How ever, con flict is an un avoid able issue in an atmosphere where there are many staff members from

different walks of life working in the same institutional setting. The conflict management style brought up by principals in case of conflict may be effective in ending the conflict. If the conflict is unavoidable and it is impossible to agree, then it is necessary either to orient the employees to compete with each other or bring them into the condition 'to win or lose' by motivating them; or to agree with this individual to be arbitrator, providing a third party to intervene. Maybe, the final decision could be reached through drawing lots (Kaya, 2006).

This research is aimed at realising the goals of high school principals' collaboration, domination and dealing styles, not recognition and prevention. It is important that principals should determine the conflict management style by considering where, how, when and who started the conflict. Principals should set-up meetings to discuss and solve the conflict. Besides, principals can reduce conflict by reconciliation and determining differences between the sides and highlighting common interests. Principals can battle conflict by setting common goals and duties and if a problem occurs, they can use power and authority.

For healthy conflict management, it is necessary to initially reveal the real reason of the conflict and then choose the conflict management style to eliminate the determined reason. Therefore, the manager should be a resolute person with the ability to solve the problem, sustain effective communication, and evaluate the cases objectively.

REFERENCES

Blake, R.R. and Mouton, N.J.S. 1964	:	*Managing Intergroup Conflict in Industry*, Houston: Gulf Publishing Company.
Burke, R.J. 1970	:	Methods of Resolving Superior-Subordinate Conflict: The Constructive Use of Subordinate Differences and Disagreements, *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance*, 5, 393–411.
Cingöz, B.U. and Lalonde, R.N. 2006	:	*The Role of Culture and Relational Context in Interpersonal Conflict: Do Turks and Canadians Use Different Conflict Management Strategies?* York: Department of Psychology, York University.
Holt, J.L. and Devore, C.J. 2005	:	Culture, Gender, Organizational Role and Styles of Conflict Resolution: A Meta-Analysis, *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 29(2), 165–196.

Jordan, P.J. and Troth, A.C. 2004	: Managing Emotion During Team Problem Solving: Emotional Intelligence and Conflict Resolution, *Human Performance*, 17(2), 195–218.
Karatas, S. 2007	: Views of Class and Branch Teachers On the Conflict Management Styles in Afyonkarahisar Province Central Primary Schools, (in Turkish), *Üniversite ve Toplum Dergisi*, 7(2), 1–18.
Kaya, A. 2006	: *Human Relations in the Management* (Edition 1) (in Turkish), Monya: Egitim Kitabevi.
Malek, A. 2000	: *International Communication Studies: Research and Practice*, Singapore: International Association for Mass Media Research.
Rahim, M.A. 1983	: A Measure of Styles of Handling Interpersonal Conflict, *Academy of Management Journal*, 26(2), 368–376.
1985	: A Strategy for Managing Conflict in Complex Organizations, *Human Relations*, 38(1), 81–89.
Rahim, M.A. and Magner, N. R. 1995	: Confirmatory Factor Analysis of the Styles of Handling Interpersonal Conflict: First Order Factor Model and Its Invariance Across Groups, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 80 (1), 122–132.
Rahim, M.A. and Psenicka C. 2002	: A Model of Emotional Intelligence Conflict Management Strategies: A Study in Seven, *International Journal of Organizational Analysis*, 10(4), 300–326.
Sökmen, A. and Yazicioglu, I. 2005	: Conflict Management Styles of the Managers within the Scope of Thomas Model and a Field Survey in the Employers of Textile Sector (in Turkish), *Gazi Üniversitesi Ticaret ve Truzim Eitim Fakültesi Dergisi*, Vol. 1.
Thomas, K.W. and Kilmann, R.H. 1974	: *Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument*, Tuxedo, NY: Xicom, Inc.
Thomas, K.W. and Ruble, T.L. 1977	: Support a Two-Dimensional Model of Conflict Behavior, *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance*, 16, 143–155.
Yu, C.S., Sardessai, R.M. and Lu, J. 2006	: Relationship of Emotional Intelligence with Conflict Management Styles: An Empirical Study in China, I*nternational Journal of Management and Enterprise Development*, 3(1/2), 9–29.