Examining Principals' Conflict Management Styles: A Study of Turkish Administrators

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Abstract

This research is aimed to examine principals' conflict management styles and comparing these styles in terms of demographic variables. Descriptive survey design was used to describe the frequency of principals' conflict management styles and comparing these styles under different boundary conditions. The target population of the study comprised 156 school principals. Rahim organizational conflict management scale was used. Organizational conflict management scale to describe conflict styles used by principals included 28 items 5-point Likert-scale. It was found that the most frequently used styles by the principals were integrating and compromising; the least frequently used styles were forcing and avoiding respectively. Integrating style was the most frequently used style compared to the other ones; compromising style was used more frequently than obliging, forcing and avoiding; obliging was used more frequently than forcing; avoiding was used more frequently than forcing. Primary and middle school principals used obliging style more frequently than general high school principals; middle school and K-8 principals used avoiding style more frequently than general high school principals. Frequency of the use of conflict management styles did not differ based on principals' total seniority in school administration, seniority as an educator, and gender.

Keywords: Conflict, conflict management styles, school principals

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Introduction

Conflict is an inevitable situation that may occur any time in social and work life. Individuals are different fromeach other and has different paradigms, life expectancy and aims hence this nature of human cause conflict between couples, parents and children, employers and employees. A century ago, the conflict in organization was treated as a pathological manifestation of breakdowns in communication or the ego trips of unreconstructed manager while in the second half of the 1950s and in the next decade, the political-science view infiltrated both schools (Jackson & Morgan, 1978).

It is difficult to see a definition of conflict which is accepted commonly by scholars because the term has a broad influence on humans (Luthans, 2010). Thomas (1992) described conflict as the process which begins when one party perceives that another has frustrated or is about to frustrate. Conflict is defined by (Folger, Poole, & Stutman, 2013) as interaction that when stakeholders among each other perceive something went wrong or not equal for parties while Rahim (2010) defined it as interactive process manifested in incompatibility, disagreement, or dissonance within or between social entities. Some other scholars (Tedeschi, Schlenker, & Bonoma, 1973) defined it as an "interactive state in which behaviors or goals of some other actor" (p. 2).

Organization is one of important area for conflict that included different relationship, groups (Folger, Poole, & Stutman, 2013) departments has different working principals and culture than each other which may trigger conflict in organizations (Eren, 2016) while sometime conflicts resulted with justice and fairness (Budd & Colvin, 2014). Conflict in organization and diary human life has potential to result with positive and negative outcomes. Clegg (2010) defined positive conflict climate in organizations as followed: i) transparency and openness in communication with diary life, ii) information flows in easy way and spontaneously along with frequent communication, iii) there are empathy (understanding others emotion and perspectives) among parties, iv) decision making based on participation, v) there is respect to equality and everyone's while negative conflict climate in organization were defined as: I) Knowledge is hidden, secrets and confidential agenda is common, ii) lenses are restricted, iii) frequency of communication is week and due to using ineffective communications styles such as a-mail and leave a message less verbal messages used, iv) superiority is using frequently, one of party behavior dominantly.

Styles of handling interpersonal conflict begins with two styles cooperative-competitive (Deutsch, 1949), then Putnam and Wilson (1982) provided three styles, non-confrontation (obliging), solution-orientation (integrating) and control (dominating) afterward Pruitt (1983) suggested four styles of handling conflict as yielding, problem solving, inaction and contending and the five styles of handling interpersonal conflict in

organization were first conceptualized by Follet (1940). Rahim (2010) explained human reactions to interpersonal conflict as falling to five styles as followed and differentiated these styles of handling with two basic dimensions concern for self and concern for others.

Integration Style: This style indicates high concern for self and others. This style is also known as problem solving which is recommended for education organizations when conflict occurred among stake holders. This style is also associated with a lower level of task conflict (Friedman, Tidd, Curral, & Tsai, 2000). Some assumptions (needed to use integration style (Folger et. al, 2013): i) whole parties of conflicts should benefit form resolution, ii) parties should believe in resolution that will ensure their benefits, iii) parties should set aside hate and hostility may feel for each other.

Obliging Style: This style is also known as accommodating which sometimes possible to use when allegation is more important for other side than ours. This style used to repair poor or shaky relationship or to keep good relationships especially when relationship is more important than issue (Folger et. al, 2013). It is suggested to be careful when using this style that other party could suppose using it as indicator of weakness or obedience hence other party start to use forcing style.

Dominating Style: This style indicates high concern for self and low concern for others. This is also known as competing. In this style there are two results that one side win and other side lost. It is possible and legal to use this style when one of parties is right. Friedman et al., (2000) argued that use of a dominating style could lead to higher levels of conflict hence should not be used except for mandatory stipulations or in a small issue.

Avoiding: This style indicates low concern for self and others. It is suggested that calm down after intensive conflict for a while to come round (Quinn, Faerman, Thompson & McGrath, 2003) could be beneficial to use this style. But using this style extensively has potential to decrease the self-esteem of users. It is not suggested to use this style for employees who have reciprocal dependence. The employees have mutual dependence to each other should use integration style if possible or compromising style.

Compromising style: This style indicates in concern for self and others. Compromisers they consider what to barter and talk to other party their situation. It could be suggested to use integration style in case of conflict for education organizations. But is not possible to use integrating style in any condition hence sometimes compromising style is suggested when resolutions did not generate in integrating style.

In terms of this research it is supposed that examining of conflict management styles used by principals and comparing these styles by demographic variables could be important for educational administration field.

Research Objective

The general aim of this study is to find out about which styles the school principals use for the conflicts they have with teachers and how often they use them; and to compare these styles based on the principals' demographic characteristics.

Research Questions

The problem research questions of the study are stated as below:

1) What are the most commonly used conflict management styles by principals?
2) Do these styles differ based on the school type, gender, professional seniority both in teaching and management?

Method

General backgrounds of the research, sample, instrument and data analyses were discussed under this title.

Research Model

The quantitative design was used for this study. Descriptive survey design (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012) was used to describe frequency of principals' conflict styles and comparing these styles under different boundary conditions whereas content analyses as qualitative method was used to describe issues to give rise to conflict in schools. Surveys allow gathering data about the participants' beliefs that would be difficult to measure using observational techniques (McIntyre, 1999, p. 20). Descriptive studies in education describe the attitudes of stakeholders such as students, teachers, administrators or parents in educational organizations. Due to receiving principals' perception about conflict management styles used in case of conflict that this study is naturally in descriptive style.

Sample

Convenient sampling was used to collect data due to practical reasons that principals were joining compulsory in-service training and management certificate sessions. The researcher attended these training sessions as a trainer and personally implemented the scale of the existing study to the school principals. It could be claimed that the implementation of the instrument by the research her/himself, implementing the scales during the training sessions and the prompts given by the researcher in order to provide the participants to respond the scales earnestly contributed to the reliability of the scale. The target population of the study comprised of the school principals in a city located in the western Black Sea Region of Turkey and totally 156 school principals participated the study.

32 of these school principals were from elementary schools, 31 of them were from middle schools, 12 were from general high schools, 29 were from special vocational high schools and public education centers, 18 were from kindergartens and 34 were from K-8; 25 of the participants were women and 127 were men. As for their seniority in teaching profession, 23 had 1-5 years of seniority; 26 had 11-15 years; 38 had 16-20 years; 68 had 21 years or above years of seniority. When their seniority in school management was taken into consideration, it was seen that 38 of them had 1-2 years, 22 had 3-5 years, 34 had 6-10 years, 37 had 11-15 years, 15 had 16-20 years and 10 had 21 years or above years of seniority.

Instrument

Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory II was used to describe conflict management styles used by principals to handle issues or problems occurred between teachers and principals. Rahim's Organizational Conflict Inventory's Alpha internal consistency reliability of styles in Turkish context calculated as between .60 - .89 by Aksu (2003); .70 - .77 by Şahin (2016); .60 - .77 by Yıldızoğlu and Burgaz (2014); whereas composite scale calculated as .70 by İnandı, Tunç and Gündüz (2013); .80 by Otrar and Övün (2007) and .84 by Serin, Balkan and Soran (2014) whereas Alpha internal consistency reliability calculated as .76 for this study. Organizational conflict management scale to describe frequency of conflict styles used by principals included 28 items with a 5-point Likert-scale response option as follows: Never, 1; seldom, 2; sometimes, 3; often, 4; always 5. Scale included five dimensions as conflict management styles were followed: Integrating, obliging, forcing, avoiding and compromising.

Procedures

To describe conflict management styles used by principals, descriptive statistics were used. ANOVA was used to compare frequency styles levels' mean across school level / type, seniority as educator and administrator; t-test was used to compare means in terms of gender; repeated measures for ANOVA was used to compare styles used by principals. The skewness and the kurtosis index were calculated for each styles (dimensions) and given in Table 1.

Table 1
Skewness and Kurtosis Index results for each dimension

Conflict Management Styles / Dimensions	Skewness	Kurtosis
Integrating	-.13	-.54
Obliging	.18	.45
Forcing	.28	-.69
Avoiding	-.14	-.22
Compromising	-.57	1.00

As can be seen in Table 1. Skewness and Kurtosis indexes ranged between -.13 and 1.00 the range that is considered excellent (George & Mallery, 2001). These results indicated that parametric statistic procedures used to analyze the data were appropriate.

Findings

The findings related with the frequency/level of the school principals' styles used in conflict management were given in the Table 2.

Table 2
Frequency/level of the school principals' styles used in conflict management

Conflict Management Styles	N	$\bar{x}$	Sx
1. Integrating	156	4.32	.44
2. Obliging	156	3.15	.52
3. Forcing	156	2.52	.70
4. Avoding	156	3.06	.78
5. Compromising	156	4.14	.49

As can be seen in the Table 2, it was found out that the most frequently used styles by the principals were integrating ($\bar{x}$= 4.32) and compromising ($\bar{x}$= 4.14); the least frequently used styles were forcing(x= 2.52) and avoiding ($\bar{x}$= 3.06) respectively. When we consider the most and least frequently used statements under each dimension used by the principals; it was seen that the most frequently performed behavior under 'integrating' style was 'I try to work with my teachers for a proper understanding of a problem' ($\bar{x}$= 4.45) while the least frequently performed behavior was 'I try to integrate my ideas with those of my teachers to come up with a decision jointly' ($\bar{x}$= 3.94). Under 'Obliging' style the most frequently performed style was 'I generally try to satisfy the needs of my teachers' ($\bar{x}$= 4.51) while the least frequently performed style was 'I give in to the wishes of my teachers' ($\bar{x}$= 1.96). Under 'Forcing' style the most frequently performed style was 'I am generally firm in pursuing my side of the issue' ($\bar{x}$= 3.84) while the least frequently performed style was 'I use my authority to make a decision in my favor' ($\bar{x}$= 1.92).Under 'Avoiding' style the most frequently performed style was 'I try to avoid

unpleasant exchanges with my teachers' ($\overline{x}$= 3.99) while the least frequently performed style was 'I usually avoid open discussion of my differences with my teachers' ($\overline{x}$= 2.17). Under 'compromising'style the most frequently performed style was 'I negotiate with my teachers so that a compromise can be reached' ($\overline{x}$= 4.34) while the least frequently performed behavior was found to be 'I use give and take so that a compromise can be made' ($\overline{x}$= 3.90). The findings related with repeated measures for ANOVA comparing whether there were significant differences betweenthe school principals' frequency/level of using these styles were given in the Table 3.

Table 3
Result of the repeated measures of ANOVA comparing the differences between the school principals' frequency/level of using the styles

Source	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	p	Difference
Between-Subjects	81.1	155	.523			1>2,3,4,5
Measures	366.3	3.13	116.9	280.6	.000	5>2,3,4
Error	202.3	485.8	.416			2>3; 4>3
Total	649.7	643.93	117.839			

1: Integrating, 2: Obliging, 3: Forcing, 4: Avoiding, 5: Compromising

As can be seen in the Table 3, it was concluded based on the repeated measures for ANOVA results that the frequency/level of the principals' using conflict management styles differed [$F_{(3.13-485.8)}$ = 280.6; p < .05]. Based on the results, it was found out that integrating style was the most frequently used style compared to the other ones; compromising style was used more frequently than obliging, forcing and avoiding; obliging was used more frequently than forcing; avoiding was used more frequently than forcing. One-way ANOVA results related with the comparison of the frequency of the principals' use of the styles based on their school types were given in the Table 4.

Table 4

One-way ANOVA results related with the comparison of the frequency of the principals' use of the styles based on their school type

Styles	School Type / Level	*n*	*M*	SD	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	*p*	Differed Schools
Obliging	1.Primary	32	3,25	,48						
	2.Middle	31	3,25	,44						
	3.High Sch.	12	2,73	,52	3,215	5	,643	2,48	,034	1,2 > 3
	4. Vocational	29	3,03	,49	38,911	150	,259			
	5.Kindrgarten	18	3,22	,60	42,126	155				
	6.K-8	34	3,18	,54						
	7.Total	156	3,15	,52						
Avoiding	1.Primary	32	3,04	,75						
	2.Middle	31	3,25	,73						
	3.High Sch.	12	2,51	,79	9,816	5	1,963	3,46	,005	1,6 > 3
	4. Vocational	29	2,91	,63	85,151	150	,568			
	5.Kindrgarten	18	2,77	,83	94,967	155				
	6.K-8	34	3,35	,79						
	7.Total	156	3,06	,78						

As it can be seen in the Table 4, there were significant differences between obliging [$F_{(5-150)}$ = 2.48; p < .05] and avoiding [$F_{(5-150)}$ = 3.46; p < .05] according to the results comparing the frequency of the principals' use of the conflict management styles scale which had five dimensions based on their school types. Considering the results, it was found out that primary ($\bar{x}$= 3.24) and middle school ($\bar{x}$= 3.24) principals' used obliging style more frequently than general high school ($\bar{x}$= 2.73) principals; middle school ($\bar{x}$= 3.25) and K-8 principals ($\bar{x}$= 3.35) used avoiding style more frequently than general high school ($\bar{x}$= 2.51) principals. What is more; frequency of integration, forcing and compromising which were the other styles of the conflict management did not differ significantly based on the principals' school types (p > .05).

According to the results of one way ANOVA analysis related with the comparison of the principals' use of the conflict management styles based on their total seniority in teaching profession, the frequency of the use of conflict management styles did not differ based on their seniority in teaching profession [Integrating: $F_{(3-151)}$ = 1.50; *p* = .218; Obliging: $F_{(3-151)}$ = .82; *p* = .485; Forcing: $F_{(3-151)}$ = .23; *p* = .876; Avoiding: $F_{(3-151)}$ = .26; *p* = .852; Compromising: $F_{(3-151)}$ = .61; *p* = .611]. Likewise, it was found out that the frequency of the use of conflict management styles did not differ based on their total seniority in school management according to the one way ANOVA results comparing the principals' use of the conflict management styles based on their total seniority in school management [Integrating: $F_{(5-150)}$ = 1.31; *p* = .262; Obliging: $F_{(5-150)}$ = 1.034; *p* = .398;

Forcing: $F_{(5-150)}$ = .24; p = .946; Avoiding: $F_{(5-150)}$ = 1.27; p = .279; Compromising: $F_{(5-150)}$ = .81; p = .545].In other words, school principals' seniority in both teaching profession and school management did not influence/differ their frequency/ level of the use of conflict management styles. The results of the independent samples t-test related with the comparison of the frequency of the principals' use of the styles based on their gender were given in the Table 5.

Table 5
The result of the t-test analysis related with the comparison of the frequency of the principals' use of the styles based on their gender

Style	Variable	N	$\bar{x}$	sd	t	df	p
Integrating	Female	25	4.39	.36	.662	150	.509
	Male	127	4.32	.46			
Obliging	Female	25	3.17	.55	.203	150	.839
	Male	127	3.14	.52			
Forcing	Female	25	2.62	.76	.699	150	.486
	Male	127	2.51	.69			
Avoiding	Female	25	2.82	.82	-1.484	150	.140
	Male	127	3.07	.75			
Compromising	Female	25	4.17	.65	.333	150	.740
	Male	127	4.14	.46			

As it can be seen in the Table 5, it was seen that there were no significant differences between the principals' styles based on their gender Integrating: $F_{(3-151)}$ = 1.50; p = .218; Obliging: $F_{(3-151)}$ = .82; p = .485; Forcing: $F_{(3-151)}$ = .23; p = .876; Avoiding: $F_{(3-151)}$ = .26; p = .852; Compromising: $F_{(3-151)}$ = .61; p = .611]. In other words, it might be stated that the frequency of the principals' use of conflict management styles was similar in some ways.

Discussion and Conclusions

When we discuss educational organizations in terms of management processes, it might be restated that using a democratic and participatory management style would clearly contribute to school development. An organizational culture which allows the expression of differing views and approaches would help both the teachers' and students' academic, emotional and social improvement together with the academic development of the school itself. Educational organizational are organizations with high human density where there are hundreds of people with different values, beliefs and philosophy; it is not likely to avoid conflicts between stakeholders of educational organizations (school management, teachers, students and parents) with such diversity and human density. Thus, conflicts are inevitable, natural and characteristic realities for educational organizations, and it would be a favorable approach to benefit from conflicts for the good of the organizations. It

would also be an appropriate point of view seeing the conflicts experienced between stakeholders as suitable occasions for the improvement of organizations rather than perceiving them as threats.

Within the scope of the existing study, it was concluded that the styles which were the most frequently used by the principals were integrating and compromising relatively; while the least frequently used ones were forcing and avoiding. When the frequency of the used styles were compared it was found out that integrating style was seen to be used more frequently than all the other styles; compromising was more frequent than obliging, forcing and avoiding; obliging was more frequent than forcing; avoiding was also more frequent than forcing style. The differences restated in the findings were statistically significant. It is possible to signify that like other organizations, in educational institutions each style could appropriately be used in some cases. However, sometimes it might be inconvenient to use some of them. To illustrate, integrating and compromising styles are more suitable to use in educational environments, but obliging and forcing are less favorable styles to use as a course of the nature of educational organizations. Taking the school managers' conflict management styles which they use for the conflicts they experienced with the other stakeholders into consideration, it coincides with the findings of the study that school managers think they use integrating style more frequently and subsequently they use compromising style (Bağdatlı, 2015; Gümüşeli, 1994; İnandı, Tunç, & Gündüz, 2013; Karataş, 2014; Ural, 1997; Yıldızoğlu & Burgaz, 2014; Yiğit, 2015). The teachers perceived that school managers use integrating style and then compromising as a style, they use forcing the least of all (Arslantaş & Özkan, 2012; Karataş, 2014; Otrar & Övün, 2007). The common point of view shared by both teachers' and school principals shows the consistency of measurement and evaluation of the researchers. Niederaurer (2006) found that senior managers at universities used integrating and compromising styles more frequently and they rarely used avoiding. Therefore, the principals' preference of the integration and subsequently compromising styles more frequently, their preference of agreeing in some cases by compromising mutually (Uras, Başer, & Kaya, 2010) is an acceptable way of problem solving and appropriate to the objectives of educational institutions and their human centered structure.

It was realized that prospective conflicts were diminished at the organizations which internalized integration style and cooperation; the number of the conflicts arouse at the organizations which adopted forcing and avoiding styles (Friedman, Tidd, Currall, & Tsai, 2000). Gümüşeli (1994) and Karip (2003) stated that integrating style was perceived more positively by employees compared to the other styles.

This research revealed that principals used their formal competency and authorization rarely to end the conflicts as they did not prefer forcing style. Titrek and Zafer (2009), Yılmaz and Altınkurt (2012) came to the conclusion that school principals did not highly use formal and compulsive power. The findings of some other studies done on the principals (Bağdatlı, 2015; Özmen; 1997; Ural, 1997; Yiğit, 2015) also showed correspondingly that principals used forcing style rarely.

It was found out according to the comparisons of the principals' responses based on their school types that primary and middle school principals used obliging style more frequently than general high school principals; middle school and K-8 principals used avoiding style more frequently than general high school principals. Karabulut (2015) found in his study that kindergarten principals used more frequently obliging style than middle school principals; Otrar and Övün (2015) found out that primary school principals used avoiding style more frequently than middle school principals according to teachers' perceptions. Furthermore, Bağdatlı (2015) in the study which he compared elementary, middle school and high school principals and Yiğit (2015) in the study which he compared general and vocational high schools deduced that school types did not differentiate the styles used in conflict management.

In the study, it was noted that there were no significant differences as a result of the comparisons between the styles used by school principals for conflict management based on their gender. There are some other studies supporting the findings of the existing study on this issue (Arslantaş & Özkan, 2012; Bağdatlı, 2015; Gümüşeli, 1994; Karataş, 2014; Nicotera & Dorsey, 2006; Oğuz, 2007; Uğurlu, 2001). On the other hand, there were some other studies with contrasting results like Şahin (2016) found that male managers used obliging and forcing style compared to their female colleagues; Yiğit (2015) and Süküt (2008) found that male managers used forcing more frequently; Karabulut (2015) found that female managers used avoiding more frequently than male managers. When we review the related literature on this issue, differing studies could be seen stating dissimilar results on the styles and their frequency based on gender. There are some finding (Korabik, Baril, & Backlund, 1994) women using forcing style, considered more negative when compared to men using this style.

Eventually, the frequency of the styles did not differ based on both their seniority in teaching profession and seniority in school management as a result of the comparison of the principals' use of conflict management styles. Similar to this finding, Karabulut (2015) concluded that principals' seniority in teaching profession did not have any significance on the styles they used for conflict management. Öztay (2008) and Gümüşeli (1994) also found out that the principals' seniority in management did not have any significant influence the styles that the principals use; correspondingly, Şahin (2016)

found that under four dimensions except obliging seniority in management did not have any significant influence on the styles used for conflict management. Dissimilar tot the findings of the mentioned studies, Açıkgöz (2009) stated that the principals with higher seniority in school management used integration and obliging styles. Yiğit (2015) and Bağdatlı (2015) highlighted that there were not any significant differences except avoiding style based on seniority; Karabulut (2015) pointed out the significant difference in obliging style. More specifically, Bağdatlı (2015) found that the principals with 16 years of seniority or above used avoiding style more frequently than the ones with 11-15 years of seniority; Yiğit (2015) also found that the principals with 21 years of seniority or above used avoiding style more frequently than the principals with 11-15 years of seniority. As for Karabulut (2015) found out that the principals with 21-25 years of seniority used obliging style more frequently than the principals with 11-20 years of seniority. Reviewing the related literature, it might be restated that the frequency of the styles used by the principals differed based their seniority in the profession especially in obliging and avoiding styles, so it might be said that obliging and avoiding styles were used by the principals with higher years of seniority. It might be because of the occupational fatigue that principals with higher seniority felt or distress because of the prolonged conflicts they had with the stakeholders; therefore, they performed the behaviors like avoiding or abstaining from conflicts compared to their younger colleagues.

Recommendation and Limitations

In this study, it might be a positive aspect that the principals used integrating and compromising styles which are suitable for the nature of educational organizations. It is not always possible to end conflicts between stakeholders using integrating style. Sometimes striking a happy medium by mutual sacrifices would contribute to attain the goals of educational organizations which are human and value-oriented places. It might be suggested that practical training sessions and case studies could be planned in order to raise awareness regarding conflict management styles and styles to be used under diverse circumstances during in service training sessions. Additionally, the reasons which was pointed out as a result of the study could be researched why obliging and avoiding styles were preferred more frequently at middle schools compared to primary schools. Likewise, the reasons for senior school principals used obliging and avoiding styles compared to their younger counterparts could be studied. It must be kept in mind while in generalizing the findings of the existing study that the population of the study was limited to the principals working in a city.

The study has some limitations. Styles used by principals in case of conflict evaluated by principals' self-assessment has potential subjective results due to humans has tendency in self-evaluation to rate higher than fact. Hence it is suggested to researchers to evaluate principals conflict management styles by teachers share long time with principals and faced conflicts with principals. Other limitations of the research were using convenience sample method to collect data. Even though convenience sample is a method to collect data but has some limitations about to generalize the results to population. It is suggested to different researchers to evaluate principals conflict management styles via randomized sample method in order to generalize results.

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