



## Survey of relationship between principals' demographic characteristics and conflict management style choices

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### Abstract

**Introduction:** Conflict is inevitable in workplaces and it is very important to manage it in a proper way to minimize the problems that might arise. The aim of this research is surveying the relationship between principals' demographic characteristics and the choice of conflict management styles.

**Methods:** The statistical society included 213 employed principals of Shiraz high schools. The data on conflict management style choices were gathered using the conflict management questionnaire. The t-test, ANOVA and regression were used to analyze the data.

**Results:** The results of this research showed that the compromise style was the most frequently used method by principals followed by collaboration and accommodation, domination and avoidance, respectively. There was a significant association between the principals' level of income and the use of collaboration and accommodation styles.

There was a statistically significant difference between gender and the use of the five fold approach in the domination style. Overall, there was a significant association between the principals' demographic characteristics and the conflict management style choices.

**Conclusion:** The principals should notice that conflict is inevitable in organizations and they should consider the opinions and ideas of both parties involved in the conflict. So the best approach for conflict management by principals is to pay attention to its outcomes and choose the style which has the most benefit for the involved parties.

**Keywords:** Demographic Characteristics, Conflict Management, Principals

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### Introduction

Today it is believed that human resources are the most important asset of each organization, particularly the schools, and a healthy relationship based on collaboration is one of the most important factors for the organization's success. Generally, conflict refers to the friction or opposition resulting from actual or perceived differences or incompatibilities. Although conflict doesn't literally have a negative meaning for people, it implies a negative meaning because of the confrontation and disagreement in it (1).

One of the major sources of conflict is the environmental pressure. The conflict arising from individual differences and job incompatibility is intensified with the stressful environment. Individual

differences remain hidden, unless they are triggered by a stimulus such as cross- functional responsibilities (2).

The natural source of conflict is often disagreement and strife for access, control and use of natural resources. Conflict basically appears as a result of using resources in different ways (3). Researchers maintain that organization managers spend one quarter of their time dealing with conflict. Training managers spend almost half of their time dealing with conflict (4).

Another research shows that high levels of conflict cause negative outcomes such as low efficiency, lack of job satisfaction and personnel displacement (5). This is a problematic subject and experts have not come up with a common result about the relationship

between managers' demographic characteristics and ways of conflict solving. In fact, different characters show different behaviors (6). Researchers have argued that managers' characteristics affect conflict solving. For example, 62 studies showed that women like to cooperate in problem solving but when women encountered bargaining guidelines, they are more competitive than men (7).

Demographic characteristics may affect the way managers or principals try to resolve the conflict in their organizations. This research investigates the relationship between demographic characteristics such as age, gender, income, education level and management experience and choices of conflict solving styles.

## Methods

The statistical society of this research comprised all principals of high schools in Shiraz. Because of the small volume of the statistical society, census method was used including high school principals of 4 regions of Shiraz. A conflict questionnaire was used to collect the data. The validity of the questionnaire was confirmed by three experts at Shiraz University. The questionnaire contained 30 items and 6 objective cases of conflicting situations common in schools. The reliability was found to be %77 calculated with Chronbach alpha. The data were analyzed using SPSS software.

## Results

Among the principals who completed the questionnaire, 48.8% were male and 51.2% were female, 76% had Bachelor degrees, 23% Master and 9% Associate degrees. 35.2% of the respondents majored in educational management and 64.8% in other fields.

The dominant style used by the principals was found to be the compromise style with an average of 23.80 followed by collaboration (23.48), accommodation (22.71), domination (18.84) and avoidance (17.77),

respectively. Except for the domination style, no relationship was found between gender and conflict solving style choices (Table 1).

There was a statistically significant difference between accommodation, collaboration and avoidance styles with experience in management.  $\beta$  Coefficient showed a negative relationship between the accommodation and avoidance styles and experience but a positive relationship between collaboration style and experience (Table 2).

In other words, when managers' experience was more, the probability of choosing accommodation and roadbed styles of conflict solving was less than that of the collaboration style. The collaboration style had the most determinant coefficient.

There was a significant relationship between managers' salary and collaboration and compromise styles, but not the other styles. The higher the managers' salary, the more probable the choice of collaboration conflict solving style (Table 3).

There was a significant relationship between the principals' field of study and the choice of conflict solving styles. There was also a significant difference between compromise, collaboration and avoidance styles and the field of study. The average score for the choice of compromise style for those majoring in educational management was 21.37 and for other majors it was 25.12. So those majoring in educational management used accommodation style less than those majoring in other fields (Table 4).

## Conclusion

As the results show, managers used different conflict solving styles. The compromise style with an average of 23.80 was the most frequently used style and the avoidance style with an average of 17.77 was the least frequently used one. So according to the results, the compromise style is the most common style used by the people and sometimes it is the only style by which the conflict is solved. In this method, disagreement and its causes are ignored; disagreement exists but it

**Table 1.** Comparison of conflict solving style choices in terms of gender

Styles	Sex	No.	Mean±SD	t	df	P	
Accommodation	male	104	22.80±7.02	0.346	211	0.73	
	female	109	23.09±4.79				
Collaboration	male	104	23.47±5.39	0.033		0.97	
	female	109	23.49±5.45				
Domination	male	104	20.94±4.66	5.790		211	0.000
	female	109	17.4±5.15				
Avoidance	male	104	17.63±5.99	0.335		0.73	
	female	109	17.89±5.91				
Compromise	male	104	24.01±4.61	0.604		0.54	
	female	109	23.69±5.58				

**Table 2.** Relationship between managerial experience and conflict solving style choice

Styles	$\beta$ Coefficient	$\beta$ Standard	r	r <sup>2</sup>	t	P
Accommodation	-0.184	-0.205	0.205	0.042	3.030	0.003
Collaboration	0.290	0.355	0.355	0.126	-5.507	0.000
Domination	0.090	-0.113	0.113	0.013	-1.641	0.102
Avoidance	-0.196	-0.226	0.226	0.051	-3.365	0.001
Compromise	-0.062	0.081	0.205	0.042	-0.171	0.243

is waived.

The results showed that principals did not use only one style and tried to make use of a combination of styles although one style was dominant. As organizations and human communities are getting more complex, conflict is unavoidable and the solution is consistent with the compromise and collaboration styles (8).

As ignoring the discord doesn't solve the problem, people may ignore the disagreement temporarily. But it will be raised over time and the only way is to face the problem logically. Principals should consider conflict as a reality in organizations and make themselves ready to deal with it logically. Preparation and awareness of principals enables them not to be afraid of such problems, rather they can plan to face them effectively (9).

If a principal knows the origin of the conflict and the factors triggering it and seeks proper ways to solve it, he not only stops avoiding, retreating or being afraid of the conflict but also creates constructive and effective results by his good controlling. The older the principals, the less they use domination and accommodation styles because they learn that conflict is unavoidable and it is a natural and necessary part of each organization and disagreement and discord among staff, teachers, students and their interaction with themselves, parents and the whole society is normal and shouldn't be avoided. As Marin points out conflict or power is born with job. Our results are in line with Rivolia and Holt's findings (8, 9).

Based on the results of this research and others, all principals regardless of their gender, experience, salary, workplace and education level use compromise and collaboration styles more than other styles. So the principals should be trained well in this regard. Principals should consider the problems clearly and

not to hide them. This helps them to see all aspects of the problem and then find the best way to solve them. If a principal uses the collaboration style more than other styles, definitely he has buffered decision making in conflictive situations. Therefore, if we consider only the financial values related to conflict, it is better that organization reduce unnecessary financial costs to manage the conflict, because mismanagement of the conflict is very hazardous. So an organization with a powerful human resource and appropriate decisions in conflictive situations can maximize its effectiveness in the workplace. The choice of the most proper conflict management style can increase the ability of co-working and create a peaceful environment among people (8).

Principals should consider factors which influence outcomes of conflict and also it would be better to promote flexibility in conflictive situations. The best approach of conflict management is that principals consider the outcomes and choose the style which has the best effects and reciprocal respect, victory and consent for each part in a way that everyone involved in the conflict feels that he has geared more benefit. Principals ought to consider both parts' suggestions and perceptions. Most psychologists confirm differences between one's perception and the real happening in the outside world. This matter should be taken into account and principals had better ask the parts to explain the problem completely in their own way (9).

Conflict is an unavoidable part of the organization, so if the students and teachers and staff feel calm and the principal doesn't manage the conflict in the right way, they don't have inclination to learn and improve in schools. Therefore, learning how to resolve a conflict is helpful and principals should plan to do it.

**Table 3.** Relationship between salary and conflict solving style choice

Styles	$\beta$ Coefficient	$\beta$ Standard	r	r <sup>2</sup>	t	P
<b>Accommodation</b>	-0.006	-0.95	0.95	0.009	-10.316	0.190
<b>Collaboration</b>	-0.26	0.43	0.43	0.185	-7.071	0.000
<b>Domination</b>	-0.001	-0.020	0.020	0.000	-0.280	0.790
<b>Avoidance</b>	-0.008	-0.131	0.131	0.017	-1.833	0.068
<b>Compromise</b>	-0.13	-0.209	0.209	0.044	-2.963	0.003

**Table 4.** Comparison of conflict solving style choice with field of study

Styles	Fields	No.	Mean± SD	t	df	P
Accommodation	Edu. management	75	22.01± 5.74	-1.70		0.091
	Other majors	137	23.44± 6.70			
Collaboration	Edu. management	75	25± 3.96	3.46		0.001
	Other majors	137	22.63± 5.91			
Domination	Edu. management	75	18.67± 4.66	0.047	211	0.96
	Other majors	137	18.93± 5.15			
Avoidance	Edu. management	75	16.33± 6.34	-2.58		0.01
	Other majors	137	18.55± 5.26			
Compromise	Edu. management	75	21.37± 6.90	-4.45		0.000
	Other majors	137	25.12± 3.14			

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