

# Organizational Conflict and Management: A Study at Schools of Physical Education and Sport in Turkey

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## Abstract

Effective management relates to creativity, good leadership, and a strong educational basis. Managing conflict is one of the main responsibilities to be an effective administrator. The purpose of this study was to investigate conflict management methods that administrators are using and what the perceptions of subordinates. Thirty-eight administrators and 70 instructors from nine universities in Turkey completed the Organizational Conflict Management Questionnaire (Ural, 1997), and ANOVA and post hoc tests were used in data analysis. It was determined that administrators applied problem solving, compromising, compensation, avoiding, and dominating in conflict management. However, differences were found between the opinions of administrators and subordinate faculty. As a result, seniority, title, and education were the important variables when applying styles of conflict management.

Key Words: Physical Education, Conflict, Conflict Management.

## Introduction

Conflict is an inevitable part of human relations and daily life. Each person will be faced with conflict during their interaction with others (Rahim, 1986; Ting-Toomey, Oetzel, & Yee-Jung, 2001). Since conflict is unavoidable, it is important for administrators to know how to manage and benefit from conflicts in their organizations (Rahim & Psenicka, 1989). The goal of conflict management is to reach positive results and prevent negative outcomes for each person involved. Effective conflict management makes it possible to decrease negative outcomes of conflict and create positive outcomes in the organizational environment (Bergmann & Volkema, 1989). Positive outcomes of conflict management in the workplace can increase quality, reduce cost, increase efficiency, and develop team work (Baron, 1986; Bergman & Volkema, 1989; Kindler, 1996; Murphy, 1994; Tjosvold, 1991).

There are numerous approaches to explaining conflict styles (Rahim & Psenicka, 1989; Rahim, Garret, & Bunzman, 1992). The classification of conflict styles in this conceptualization is based on two conceptual dimensions of concern – concern for self and concern for others. These two dimensions combine to create five managerial styles of interpersonal conflict: (1) integrating (i.e., problem solving; high concern for self and others), (2) compromising (moderate concern for self and others), (3) dominating (high concern for self and low concern for others), (4) obliging (i.e., compensating; low concern for self and high concern for others), and (5) avoiding (low concern for self and others). The five-style model based on two dimensions is intended to cover the

gamut of conflict management approaches (Tezer, 2001; Ting-Toomey, et al., 2001). This conceptualization of conflict styles has been widely used because of its compatibility with face-negotiation theory (Rahim & Psenicka, 1989; Rahim, et al., 1992).

Conflict management styles can be taught; however, administrators need to be educated. In fact, a primary reason for failure in conflict management is a lack of education in this area (Karip, 2000). Research indicates that the educational level of administrators is an important factor affecting their adoption of a particular conflict management style.

Different conflict management approaches have been adopted to solve conflict. For example, it has been suggested that it is more efficient to use problem solving methods to create better and more effective interactions among members of an organization (Tezer, 2001; Ting-Toomey, et al., 2001). Organizations whose administrators used a problem solving method have been reported to have higher performance rates than those organizations in which problem solving was not applied (Lawrence & Larsch, 1967). However, it has been reported that college athletic directors have a tendency not to use the problem solving method (Ryska, 2002).

As the number of collegiate physical education programs in Turkey increases, the quality of these programs can be improved. Quality of instructors and administrators is an important factor for effective educational organizations, and managing conflict is one of the main responsibilities of an effective administrator. Effective management is dependent on creativity, good leadership, and a strong educational base. The purpose of this study was (1) to investigate conflict management methods that administrators of collegiate physical education departments are using to manage conflict between themselves and the faculty, and (2) to investigate the perception of instructors toward those conflict management methods.

## Methods

### Subjects

The participants in this study included 38 administrators and 70 instructors in collegiate physical education departments from nine universities in Turkey.

### Instruments

The instrument utilized in this study was the Organizational Conflict Management Questionnaire (Ural, 1997). The questionnaire consists of 5 subscales, which include problem solving, avoiding, compromising, dominating, and compensating. Each subscale contains five sample items. Each item was measured on a 4-point scale, with answer choices of (1) never, (2) rarely, (3) sometimes, and (4) always. The instrument was reported to have a high degree of reliability (Cronbach  $\alpha = .8148$ ; Ural, 1997).

### Data Collection and Analysis

After receiving a permission from the Higher Education Council to conduct the study, questionnaires were mailed to 42 administrators and 80 instructors. A cover letter accompanied the questionnaire explaining the purpose and procedures of the study. All respondents were asked to complete the survey instrument independently and to return it in the envelope provided. ANOVA and post hoc tests were used to interpret the findings.

### Results

Thirty-eight administrators responded (a 90.4% response rate), and 70 instructors responded (a 87.5% response rate). Descriptive statistics are shown in Table 1. The results indicated that both administrators and instructors perceived that the problem solving style of conflict management was most likely to be applied. However, administrators rated themselves as least likely to use the dominating style among all styles; whereas, instructors perceived the dominating style to be used more often (ranking 3rd among all styles).

When comparing perceptions among administrators and instructors, significant differences were found between the self-assessment of administrators and the perceptions of instructors for the problem solving style of conflict management ( $t = 4.817, p = .000$ ). For the problem solving style, administrators yielded a higher mean score, indicating that they perceived themselves to use the problem solving style in case of conflict more so than instructors. Similarly, significant differences were found between the perceptions of instructors and the self-assessment of administrators on the use of the compromising style of conflict management ( $t = 3.82, p = .000$ ), where administrators perceived the use of this style to be more often.

Significant differences were also found between administrators and instructors in the use of the dominating style of conflict management ( $t = -2.098, p = .038$ ). However, in this case, the instructors' perceived that the application of a dominating style as a solution for conflict management was applied more often than the administrators' perception. There were no significant differences in the perceptions of the application of the avoiding style or the compensating style.

Additional comparisons were made between perceptions of administrators and instructors on the basis of rank, years of service, and education. When comparing perceptions of instructors and administrators while considering the rank of the instructor (Table 2), a significant difference was found between the self-assessment of administrators and perceptions of both groups of instructors with regard to problem solving ( $F = 7.73, p = .000$ ) and compromising styles ( $F = 5.107, p = .002$ ). There were no significant differences between groups on dominating, avoiding, and compensating styles. Instructors and administrators stated same opinions in those styles.

When comparing perceptions of instructors and administrators while considering the years of service of the instructor, a significant difference was found between the perceptions of both groups of instructors with regard to problem solving ( $F = 8.85, p = .000$ ) and compromising styles ( $F = 4.81, p = .004$ ). There were no significant differences between groups on dominating, avoiding, and compensating styles. Instructors and administrators

stated same opinions in those styles. And finally, when comparing perceptions of instructors and administrators while considering the educational level of the administrator with regard to conflict management, a significant difference was found between the perceptions of instructors and the self-assessment of both groups of administrators with regard to problem solving ( $F = 7.93, p = .000$ ) and compromising styles ( $F = 4.89, p = .003$ ) again. And again, there were no significant differences between groups on dominating, avoiding, and compensating styles.

### Discussion

The results of this study indicated that administrators perceived that they "always" used the problem solving style and "sometimes" used a compromising style in dealing with conflict. The results also showed that they were "rarely" using dominating, avoiding and compensating styles in handling confrontations. These results were consistent with other studies (Burke, 1970 ; Lawrence & Larsch, 1967). It is beneficial to use a problem solving style in organizations to create better communication among members. These findings are positive signs for both administrators and their organizations. Unfortunately, Ryska (2002) found that athletic directors in higher education had a tendency not to use problem solving strategies as often.

In general, the instructors in our study believed that administrators did use problem solving style to resolve conflict; however, there was a significant difference between their perceptions and the self-assessment of administrators. The findings of this study were not consistent with Gumuseli (1994), who reported that administrators and teachers had similar perceptions about conflict management styles in their organizations. Reason for this difference may be that this study used administrators and instructors in higher education; whereas, Gumuseli (1994) was conducted at middle and high schools. Perhaps the structure of secondary education is more homogeneous, with only teachers and administrators interacting. At the university level, there are numerous ranks among instructors (i.e., professor, associate professor, assistant professor, instructor, and assistant instructor).

The dominating conflict management style is one that was perceived to be rarely used by administrators in this study, which is consistent with other studies (Aydın, 1984; Burke, 1970). However, in this study, the instructors indicated that their administrators used this style more often than administrators perceived. As a general rule, instructors do not want administrators to use a dominating style in conflict management. Previous studies found that the use of either a dominating style or an avoidance style by administrators tend to cause more problems and conflict than solutions (Adams, 1990). In fact, this study found that there was a consistency between instructors and administrators in the application of avoidance style. Administrators stated they used avoidance style rarely, and instructors agreed. These results support previous studies (Wanasiri, 1996). From the administrators' perspective, this result can be seen as a positive outcome.

In addition to problem solving, administrators stated that they often used a compromising style. These results support Ryska (2002) and Wanasiri (1996), who found that administrators had a tendency to use often the compromising style in their organizations. Instructors and administrators perceptions were consistent in their

perceptions of the utilization of a compromising style. Both groups claimed that administrators used compromising style rarely in case of conflict, which was consistent with the other studies (Wanasiri, 1996).

When considering the order the frequency of the strategies of conflict management, administrators stated problem solving was the most frequent, followed by compromising, compensating, avoiding, and dominating styles. Nevertheless, when instructors were asked the same question, their ranking was different, with a dominating style being perceived more frequently. This difference may reflect the difference between effective management and ordinary management styles. Making an appropriate decision and demonstrating proper behaviors are signs of effective leadership and management, which can be learned.

Experiences, rank, and education levels contributed to the differences between administrators and instructors. When perceptions were evaluated according to their experience, rank, and education levels, it was found that these characteristics affected the perceptions of administrators and instructors, with consistent differences found in the perceptions of the use of problem solving and compromising styles. Of particular interest is the difference in perception based on rank, where hierarchy at the university level may cause these differences. No studies in the literature could be found, but there were some studies pointing out the important roles of title in organizations. Titles did not have any influence on the avoiding, dominating and compensating styles.

Experiences were found to be an important variable in the problem solving and compromising styles. As the experience of the instructors increases, the expectations of them may also increase. These results support previous reports from Wanasari (1996), who found that experience has an effect on the use of conflict management strategies. Other studies have reported that there was an increase in the expectations of experienced instructors with regard to respect and autonomy from administrators (Mirzeoglu, Dogu, & Mirzeoglu, 1998). Again, this result may be a reflection of the hierarchical order at universities.

From an educational perspective, it was found that education level of groups were an important factor for the adaptation of conflict management strategies with regard to problem solving and compromising styles. These findings support findings of several other studies (Ashworth, 1990; Tezer, 2001; Ting-Toomey, et al., 2001; Wanasiri, 1996). The findings of this study indicate that administrators, without taking special courses in administration showed contradictory in opinions. The result of the current study showed that a significant number of administrators in physical education departments were not specially trained in educational administration. Turkish Higher Education laws in Turkey do not mandate academics who move into administration to further their studies in educational administration. Administrators at Turkish universities are usually appointed according to their academic career. However, studies have shown that conflict management strategies can be learned; therefore, administrators should be trained (Karip, 2000).

In short, administrators in physical education departments in Turkish Higher Education preferred to use the following conflict management styles, listed in terms of frequency of application – problem solving, compromising, compensating, avoiding and dominating styles. Furthermore, administrators' and instructors'

experiences, titles, and education levels were important variables affecting their perspectives in the adaptation of conflict management strategies, especially with regard to problem solving and compromising styles. Administrators should carefully decide which style of conflict management to use, since instructors participate in the decision making process and have a voice in solving conflicts.

The results of this study will contribute to the body of literature on the conflict management strategies in physical education departments at universities, and they will also provide new insights into conflict management strategies of administrators in Turkish universities. As a natural extension of this study, it is recommended that further studies should examine the relationship between conflict management and performance, the relationship between conflict management and job satisfaction. Additionally, the source of conflict, type of conflict, and levels of conflict can be examined to give new insights and ideas in organizational behavior and productivity at Turkish universities, and everywhere.

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**Table 1. Comparison of Descriptive Statistics for Conflict Management Styles Between Administrators (N = 38) and Instructors (N = 70)**

Conflict Management Styles	Administrators	Instructors
	M (SD)	M (SD)
Problem Solving**	17.47 (1.99)	14.44 (3.72)
Avoiding	11.73 (2.46)	11.35 (2.15)
Dominating*	10.71 (2.54)	11.88 (2.89)
Compromising**	15.97 (2.24)	14.00 (2.71)
Compensating	12.34 (2.36)	11.60 (2.54)

\*p < .05; \*\*p < .01

**Table 2. Comparison of Descriptive Statistics for Conflict Management Styles Between Administrators and Assistant Instructors and Instructors**

Conflict Management Styles	Title	Administrators	Instructors
		M (SD)	M (SD)
Problem Solving*	Asst. Instruct.	17.20 (2.34)	14.31 (3.95)
	Instructor	17.71 (1.88)	14.65 (3.36)
Avoiding	Asst. Instruct.	10.80 (2.97)	11.97 (2.68)
	Instructor	10.67 (2.43)	11.73 (3.26)
Dominating	Asst. Instruct.	11.30 (2.31)	11.84 (2.17)
	Instructor	11.89 (2.54)	10.53 (1.88)
Compromising*	Asst. Instruct.	16.60 (1.95)	13.93 (2.71)
	Instructor	15.75 (2.33)	11.72 (2.42)
Compensating	Asst. Instruct.	12.20 (2.29)	11.72 (2.42)
	Instructor	12.39 (2.42)	11.38 (2.77)

\*p < .01

**Table 3. Comparison of Descriptive Statistics for Conflict Management Styles Between Administrators and Instructors with More or Less Than 10 Years of Service**

Conflict Management Styles	Years of Service	Administrators	Instructors
		M (SD)	M (SD)
Problem Solving*	Less than 10	16.50 (2.13)	14.89 (3.82)
	More than 10	17.86 (1.88)	14.12 (3.66)
Avoiding	Less than 10	11.75 (2.76)	11.75 (2.58)
	More than 10	10.43 (2.45)	11.97 (3.12)
Dominating	Less than 10	11.62 (1.92)	11.72 (2.56)
	More than 10	11.76 (2.62)	11.09 (1.80)
Compromising*	Less than 10	16.12 (1.35)	14.10 (2.93)
	More than 10	15.93 (2.44)	13.92 (2.59)
Compensating	Less than 10	12.87 (2.16)	11.82 (2.49)
	More than 10	12.20 (2.42)	11.43 (2.59)

\*p < .01

**Table 4. Comparison of Descriptive Statistics for Conflict Management Styles Between Instructors and Administrators with or without Educational Experience in Conflict Management**

Conflict Management Styles	Educational Experience	Administrators	Instructors
		M (SD)	M (SD)
Problem Solving*	None	17.10 (2.28)	14.41 (3.84)
	MS, PhD	18.05 (1.58)	14.46 (3.69)
Avoiding	None	11.05 (3.04)	11.31 (2.79)
	MS, PhD	10.36 (1.94)	12.29 (2.93)
Dominating	None	11.42 (2.31)	11.37 (1.87)
	MS, PhD	12.05 (2.63)	11.34 (2.35)
Compromising*	None	16.10 (1.79)	13.82 (2.63)
	MS, PhD	15.84 (2.67)	14.12 (2.80)
Compensating	None	11.89 (2.42)	11.75 (2.77)
	MS, PhD	12.78 (2.27)	11.48 (2.73)

\*p < .01

