

Predicting Conflict Management Based on Organizational Commitment and Selected Demographic Variables

Refik Balay

Harran University
Turkey

The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between different levels of organizational commitment (compliance, identification, internalization) of teachers and their different conflict management strategies (compromising, problem solving, forcing, yielding, avoiding). Based on a questionnaire survey of 418 teachers, this study indicated that male teachers are more likely to experience commitment based on compliance, and are more likely to avoid conflicts than female teachers. As teachers get older they are more likely to experience commitment based on internalization and on identification, and they are more likely to use problem solving conflict management strategies than those who are younger. The results also revealed that both identification and internalization are significant determinants of the use of compromising and problem-solving conflict management strategies. Commitment based on compliance is the only significant predictor of forcing behavior. Commitment based both on identification and compliance are found to be the important determinants of avoiding behavior. Of these two, identification was found to be the most significant predictor of avoiding conflict behavior. Conflict resolution through yielding was not predicted by any level of organizational commitment.

Key words: conflict management, organizational commitment, primary school teachers

Introduction

Organizational Commitment

In recent years, work organizations have been confronted with an increasingly competitive global business climate. This forces organizations to develop policies to enhance workplace commitment on the one hand, and leads managers to develop their skills on effective conflict management on the other.

Refik Balay, Department of Educational Sciences, Harran University, Turkey.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Department of Educational Sciences, Faculty of Arts & Sciences, Harran University, Osmanbey Campus, 63200, Şanlıurfa, Turkey. e-mail: refikbalay@yahoo.com

Those who are more committed to their organizations are assumed to be more productive persons and behave with a higher sense of responsibility and loyalty (Ulrich, 1998).

Several different definitions of commitment exist in the literature. Buchanan's (1974) definition is typical: "Commitment is viewed as a partisan, affective attachment to the goals and values of an organization, to one's role in relation to goals and values, and to the organization for its own sake, apart from its purely instrumental worth" (p. 533). In the definition of Wiener (1982) commitment is conceptualized as a normative motivational process clearly distinctive from instrumental approaches to the explanation of work behavior. Tsui, Egan, and O'Reilly (1992) defined it as an employees' psychological and behavioral attachment to a social group. Scheldon's (1971) definition combines commitment with identification words. He viewed commitment as a psychological attachment

to the organization which links the identity of the person to the organization. According to Mottaz (1988), organizational commitment is an affective response resulting from an evaluation of the work conditions which attach the individual to his or her organization.

Recent research has suggested that commitment is a process of identification with the goals of an organization's multiple constituencies. In this approach employees can be differentially committed to top management, occupations, supervisors, co-workers, and unions (Becker, Billings, Eveleth, & Gilbert, 1996; Reichers, 1985).

There is a useful dichotomy between instrumental/exchange and psychological commitments (Buchanan, 1974; Hrebiniak & Alutto, 1972). Exchange commitment refers to the utilitarian gain from the employment relationship; the organization provides inducements to the employee in return for contributions from the employee. To the extent that the inducements/contribution ratio is in balance or is favorable to the employee, the employee will not wish to leave the organization and is thereby committed (Gaetner & Nollen, 1989). On the contrary, psychological commitment is defined as non-instrumental, affective attraction to the firm by the employee. Here commitment refers to the identification with the company goals and values and even internalization of these values (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986; Sheldon, 1971). These varieties of definitions and conceptualizations reflect the degree of employees' commitment to the organization.

Allen and Meyer (1990) suggest that commitment can take three different forms: *Affective commitment*; refers to employees' emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organization. *Continuance commitment*; reflects recognition of costs associated with leaving the organization, and *normative commitment*; refers to employees' feelings of obligation to remain with the organization.

In some studies, organizational commitment has been conceptualized either as an independent variable (Bateman & Strasser, 1984) or as a dependent variable (Buchanan, 1974). Studies revealed that commitment in general creates positive outcomes for the organization. For instance, commitment is positively related to the issue of job satisfaction (Hrebiniak & Alutto, 1972), job performance (Becker, et al., 1996; Shore & Martin, 1989), and involvement (Handy, 1985; Wallace, 1995).

In this study, commitment is used as an independent variable and defined as a relative strength of an individual's identification with, and involvement in a particular organization. This approach is consistent with the formulation of commitment used by Kelman (1958) and O'Reilly and Chatman (1986), which in this study we have depended on.

They suggest that organizational commitment is based on three levels: *compliance* is an involvement to obtain specific extrinsic rewards, *identification* depends on a desire for affiliation, and *internalization* reflects the congruence between individual and organizational values. This formulation is a useful one since it gives an opportunity to make a clear distinction between teachers who identified with, internalized the values of their schools and those who share exchange-based commitment.

Conflict Management

Conflict management is one of the most essential issues in the conflict literature. It refers to behaviors which participants use when they are in conflict. Functional conflict, results in positive benefits to individuals, the group, or the organization (Schermerhorn, Hunt, & Osborn, 2000). It contributes significantly to successful leadership and teamwork, improves product and service quality for customers, builds customer loyalty, reduces costs, and uses financial resources wisely (Tjosvold, Hui, & Law, 2001). It can also be valuable to an organization since it promotes innovative and creative problem solving, develops genuine harmony between individuals and clarifies issues for the benefit of the members and the organization (Schermerhorn et al., 2000).

On the negative side, conflict works to the disadvantage of individuals, groups or organizations. For example, findings indicated that intrapersonal conflict had a direct negative impact on intragroup conflict and work satisfaction. Intragroup conflict had direct negative effects on work satisfaction and team performance effectiveness (Cox, 2003). Furthermore, destructive conflict diverts energies, hurts group cohesion, promotes interpersonal hostilities, and overall creates a negative organizational climate for workers. It can also decrease work productivity and job satisfaction and contribute to absenteeism and job turnover (Schermerhorn et al., 2000).

The literature on conflict management indicates that authors merely concentrated on how the conflict is managed. People react to and cope with conflict in a variety of ways. Morrison (1998), for instance suggests that people react to a potential conflict in one of four main ways: *fight* (dealing with it aggressively); *flight* (being unassertive and fleeing the situation); *freeze* (doing nothing and, therefore, remaining passive); *being assertive* (talking through the situation). Rahim and Magner (1995) suggest that people may select from five styles in handling conflicts: avoiding (the person, issue, the situation), accommodating (giving in),

compromising (both parties make adjustments), competing (forcing to satisfy one's desires) and collaborating (problem solving). SkjØrshammer (2001) revealed that when in conflict, professionals use three major behavioral approaches to handling the situation: avoidance, forcing, and negotiation/compromise, usually in that order.

Gobeli, Koenig and Bechinger (1998) classify the conflict management approaches as withdrawal/avoidance, imposing/forcing, compromising/give and take, smoothing/harmonizing, and confrontation/problem solving. They also observed the conflict management approaches in terms of their effectiveness. Results revealed that both confronting and give and take approaches have beneficial effects on the success of the organization. Smoothing, withdrawal, and forcing all have negative effect. Generally, the results suggest that management should less frequently make use of the disfunctional management styles-withdrawal, smoothing, and forcing and promote more frequent use of functional management styles- give and take and problem solving.

De Dreu, Evers, Beersma, Kluwer, & Nauta's (2001) argue that conflict management is a function of high and low concern for self, combined with high and low concern for others. High concern for self and low concern for others results in a preference for *forcing*, focused on imposing one's will on others. Forcing involves threats and bluffs, persuasive arguments and positional commitment. Managing conflict in this way can sometimes be an alternative conflict strategy. It involves the use of formal or informal positional power (SkjØrshammer, 2001). Low concern for self and high concern for others results in preference for *yielding*, which is oriented towards accepting and incorporating others' will. It involves unilateral concessions, unconditional promises and offering help.

Low concern for self and others results in a preference for *avoiding* which involves reducing the importance of the issues and attempts to suppress thinking about the issues. Avoiding conflict simply pretends that the conflict does not really exist and hopes that it will go away (Schermerhorn et al., 2000). It means not to talk about an issue publicly, attempt to smooth over conflicts and minimize discussions about the issues in dispute (Chen & Tjosvold, 2002; SkjØrshammer, 2001).

High concern for self and others produces a preference for *problem solving* which is oriented towards an agreement that satisfies both own and others' aspirations as much as possible. The problem solving approach was found to be the most effective solution in handling conflict. In this pattern, a recognition of disagreement exists, and then engaging in

collaborative problem-solving to reach a solution to which the parties are committed (Gobeli et al., 1998) takes place. Here the problems are confronted and solved by means of a collaborative effort from all concerned (Cheung & Chuah, 1999).

Intermediate concern for self, paired to intermediate concern for others results in a preference for *compromising*. Compromising conflict management suggests the determination of acceptable solutions in which conflicting parties have some degree of satisfaction with a 'give and take' attitude (Cheung & Chuah, 1999). In this strategy parties try to solve the conflict cooperatively (Tjosvold et al., 2001), and communicate in ways in which they can then use the conflict to promote mutual goals and resolve it for mutual benefit (Chen & Tjosvold, 2002). In this study we have depended on De Dreu et al. (2001) conflict management approaches which are commonly used in the literature.

The Relationship Between Organizational Commitment and Conflict Management

The literature shows that not only a well managed organizational commitment but also an effective conflict management strategy is important for the well being of an organization. A study by Thomas, Bliese, and Jex (2005) resulted in findings that showed that interpersonal conflict within the organization was related negatively to both affective and continuance commitment. London and Howat (1978) investigated the relationships between the use of conflict resolutions and three measures of employee commitment. They found that confronting techniques in conflict was positively related to subordinates' organizational commitment. Supervisors' professional and organizational commitment were negatively related to their use of forcing. Commitment to the community was negatively related to withdrawing for the total sample. Tjosvold et al. (2001) positively associated a peaceful conflict management resolution and group oriented behaviors. They pointed out that when parties discussed their opposing views openly and cooperatively they not only reach their goals but strengthen their relationship and commitment to the organization. In their study, strong cooperative goals were found to be critical for a high quality relationship, and this relationship led the employee to being a good organizational citizen. In general terms, findings by Tjosvold et al. (2001) were supported by Wong and Tjosvold (2002). These authors also found that commitment induces cooperative conflict management strategies rather than competitive methods or avoidance and

that cooperative conflict strategies result in relationships which satisfy the parties concerned. Additionally, one previous research exercise conducted by Coote, Forrest, and Tam (2003) indicates that commitment associates with a willingness to cooperate, a propensity to leave, acquiescence and compliance. They suggest that seeking to avoid conflict and lessen the exchange of harsh words would help managers to build commitment and trust in the organization. Consistent with other studies Ohbuchi, Suzuki and Hayashi (2001), Tjosvold et al. (2001), and Wong and Tjosvold (2002) argued that high commitment forms a strong bond among members of the staff, motivating them to resolve conflict and cooperate rather than avoid or seek their own interests at the cost of the others.

From the commitment and conflict points of view, we observed that educational organizations are extremely vulnerable to conflict due to the stresses of the environment, the nature of the work and diversity of interactions, members and tasks. Constructive and creative conflict management is essential to accomplish the educational, administrative and organizational goals of the schools. Administrators and teachers shoulder the highest responsibility in this process. That is why they must be more sensitive in their relations with others, solve problems peacefully and strengthen the commitment throughout the school system (Balay, 2006).

Conflict Management, Organizational Commitment and Selected Demographic Variables

A variety of demographic variables that describe the worker's personalities have been reported to be associated with organizational commitment. Age and gender have been discussed most frequently in relation to organizational commitment (Blau & Lunz, 1998; Hrebiniak & Alutto, 1972; Luthans, Baack, & Taylor, 1987; Morris & Sherman, 1981). These two variables, however, can also affect the conflict management behaviors of employees (İpek, 2003; Skoe, Cumberland, Eisenberg, Hansen, & Perry, 2002).

Age as the one important antecedent of commitment, is broadly discussed in the literature. Luthans, Baack and Taylor (1987), for instance revealed that older workers tend to be more committed to their organizations. Consistent with this result, Morris and Sherman (1981) found that older employees had higher levels of organizational commitment. In their empirical research Blau and Lunz (1998) also found that younger medical technologists had higher intent to leave their profession. Hrebiniak and Alutto (1972) argued that increases in age, implying the accumulation of valued resources in the

employment system and lessened the attractiveness of older workers to other organizations. He concluded that regardless of occupation, younger employees who have not invested a great deal in their careers are not as committed to their organizations as older respondents whose careers are fully developed. Many researchers (e.g., Sheldon, 1971; Shore, Barksdale, & Shore, 1995) have suggested that age should be more highly related to continuance or calculative commitment. This relationship is specifically attributed to limited job alternatives and the accumulation of beneficial sources or greater sunk costs in later years. On the contrary, Mathieu and Zajac (1990) and Meyer and Allen (1984) have suggested that age was more strongly associated with affective commitment than with continuance or calculative commitment. They argued that for a variety of reasons, including greater satisfaction with their jobs and having received better positions cognitively justified their remaining in an organization.

Moreover, there is some indication that gender characteristics of employees have some effect on organizational commitment. Hrebiniak and Alutto (1972), for example found that female employees exhibit less of a propensity to change their organizations than their male counterparts. Empirical research results by Blau and Lunz (1998) supported this view. These authors found that men showed a stronger intent to leave their organizations. The full meta-analysis in the study of Mathieu and Zajac (1990) indicated that women tend to be more committed than men. In a supporting way Grusky (1966) suggested that women tend to be more committed than men because they had to overcome more barriers to gain membership.

Age and gender as the two important antecedents of commitment, are commonly discussed in the literature on conflict management. For example, (İpek, 2003) proposed that the higher level of employee' age results in a lower level of conflict. However, a study by Cox (2003) revealed that age was only slightly correlated with intrapersonal conflict, intragroup conflict and intergroup conflict. On the other hand, several writers (e.g., Skoe et al., 2002) concentrated on the different personal orientations of men and women. They argued that women grow up more oriented to forming connections and establishing harmony with others, whereas men come to focus more on the aggressive behaviors required to make a living in a competitive economic environment.

Organizational Commitment and Conflict Management Skills of Teachers

Interest in teachers' organizational commitment is

growing, but research on this is still underdeveloped as compared with that on commitment in other professions. A literature review shows that most of the studies merely focused on the kinds of teachers' commitments such as teachers' commitment to instruction and student learning. In this context Weber (1997) reveals four kinds of commitments that teachers can show to the school itself: Being willing to exert effort on behalf of the school, having the desire to continue working in the school, accepting and sharing the school's major instructional values and goal, and showing a strong sense of efficiency to provide learning for students. Moreover, Firestone and Pennell (1993) suggest that teachers may be committed to teaching, their school or their students, and that their patterns of behavior vary depending upon which commitments are stressed. A commitment to students, for example may contribute to a warm, supportive climate that is likely to reduce the dropout rate but may not contribute much to academic achievement, while a commitment to teaching may have the opposite effect. According to Farber (1984), low teacher commitment reduces student achievement. Burnt-out teachers are less sympathetic towards students, have a lower tolerance for frustration in the classroom, feel more anxious and exhausted and tend to develop fewer plans to improve the academic quality of their instruction. In support of these findings a close relationship was found between teacher commitment and student achievement. Kushman (1992), for example argues that teachers' use of affective instructional behaviors in the classroom leads to increased student commitment to school, which in turn leads to increased student achievement. The argument that students influence teacher commitment was also supported by Farber's (1984) study which teachers who work with more affluent students are generally more committed than others.

Numerous studies have investigated conflict management in educational organizations, some of which have been devoted to the conflicts between administrators and teachers. For instance, Karip (2000) suggests that 68 per cent of teachers stated that the conflict they experience with administrators in relation to school affairs negatively affects their performance and motivation. Monchak (1994) finds that primary school administrators are more likely to use the strategy of compromise than teachers. These results are supported by Balay (2006). His study indicated that administrators are more likely to avoid conflicts and use compromising strategies than teachers. He also indicated that both administrators and teachers at private primary schools are more likely to use compromising, avoiding, and competing behaviors than their colleagues at public schools.

Addressing Cross- Cultural Differences

The influence of cross-cultural differences needs to be addressed in the discussion of organizational commitment and conflict management. Within each culture, factors such as age, gender, social class and race seem to be important. Wiener (1982) stressed the importance of culture in determining loyalty or commitment among Japanese employees. He proposed that the Japanese employment system serve as a model of employer-employee relationships based on loyalty and duty. In this system a strong reciprocal set of obligations exist between the organization and the employee. Among American employees, loyalty was found to relate positively to age. A study by Cohen (1999) also compared both the commitment of American and Japanese employees. He concluded that Americans expressed higher levels of organizational commitment yet the Japanese had lower rates of absenteeism, turnover and tardiness. Alvi and Ahmed's (1987) study which was conducted in a less affluent society (Pakistan) showed different results. In contrast to most previous studies involving industrialized societies, the degree of female commitment in Pakistan appears to be much higher than that of male workers and age seems inversely related with commitment.

The influence of cross-cultural differences (e.g., individualism, uncertainty avoidance, power distance, masculinity and long-term orientation) which were identified by Hofstete (1994) came to be an increased interest in the conflict management studies. From the collectivist/tight (e.g., Japan, China) and individualistic/loose (e.g., United States, United Kingdom) cultures point of view, it was reported that in a collectivist culture, individuals view themselves as part of a group rather than as distinct persons and give priority to their collective goals. In contrast, the individualistic culture's emphasis on individual accomplishments and interests, motivate individuals to avoid conflicts and pursue self-interest rather than the collective good (Song, Xie, & Dyer, 2000). Studies showed that Chinese participants engage in open minded productive discussion of opposing views when they have cooperative goals (Tjosvold et al., 2001). These approaches were supported by Ohbuchi et al. (2001). They suggested that Japanese employees felt that justice was achieved when they saw that conflicts were resolved in the group-oriented manner, relatively independent of personal interests. Additionally, Ohbuchi and Takahashi (1994) proposed that in dealing with interpersonal conflict, the Chinese and Japanese appear to use avoiding styles of conflict management more than Americans do.

In the light of the findings above, it seems that a close connection exists between age and the gender characteristics of employees and their organizational commitment and conflict management behaviors. The multidimensional aspects and the social-cultural basis of educational organizations are also expected to influence the teachers' well being deeply. In relation to this, teachers' attitudes and behaviors toward their schools directly influence the functioning of school management. Age and gender which seem to be significant antecedents of organizational commitment and conflict management need to be studied to address some implications for teachers as well as for school administrators.

Moreover, there is a dearth of research on the link between distinct levels of organizational commitment and conflict management strategies. Therefore, this study serves to test the proposition that different levels of organizational commitment associate with different conflict management strategies. In order to accomplish the major objectives of this study, we regressed *internalization, identification, and compliance* levels of organizational commitment with *compromising, problem solving, forcing, yielding and avoiding* conflict approaches of primary school teachers.

There are two important incentives that led us to research this issue. One comes from a conceptual basis. The literature on organizational commitment and conflict management is extremely broad. Indeed, many writers from different social disciplines such as psychology, sociology, management and business have discussed these issues. Since there have been no studies in Turkey that investigate different levels of organizational commitment with different conflict management strategies and the possible effects of some personal variables at the primary school level, this study has been designed to serve this aim.

The second originates from a pragmatic basis. Although there are many reforms (e.g., the period of compulsory education at primary school level has been increased from five to eight years, a new, more sophisticated and student-centred curriculum was introduced at the primary school level to enhance the quality of education) in recent years to develop the educational system, the problems regarding the Turkish educational system are going to increase, rather than decrease. Many politicians, administrators, teachers and even parents complain that the educational system especially at the primary education level is far from functioning well and fails to accomplish the major goals of the system. Indeed, there are many reasons that we can talk about here. However, one of the reasons behind this worsening situation seems to be related to the organizational commitment and conflict

management behaviors of teachers in the system.

Taking into consideration the multiform and vulnerable aspects of the school system, we can not depend only on the minimum duties and the obligations of teachers in the system. In other words, to accomplish the major goals of the system, especially at the primary education level, teachers should highly commit to their schools and have highly developed abilities in managing conflict. Thus, this study was designed to associate the different levels of organizational commitment of teachers with their different conflict management strategies and evaluate the effect of age and gender characteristics of teachers on these components. Two demographic variables (gender and age) were included in this research. The main reason being that they seem to be important determinants of organizational commitment and conflict management of teachers. Complex human characteristics and the socialization effects of educational organizations are especially expected to influence teachers' attitudes. From this perspective, we assume that a change in age leads both men and women teachers to change and evaluate their organizational commitment and conflict management behaviors over the long term.

The results of this research can guide efforts aimed at strengthening the organizational commitment and conflict management skills of teachers. The findings can also have implications for educators and administrators in Turkey and other countries throughout the world in introducing and implementing new policies to develop teachers' organizational commitment and enhance peaceful conflict management resolutions in their school systems.

Research Questions

We were primarily interested in predicting teachers' conflict management strategies, based on their levels of organizational commitment. In this light, the following research problems were addressed:

RQ1: How do age and gender differences among the participants relate to differences in their levels of organizational commitment and choices of conflict management strategies?

RQ2: What are the relative weights of the different levels of organizational commitment in predicting conflict management strategies?

Method

Participants

The study was conducted among 21 primary schools, in Şanlıurfa, a city in the Northeastern Anatolia Region of Turkey, in the school year 2005-2006. Only schools with more than 40 staff teachers, located in the centre of the city comprised the population, from which only 21 were selected randomly. Teachers were selected by taking into account the average number of teachers working in these schools, in the period of the school year mentioned above. A letter including the purpose of this study, a request for permission to collect data, and copies of the questionnaire were sent to all the respondents in the schools. Teachers were asked to respond to the questions about their perceptions regarding organizational commitment and conflict management in their schools. Participation was voluntary in the study. In order to collect data for the present research, 840 questionnaires were sent to the schools. Some teachers could not be reached for several reasons and some others did not want to participate. Thus, out of the total questionnaires, only 600 could be conducted and 418 usable ones were returned. This represented a response rate of 69.6 per cent.

The respondents were relatively young and have a short length of employment tenure. The age of the respondents ranged from 20 to 62, with a mean age of 34.014 and a standard deviation of 8.067, and their length of employment tenure ranged from one to 21 years or over, with a mean of

Table 1
The Percentage and Frequency Values of Respondents' Demographic Variables

Variables	Groups	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	154	36.8
	Male	264	63.2
Age	20-30 age group	175	41.9
	31-40 age group	161	38.5
	41-50 age group	58	13.9
	51 or over age group	24	5.7
Tenure	1-5 tenure group	130	31.1
	6-10 tenure group	172	41.1
	11-15 tenure group	32	7.7
	16-20 tenure group	25	6
	21 or over tenure group	59	14.1
Total		418	100

10.282 and a standard deviation of 7.973. The frequency and percentage values of respondents' demographic variables were displayed in Table 1. As can be seen from Table 1, 264 (63.2 per cent) of the respondents were men, and 154 (36.8 per cent) women.

Instruments

We used the Organizational Commitment Scale (OCS) of Balay (2000) to assess the organizational commitment of teachers. This scale is commonly adopted and used for studies in educational organizations in Turkey.

The participating teachers were asked to reveal their opinions about their commitment to the schools on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1= never agree, 5= strongly agree). We used factor analysis to scrutinize the discriminant validity of OCS. A minimum factor loading of 0.30 (Büyüköztürk, 2002) was used as a guideline for considering an item to be part of a factor. Based upon this factor analysis, seven items were omitted because their factor loadings were under 0.30. A twenty-item measure of organizational commitment was constructed and used in the subsequent data analysis. Using principal component analysis with a varimax rotation, three clear factors emerged: Internalization, identification and compliance. A *sample item* for organizational commitment based on internalization is "I think my values and those of my school's are quite similar", for identification is "I am proud of being a member of this school", and for *compliance* is "I think it was a mistake to decide to work at this school".

Cronbach's alpha for internalization was .70, with 28.332 percent variance explained; for identification .89, with 20.428 percent variance explained and for compliance .92, with 11.507 variance explained. The total variance explained was computed as 60.267 percent.

We also used 'The Dutch Test for Conflict Handling' (DUTCH) by De Dreu et al. (2001) in the study, with the permission of the author. This is a flexible and valid instrument to assess conflict management strategies of teachers at schools. Teachers were asked to disclose their opinions about conflict management in the schools where they work on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1= not at all, to 5= very much). Factor analysis was used to determine the discriminant validity of scale. A minimum factor loading of 0.30 (Büyüköztürk, 2002) was used as a guideline for considering an item to be part of a factor. Based upon this factor analysis, two items were omitted because their factor loadings were under 0.30. An eighteen-item measure of conflict management was constructed and used in the

subsequent data analysis. Using principal component analysis with a varimax rotation, five clear factors emerged: Compromising, problem solving, forcing, yielding and avoiding. A sample item for compromising is “I emphasize that we have to find a compromise solution”, for problem solving; “I examine issues until I find a solution that really satisfies me and the other party”, for forcing; “I push my own point of view”, for yielding; “I give in to the wishes of the other party”, and for avoiding; “I avoid differences of opinions as much as possible”.

Cronbach’s alpha for compromising was .83, with a 16.662 percent variance explained; for problem solving .75, with 13.042 percent variance explained; for forcing .75, with 13.011 percent variance explained; for yielding .68, with 11.199 percent variance explained and for avoiding .60, with 8.125 percent variance explained. The total variance explained was computed as 62.038 percent.

Data Analysis

The analysis was conducted in two stages. First, using

the entire questionnaire sample (n = 418), we used a t-test, one-way ANOVA and Scheffe test to find out if participants differed in their levels of organizational commitment and conflict management strategies due to the demographic variables, gender and age. Second, we regressed organizational commitment levels on conflict management strategies. These two sets of subscales were tested for their contribution to R².

Results

The Relationship of Age and Gender to Organizational Commitment and Conflict Management

To determine the possible differences in the levels of organizational commitment and conflict management strategies of male and female teachers, a t-test and one-way ANOVA technique were performed. In addition, to calculate the source of significant intergroups differences, we used the Scheffe test in the study.

Table 2
T-Test Results on Differences in Levels of Organizational Commitments of Male and Female Teachers

Subscale	Gender	N	Mean	t	p
Internalization	Female	154	3,76	1.922	.056
	Male	264	3,93		
Identification	Female	154	3,14	1.791	.074
	Male	264	3,33		
Compliance	Female	154	1.46	2.639	.009
	Male	264	1.64		

Table 3
T-Test Results on Differences in Conflict Management Strategies of Male and Female Teachers

Subscale	Gender	N	Mean	t	p
Compromising	Female	154	4.00	.427	.660
	Male	264	4.04		
Problem solving	Female	154	4.04	.320	.749
	Male	264	4.02		
Forcing	Female	154	3.00	.758	.449
	Male	264	2.93		
Yielding	Female	154	2.99	.299	.765
	Male	264	3.01		
Avoiding	Female	154	2.22	2.037	.042
	Male	264	2.42		

As may be seen from Table 2, *t*-test analysis indicated that opinions of male and female teachers concerning their levels of organizational commitment to their schools were statistically differentiated with regard only to commitment characterized by compliance ($t = 2.639; p = 0.009$). The mean score of the male teachers is significantly higher ($M = 1.64$) than that of the female teachers ($M = 1.46$). These findings showed that the male teachers are more likely to experience commitment based on compliance than female teachers.

Table 3 indicated that the opinions of male and female teachers concerning their conflict management strategies were statistically differentiated with regard only to avoiding conflict management ($t = 2.037; p = 0.042$). The male teachers are more likely to use avoiding approaches than their female counterparts in managing conflict, based on the higher mean

($M = 2.42$) of the male teachers, compared to ($M = 2.22$) of the female teachers.

The ANOVA-test results in Table 4 indicated that the perceptions of teachers regarding their organizational commitment to their schools were statistically differentiated in internalization ($F(3,414) = 10.935, p = 0.000$), and identification ($F(3,414) = 17.804, p = 0.000$) levels. The Scheffe test results in general revealed that as teachers get older they are more likely to experience commitment based on internalization and commitment based on identification.

The ANOVA results presented in Table 5 indicate that the opinions of teachers concerning their conflict resolutions are statistically differentiated only in problem solving ($F(3,414) = 7.811, p = 0.000$). Moreover, the Scheffe test

Table 4

ANOVA-Test Results on Differences in Teachers' Levels of Organizational Commitment Based on Age

Subscale	Ages Mean				<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	Scheffe
	20-30	31-40	41-50	51 or older			
Internalization	3.6486	3.9267	4.1983	4.3167	10.935	.000	1-2 1-3 1-4
Identification	2.9314	3.3106	3.8592	3.9722	17.804	.000	1-2 1-3 1-4 2-3 2-4
Compliance	1.5657	1.5978	1.5819	1.5625	.056	.982	-

1=20-30 age group; 2=31-40 age group; 3=41-50 age group; 4=51 or older age group

Table 5

ANOVA-Test Results on Differences in Teachers' Conflict Management Strategies Based on Age

Subscale	Ages Mean				<i>F</i>	Sig.	Scheffe
	20-30	31-40	41-50	51 or older			
Compromising	3.9686	4.0606	4.0690	4.1979	.861	.462	-
Problem solving	3.9457	3.9643	4.3276	4.4167	7.811	.000	1-3 1-4 2-3 2-4
Forcing	3.0471	2.8960	2.9353	2.8542	.923	.429	-
Yielding	3.0114	3.0109	2.9483	3.0417	.145	.933	-
Avoiding	2.1886	2.4814	2.5517	2.1458	3.721	.012	-

1= 20-30 age group; 2= 31-40 age group; 3= 41-50 age group; 4= 51 or older age group

results generally indicated that as teachers get older they are more likely to use problem solving approaches.

Predicting Conflict Management From Organizational Commitment

A multiple linear regression analysis was employed to pursue the major objective of this study, which is to assess the relationships between different levels of commitment and conflict management strategies. Results are reported in Table 6

R = Shows the relationship among different levels of organizational commitment and conflict management strategies.

*R*² = Shows the amount of variance explained in conflict management strategies by different levels of organizational commitment.

B = Unstandardized regression coefficients.

β = Standardized regression coefficients.

Table 6 indicates that internalization emerges as the only significant predictor of compromising conflict management (*β*

= .296, *p*<.001) and the participants’ use of the problem solving strategy for conflict management (*β* = .450, *p* <.001). However, the findings indicate that the predictive power of the models are relatively weak, because the independent variables can account for only a small proportion of the variance in compromising conflict management (*R* = .284, *R*² =.081, *p* <.001) and problem solving (*R* = .421, *R*² =.177, *p* <.001).

Table 6 also shows that only commitment based on compliance has a significant relationship with forcing conflict behavior (*β* = .168, *p* <.01). However, the organizational commitment variables explain only .027 of the variance in forcing conflict management (*R* = .166, *R*² =.027, *p* <.01). This shows that the predictive power of the model is too weak.

Upon a further inspection of the Table 6, it can be seen that both identification (*β* = .194, *p* <.01), and compliance (*β* = .121, *p* <.05) have considerable influence on avoiding behavior. Of these two variables identification seems to be the more important predictor of avoiding behavior. However, the findings indicate that the predictive power of the model is too weak. The variables in the regression equation account for a small proportion of variance in avoiding use of conflict (*R*

Table 6
Regression Analysis Results

Conflict Management Strategies	Levels of Organizational Commitment	<i>B</i>	<i>β</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>p</i>
1.Compromising	Internalization	.285	.296	.000	.284	.000
	Identification	-.007	-.011	.870		
	Compliance	.01	.017	.736		
2.Problem solving	Internalization	.383	.450	.000	.421	.000
	Identification	-.01	-.028	.641		
	Compliance	.03	.040	.404		
3.Forcing	Internalization	.03	.031	.634	.166	.009
	Identification	.08	.101	.129		
	Compliance	.204	.168	.002		
4. Yielding	Internalization	.08	.100	.125	.097	.269
	Identification	-.01	-.026	.703		
	Compliance	-.02	-.028	.592		
5.Avoiding	Internalization	-.142	-.116	.074	.165	.009
	Identification	.183	.194	.004		
	Compliance	.160	.121	.022		
1.Compromising	<i>R</i> ² =.081			<i>F</i> (3,414) = 12.114		
2.Problem solving	<i>R</i> ² =.177			<i>F</i> (3,414) = 29.762		
3.Forcing	<i>R</i> ² =.027			<i>F</i> (3,414) = 3.892		
4.Yielding	<i>R</i> ² =.009			<i>F</i> (3,414) = 1.315		
5.Avoiding	<i>R</i> ² =.027			<i>F</i> (3,414) = 3.874		

= .165, $R^2 = .027$, $p < .01$). Finally, as may be seen, in this study none of the levels of organizational commitment has a significant relationship with yielding conflict behavior ($p > .05$).

Discussion

The primary purpose of the present research is to assess the relative relationship between teachers' organizational commitment and conflict management strategies. Our analysis in this study has incorporated two underlying goals and several implications.

The Theoretical Implications For Research

The first goal has been to examine the possible relationships between age and gender differences of teachers and their levels of organizational commitment and conflict management strategies. Results pointed out that male teachers are more likely to experience commitment based on compliance than female teachers. This result contrasts with some previous studies. Balay (2000), for example found that male teachers are more likely to experience commitment based on identification and on internalization than their female counterparts. On the other hand, Grusky (1966) and Mathieu and Zajac (1990) have proposed that women would become more committed to their organizations because they had to overcome more barriers than men to gain membership. In this context, the lower level of female teachers' organizational commitment than men in terms of their compliance level, can be interpreted as their lower level of continuance commitment and the higher level of affective commitment to their schools.

In addition, our study pointed out that male teachers are more likely to avoid conflicts than their female colleagues in their conflict resolutions. From the concern for self and concern for others point of view, this result contradicts previous studies. Several authors (Skoe et al., 2002), for instance, proposed that women grow up more oriented to creating connections and establishing harmony with others, whereas men come to focus more on the aggressive behaviors required to make a living in a competitive economic environment. They suggested that compared to men, women view moral conflicts as more important generally. This is consistent with the notion that women are more concerned with interpersonal issues than men.

The higher observed score of men in commitment based on compliance and avoiding conflict management than

women are meaningful results. As we have noted previously, compliance which is an instrumental-calculative form of commitment, depends on an involvement to obtain specific extrinsic rewards (Kelman, 1958; O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986). According to the instrumental viewpoint, people are primarily concerned with the more material or tangible resources received from the relationship (Brockner, Tyler, & Schneider, 1992). Thus, those who experience commitment based on compliance remain in their organization not because they want to or they ought to, but because they need to do so (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Becker et al., 1996). Consequently such tendencies of teachers may lead them to avoid conflicts to be able to receive more instrumental benefits from their schools.

This study also indicated that as teachers get older they are more likely to experience commitment based on internalization and identification than those who are younger. These results are consistent with previous studies which revealed that age is positively correlated with commitment. Mathieu and Zajac (1990), for example, revealed that the higher the age of an employee, the higher the level of commitment to their organizations. Luthans, Baack, and Taylor (1987) revealed that in particular, older workers tend to be more committed to their workplaces. In a few studies, age has been found to predict psychological commitment. Even as a variable, it is conceptually more likely to be related to exchange commitment than to psychological commitment because it implies few viable alternatives outside the employing organization (Gaertner & Nollen, 1989). In the present study, our findings clearly indicate that teachers who get older in their schools, in the long run tend to experience more psychological attachment, more specifically internalization and identification levels of commitment.

For the first goal of the study we also found out that as teachers get older they are more likely to use problem solving conflict management strategies than those who are younger. This result is consistent with the literature. Those who get older tend to be more committed to their organizations (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Luthans et al., 1987), dispose more prosocial behaviors (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986), and experience lower levels of conflict (Ipek, 2003). Furthermore, Tjosvold et al. (2001) pointed out that when parties discussed their opposing views openly and cooperatively, they not only reach their goals but also strengthen their relationship and their commitment to the organization. Wong and Tjosvold (2002) found that commitment induces cooperative conflict management rather than competition or avoidance and that cooperative conflict results in relationships satisfying to both parties. Song et al. (2000) has argued that high commitment

forms a strong tie among members of the staff, motivating them to resolve conflict and to cooperate rather than avoid or seek their own interest at the expense of others. In the light of these findings, it can be argued that teachers who get older in their schools, in the long term experience a higher level of commitment and tend to use problem solving more than other strategies in their schools.

The second goal of this research has been to associate different levels of organizational commitment and conflict management strategies. Our study has produced results that suggest both identification and internalization are significant determinants of the use of compromising and problem-solving conflict management strategies. The reason for this is that those who identified with, and internalized the goals and the values of their organizations can display higher levels of concern for relationships which includes the use of compromising and problem-solving rather than forcing or avoiding strategies. These findings are justified and supported by previous studies. O'Reilly and Chatman (1986), for instance postulated that commitment rooted in identification and internalization will be related to prosocial behaviors whereas compliance-based commitment will not be. As commitment based on identification and internalization refers to employees' emotional attachment to, and their feelings of obligation to remain with the organization, commitment based on compliance reflects recognition of costs associated with leaving the organization. Thus, from the commitment point of view, forcing conflict management correlates positively with compliance. This finding showed that both managing conflict by force and commitment based on compliance are treated by external but not internal incentives. That is, not only the forcing conflict approach, but also commitment based on compliance involves the use of control, formal and informal positional power (Handy, 1985; SkjØrshammer, 2001). In compliance, an employee obeys orders to accomplish his or her individual goals without taking into account the expectations of others (Brockner et al., 1992; O'Reilly & Chatman 1986). Similarly, forcing is the exerting of one's point of view at the expense of another and often leads to a win-lose situation (Cheung & Chuah, 1999). Furthermore, it can be generalized that those who tend to manage conflict by force (Morrison, 1988), and depend on commitment based on compliance (Wiener, 1982), share lower degrees of concern for relationships and high levels of concern for results which lead to fighting strategies. This means that the more specialized the behavioral act is, the greater will be the weight of instrumental motivation and forcing. The less specialized the act (i.e., accepting organizational goals and values on an

affective or normative basis), the greater the importance of commitment. From that point of view, although it is at weak level, the positive association between commitment based on compliance and forcing conflict management seems to be consistent with findings in the literature.

Implications For Different Stakeholders Within The Educational System

Our current research has important implications for the different stakeholders within the educational system (e.g., top managers, educational administrators and teachers). In this study, except for internalization, none of the dimensions of organizational commitment showed any relationship with compromising conflict management strategies. The significant relationship between internalization and the use of compromising conflict management can lead school administrators to enhance the organizational commitment of teachers in their schools to achieve a compromising conflict management approach. Prior research exercises (Song et al., 2000; Wong & Tjosvold, 2002) have concluded that the link between commitment, competitive and avoidant forms of conflict management is negative. Commitment, which was conceptualized as identification or internalization of the goals and the values of an organization by Kelman (1958) O'Reilly and Chatman (1986) and Sheldon (1971) induces cooperative conflict management rather than competitive or avoidance strategies.

In addition, those who share the goals and the values of their organizations, generally perceive higher level of congruencies or compatibilities Cox (2003). Thus, the more congruency or fitness between the organization and employees' desires, the more friendly-prosocial behaviors and the more incentives for cooperation are likely.

Our research also has addressed some other implications for educational administrators and top managers to introduce a collaborative/participative management system in their schools. This study openly demonstrated that commitment based on internalization enables teachers to apply more problem solving conflict management strategies. This result can also lead school administrators to strengthen the organizational commitment of teachers to achieve problem solving conflict management in their schools. Collaboration which is the same as problem solving (see Rahim & Magner's (1995) definition) is expected to reduce self-centered motivation (commitment based on compliance and forcing conflict management), and enhance the motivation to develop relations with others and share the goals and the values of the

organization (commitment based on identification or internalization). In support of this idea, Firestone and Pennell (1993) suggest that collaboration which develops relations with others can increase teachers' commitment to their schools. They suggest that through collaborative practices and the exercise of influence, teachers will become more committed to specific decisions in the short run, and to the school in the long run.

Collaboration or problem solving can help overcome uncertainties about the ends and means of teaching by providing opportunities to identify common goals and learn useful methods. One study by Nygaard and Dahlstrom (2002) addressed the relationship between shared goals and values of team members in conjunction with participative/collaborative decision making. They argued that the primary task of managers is to empower employees and foster their commitment to the organization. Huffstutter, Lindelow, Scott, Smith, and Watters (1997) reported that participation in decision making provides a greater opportunity for the expression of existing disputes. This may prevent minor irritations from developing into major incidents. An organizational culture based on an open dialogue, collaboration and participation is more essential for those working in schools. Participation or peaceful problem solving strengthens the desire to be a member of the school. In short, more participative/collaborative dispositions of teachers and compromising use of conflict strategies are expected to induce more commitment based on identification or internalization and less commitment based on compliance in schools. Thus, our current study provides valuable results since it concluded that the link between compromising and problem solving use of conflict and commitment strategies based on internalization is largely proven.

Our research has provided valuable results since it confirmed that not the commitment based on identification or internalization, but commitment based on compliance is the only and the significant predictor of forcing conflict management. As we noted previously, compliance refers to the utilitarian aspect of commitment. Indeed, teachers in their schools may expect to reach the utilities or remove the possibility of losing the benefits in the future. Those teachers are more likely to think and behave from a self-centered motivation, and such inclination sometimes leads them to use forcing as the primary conflict management strategy in their workplaces. Implications for this point can lead school administrators to lessen continuance or commitment based on compliance to reduce the negative effects of low concern for others and the use of forcing conflict approaches in their schools.

One more important implication in this study is that although both commitment based on identification and on compliance were found to be the significant predictor of avoiding conflict management, avoiding conflict resolution was more strongly linked to identification than compliance. This result may lead school administrators to introduce new policies for the teachers who are young, perceive a higher level of calculative motivation or commitment based on compliance in their early length of service. Thus, teachers who act with an instrumental-calculative motivation in the early years, tend to receive the rewards or gains of being a member of the school relatively in the middle and the long run period of their time at the school. This in turn leads them to be satisfied with being a citizen of the school, show more friendly behaviours and seek to avoid conflict to lessen the exchange of harsh words that are all essential in helping to build a sense of commitment based on identification in the school.

The final implication of our research is that it confirmed the fact that teachers manage their conflict approaches with their commitment to their schools on a multidimensional basis. We hope that these results encourage researchers and practitioners to reinvestigate and retest relationships between organizational commitment and conflict management in detail. In the past, Wong and Tjosvold (2002) for instance, have found a positive and significant association between compromise approaches to conflict and overall commitment to the organization. However, more specifically, we found a positive and significant correlation only between the compromise approach to conflict and commitment based on internalization. In short, our results suggest that the propensity to become committed to a specific level of organizational commitment would be a more valid predictor of different modes of conflict management.

In terms of being complementary to previous studies, in this research we focused on distinct levels of organizational commitment and conflict handling strategies of teachers in public primary schools. The implications of this study can lead top managers and practitioners to build commitment and enhance the conflict management skills of teachers for a well-functioning school management environment. It may also enable the teachers to understand the dynamic of commitment and become more competent in their conflict management resolutions for a healthy education system.

Implications For Cross-Cultural Settings

The implications drawn from this study must be viewed in the light of the limitations inherent to the research. Our

study was conducted in Sanliurfa, a city which is located in the Southeastern Anatolia Region of Turkey. Indeed, the cultural basis and their effects on individuals' or social groups' behaviors may differ from place to place. As pointed out by Loosemore and Al Muslmani (1999), Kunaviktikul et al. (2000), Tjosvold et al. (2001), Song et al. (2000), Wiener (1982), Alvi and Ahmed (1987), and Cohen (1999) culture and socialization process are directly related to the conflict handling behaviours and the commitment of individuals. Furthermore, Tinsley and Brett (2001) report that culture is the unique character of a social group. It is reflected in the cognitive structures of individuals such as members' norms and values and in the legal, social, and economic structures of the institutions. More specifically, they report that because norms are the elements of culture, norms for conflict management should vary consistently with other characteristics of a culture. In this respect, results in this study need to be interpreted cautiously by considering the dynamic nature of culture.

Limitations and Future Research

The major objectives of this study were to examine the link between different components of commitment and modes of conflict management. Admittedly, all of our conflict management and commitment scales were reliably measured. Nevertheless, we are aware of the fact that our results are unlikely to be universal. The primary reason is because this study was conducted in the regional public schools. Although participation from different schools was at a high rate, most of the subjects were relatively young women and men.

Organizational commitment and conflict management seem to be associated with some other concepts such as, stress (Huffstutter et al., 1997; Kushman, 1992), organizational culture (Bennett, 1999; Ipek, 1999), socialization (Buchanan, 1974; Wiener, 1982), and job satisfaction (Kunaviktikul et al., 2000). Our research suggests that further studies need to be conducted to examine such diverse factors which effect the organizational commitment and conflict handling behaviours of teachers in schools from different cross-cultural perspectives.

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