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## **Comparison of Conflict Management Strategies of Physical Education Office Managers Based on some Demographic Characteristics**

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of study was comparison of conflict management strategies of physical education office managers based on their some demographic characteristics. All of managers of physical education office of Mazandaran (n = 15) and Guilan (n = 16) province and their assistant [(n = 15) and (n =16) respectively] response to Putnam and Wilson's "organizational communication conflict instrument (OCCI)". Analysis showed that Mazandaran's and Guilan's managers and their assistant hadn't differences together in conflict management strategies, and using cooperation strategy significantly as first preference, and using compromise, dominance, accommodation, and avoidance strategies as second preference in conflicts resolution; and demographic variables (age, work duration, interaction of age and work duration, study proof, study branch, interaction of study proof and study branch) hadn't effect on conflict management strategies preferences. In conclusion, however there were no significant difference between conflict management strategies preference of Mazandaran's and Guilan's managers and their assistant; but, it is important that the preference of both Mazandaran's and Guilan's managers is cooperation suggesting that the managers use good decision making and appropriate styles for resolution of employees' problems in offices.

**Keyword:** Conflict, Conflict Management, Collaboration.

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## Introduction

One of the prevailing characteristics of the organizations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is the continuous variations. The unstable economic statuses, variable technologies, global competitions, workforce diversity, and new organizational structures are just some of the factors contributing to this age of uncertainty. Nowadays, the manpower is mentioned as the main asset of organizations and the competitive privilege. The presence of cooperation and empathy among these precious resources is of the most important factors for success in every organization (1). Management is one of the most significant human affairs. The groups have been formed ever since people couldn't achieve their goals on their own. Management has always been essential so that different people's efforts have been coordinated (2). Organizational activities involve people interacting. These interactions can make conflict. The conflict has many faces so that it could be a constant challenge for the managers who are responsible for achieving the organizational goals (3). The conflict is inevitable in the organization and is not necessarily vital for it. The conflict could enhance creativity and innovation and propagate change, or it may waste the organization's energy and resources. To manage the conflict correctly, managers should know it as perennial force and direct it to make the organization dynamic with proper and constructive treatment (4). The word "Conflict" is of concepts having different meanings. In the Persian dictionary, conflict means to disrupt each other or to have differences. The conflict is defined as a kind of behavior among organizational groups (5). Mary Parker Fault doesn't look at the conflict as a harmful and bad phenomenon; however, she states that the present conflict can be used to advance the organizational goals through appropriate human relations. On the contrary, Elton Mayo considers the conflict as a social disorder (6). Stephan Robbins defines the conflict in this way, "The conflict is a factor done on purpose, even obviously. In this process, the individual makes a kind of conscious effort in order to neutralize the other individual efforts through obstructing his way, so the individual will become desperate on the way of achieving his goals, or makes benefits (5)". Thomson considers every behavior shown by the members of an organization to oppose the other members. Robbins believes that there is a plethora of factors which make conflict in the organization. The individual differences in goals, expectations, values, practical trends, and the way to deal with a situation are inevitable. When these differences are gathered in the workplace, the possibility of emerging conflict will grow (3). Conflict management is a kind of management which can

run the organization the best way in the presence of conflict. Most of the managers have dealt with conflict in the work process and experienced it. Every manager acts in a special way dealing with conflict. One manager remains calm, another one overreacts, and yet another one takes a peaceful action to handle the conflict (7). Conflict management is the planning process to avoid conflict in a place where it may occur along with organizing the emerged conflict (5). Conflict management bears the same and sometimes more importance than planning, organizing, communications, motivation, and decision making (3).

Many theories have been stated regarding conflict and its management in the organizations. The traditional view of conflict as the first theory, known as the unity theory, states that the conflict is a negative and bad phenomenon which should be avoided. However, the human relations view of conflict as the second theory considers the conflict a natural matter. The latest theory called the interaction view of conflict believes that not only can the conflict create a positive power in the organization, but also is a necessity for the organizational activities (3). Needless to say, it is not the existence of conflict that causes disturbance in the organizational relations, but the inefficient conflict management creates derangement and undesired results. The conflict at a rational level is a natural and acceptable aspect in every field, and it will be quite worthwhile if the conflict management is done correctly (4).

Therefore, the ability to direct and control the conflict phenomenon in the organizations is of the most important skills required by today's managers (8). Fisher states that the management skill in dealing with conflict is a decisive factor in efficiency and success of the organization (9). Cetin expresses that should the conflict be very well understood and directed, it can be used as a factor to grow and develop the organization (10). The Conflict is an inevitable fact in organizational life. The conflict governs the interpersonal relations potentially, and this potential force is either meant for organization's health, growth, and development or a big obstacle in front of growth and development (10). The conflict is like a coin which has two negative and positive sides, and the way of dealing with it governs its efficiency for the organization. Hence, the ability to manage and control this phenomenon in the organizations is of the most important skills managers need today (11). If the conflict is used on personal and revengeful purpose, it will be hazardous and non-functional; however, if it is exploited to create talents for organizational purposes, it will be useful and functional (8). The conflict has a four-stage

process; a: Potential disagreement, which occurs with conflict factors and circumstances including communicative factors (disturbance is communicative channels), structural factors (lack of coordination between organizational units regarding purposes, decision makings, performance measures, and so on), and personal factors (differences in personal traits and people's value systems); b: Understanding and personalizing the conflict, which turns to actual from potential when failure starts and people with different understandings become aware of disagreements; c: Behavior, which is the appearance stage of conflict and is shown by the action of one or both sides, in other words, it is the advent stage of countermeasure behaviors toward the conflict like domination, avoidance, compromise, accommodation, and collaboration; d: Result, which is the consequence of mutual effects of publicly conflictive behaviors and the behaviors to deal with conflict, either positively or negatively (12). The conflict management styles are defined as special behavioral patterns which are shown by the managers at the time of facing conflict (11). Management thinkers and scholars have suggested various approaches to resolve conflict (5). The first people who classified conflict management approaches into five styles were Blake and Mouton (1964), but it was later redefined by Thomas (13).

Blake and Mouton mentioned five styles for conflict management, including: a) Domination, b) Accommodation, c) Avoidance, d) Compromise, and e) Collaboration (13). Domination is the style of applying method of dictatorship and authoritarian style to control the conflict, in a way that one party has a strong desire to achieve the goals and wanted requirements without considering the other party's requirements and desires. The manager benefiting this style is ready to apply the authority, notifications, sever disciplinary regulations, and punitive measures to resolve the aroused conflict (7). Accommodation is exactly the counterpart of domination. The manager who applies this style is ready to sacrifice his own profits to maintain peace and the friendly atmosphere. The manager of accommodation style uses the irenic methods emphasizing on the positive aspects and overlooking or covering the negative aspects to suppress the conflict, an approach which helps forgetting the main problem (7). Avoidance or withdrawal is the style applied by the managers who easily overlook the conflict and avoid it in different ways. Postponing trouble-making affairs, applying the impartial approach, and avoiding argument with the opposing party are instances of methods used by these managers. Compromise or peace suggests a situation in which both parties involved in the conflict forget parts of their demand, in way that both of them feel satisfied, because each party benefits something. There is no

serious action in this style either, because the problem is simply overlooked. The nature of this style restricts the experiences and lessons and wastes innovations, which leaves the problem unsolved (7). Collaboration or the win-win strategy is the name of the mutual efforts by both involved parties in order to resolve the problem and find a solution which meets every expectation and preference on both sides in the conflict. This is achieved in a way that the reasons and origins of conflict is scrutinized, diagnosed, and eventually taken care of, which means the opinions and expectations of both sides are talked about and considered and the solution accepted by both sides are figured out, in a way that both parties win. Therefore, this style is the direct confrontation with the conflict, which is appropriate, effective, and profitable (7).

In this regard, there have been studies with different samples and societies having various purposes by Kantek and Gezer (2009), Lee (2008), Barbuto and Xu (2006), Tengilimoglu and Kisa (2005), Owens *et al.* (2005), Cetin and Hacifazlioglu (2004), Slabbert (2004), whose reported results are contrary to one another -14 ,10) (19). Tengilimoglu and Kisa (2005) had reported that people of high educations face less conflict in their specialized groups than people of low educations, also, the allocated facilities to different organizational classes and positions are important factors underlying conflict (19). Owens *et al.* (2005) had observed that girls, in comparison with boys, apply the compromise and avoidance styles more, and students of older ages, in comparison with those of younger ages, use the compromise style more (17). Cetin and Hacifazlioglu (2004) had considered individual differences such as experience, age, gender, and the organizational position effective on conflict management (10). Slabbert (2004) had stated that low-rank bank managers mostly used the avoidance style, and the middle-rank managers mostly use the competitive and collaboration style; however, they had little inclination to the collaboration style (18). Researches done in the field of conflict management in sports sections is limited and insufficient in country, as there have only a few reports by Eshraqi *et al.* (2009), Abasi *et al.* (2009), Amiri (2007), Osanlou *et al.* (2007), Razavi *et al.* (2005), and Kiani Mehr *et al.* (2012) which not only have been done in different areas, but also had reported paradoxical results which will be pointed out in the following discussion (22-20 ,11 ,8 ,6).

In sports organizations with different people having personal traits, needs, expectations, and understandings, the emergence of contradiction is inevitable. The quiddity of physical education and sport provides the groundwork for many of the contradictions and conflicts, therefore, many problems arise in the way of managers and

practitioners of sport and physical education while failure in this regard could be irreparable damage on the status of physical education and sport to the country (8). Researches on this matter are insufficient. There have also been few studies conducted in Iran. Hence, it seems essential to clarify the unbeknownst of this section with repeated studies. So, the goal of this research is to compare the styles of conflict management applied by the physical education office managers in the cities of two provinces of Mazandaran and Guilan, along with the staff, CEO's, and deputy directors of the general departments of physical educations in both mentioned provinces so that basics are produced to be eventually executed by all the sports organizational behavior specialists and managers of sports sections.

### Materials and Methods

In terms of method and time, the present survey study is an after-the-act and a transverse or sectional research, respectively. Documents and field study using questionnaires were used in this study.

Statistical population and sample: Population of this study included all managers and deputies of Physical Education offices of Mazandaran Province (30 people) and Guilan Province (32 people) that all were considered as the sample.

Research tool: Research tool was two questionnaire including the questionnaire of "personal information" developed by the authors which deals with questions about age, work experience, field of study, and degree and the questionnaire of Organizational Communication Conflict Instrument (OCCI) developed by Putnam & Wilson and mentioned in a book called "Organizational Behavior" written by Robbins (1991) which consists of 5 component including domination strategy, lenity strategy, avoidance strategy, compromise strategy, and collaboration strategy (3). In this 30-statement questionnaire, a Likert scale with five options ranging from never to always was used for answers. For statements related to domination (3, 10, 17, 18, 22, 26, 30), lenity (14, 15, 25, 27, 29), avoidance (2, 7, 12, 23, 24, 28), compromise (4, 6, 9, 13, 16, 20, 21), and collaboration (1, 5, 8, 11, 19), the first choice (never) scores 1, the second choice (rarely) scores 2, the third choice (sometimes) scores 3, the fourth choice (usually) scores 4, and the fifth choice (always) scores 5 for each statement. Finally, all obtained scores in each component for each individual were summed and divided by the number

of statements of that component (in order to adjust the score for all components) and managers conflict management strategy (from the view of the managers themselves) was determined. Validity of the instruments used (questionnaires) was confirmed by the comments of professors and experts. Cronbach's alpha was also used to determine the reliability of the questionnaires. Alpha was determined 0.672, 0.823, 0.741, 0.551, and 0.752 for domination strategy, lenity strategy, avoidance strategy, compromise strategy, and collaboration strategy, respectively.

Data analysis: To test the assumptions of normal distribution of data, homogeneity of variance, and sphericity (compound symmetry), respectively, One Sample K-S Test, Leven Test, and Mauchly's Sphericity Test were used. Mean, a measure of central tendency of descriptive statistic, and standard error, a measure of variability of descriptive statistic, were used to describe the population. In order to determine priorities for conflict management strategy, the effect of independent variables of gender, age, work experience, field of study, and degree, and also to compare opinions of managers and employees, Repeated Measures ANOVA at a significance level of 0.05 was used. All statistical analyses were done using SPSS software.

### Results

Among the assumptions, only the assumption of compound symmetry was not estimated. This means that Mauchly's Sphericity Test was significant ( $W=0.22$ ,  $p=0.01$ ). So, Greenhouse-Geisser correction at degree of freedom was used in Repeated Measures ANOVA. The results of the analysis of variance showed that managers of offices, in settlement of conflicts, significantly (Mean  $\pm$  standard error) apply collaboration strategy ( $4.08\pm 0.1$ ), compromise strategy ( $3.00\pm 0.09$ ), domination strategy ( $2.98\pm 0.14$ ), lenity strategy ( $2.83\pm 0.13$ ), and avoidance strategy ( $2.45\pm 0.11$ ) as the first to the last priorities ( $p=0.001$ ,  $F=8.07$ ) (Table 1 and Graph 1).

On the other hand, demographic variables of these managers including age ( $p=0.337$ ,  $F=1.14$ ), work experience ( $p=0.389$ ,  $F=1.1$ ), interaction of age and work experience ( $p=0.303$ ,  $F=1.25$ ), degree ( $p=0.578$ ,  $F=0.48$ ), field of study ( $p=0.84$ ,  $F=0.23$ ), and interaction of field of study and degree ( $p=0.86$ ,  $F=0.2$ ) had no impact on prioritization of their conflict management strategies (Table 2). In

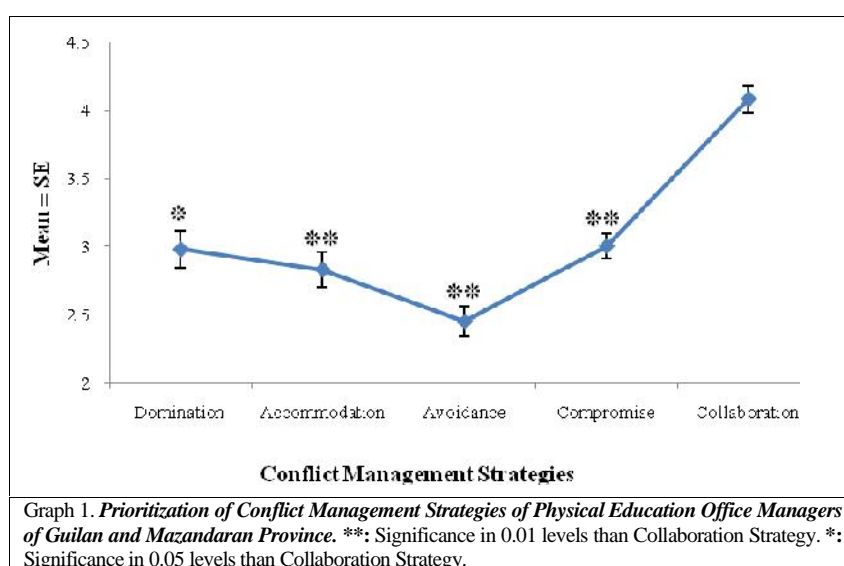
other words, there was no significant difference between managers of Guilan and Mazandaran provinces, managers with different ages, managers with different work experiences, managers with different academic degrees (Diploma to Masters),

and managers graduated in Physical Education or other disciplines in terms of priorities of conflict management strategies.

**Table 1. prioritization of Conflict Management Strategies and Effects of demographic variables**

Source	F	p
Conflict Management Strategies	8.07	0.001*
Province effect	1.42	0.253
Age effect	1.14	0.337
Work Experience effect	1.1	0.389
Age and Work Experience Interaction	1.25	0.303
Education Degree effect	0.48	0.578
Field of Study	0.23	0.84
Education Degree and Field of Study Interaction	0.2	0.86

\*: Significance in 0.01 levels.



## Discussion

It was observed in this study that there is a significant difference between the strategies of conflict management. But when the effects of independent variables such as province, age, work experience, degree, and field of study and also the interaction of age-work experience and degree-field of study are investigated, no significant difference was observed between the strategies. In other words, all managers (either in Guilan or Mazandaran) apply the strategy of collaboration as the first priority, as this strategy has a significant advantage over other ones. However, there is no significant difference between other four strategies (compromise, avoidance, lenity, domination). This means that managers of physical education offices take advantage of them alike. Hence, this successful exposure bears positive and constructive results for both the parties and the organization. In addition, an appropriate solution to a problem can increase productivity and production.

Based on the theoretical background and previous studies, the ability to control conflict is undoubtedly one of the most important skills that managers need. Studies on high and middle level managers show that a manager spends 2% of their time, on average, on settlement of conflicts (3). A proper conflict management gets advantage of organizational conflicts and reduces their inefficient aspects. Waste of organizational time and energy, organizational dissatisfaction, reduced effectiveness of the group, forgetting the main objectives of the organization, incorrect judgments about each other, and poor coordination in the organization are some of these inefficient aspects (5). Managers' knowledge about this allows them to identify the nature, features, and situations of conflict in the organization and prevent the emergence of negative and damaging conflicts through a correct prediction. Lack of proper understanding of conflict and inappropriate use of conflict management strategies (domination, lenity, avoidance, compromise, and collaboration) would lead to

adverse consequences including reduced partnership, creation of an atmosphere of suppression, overlooking the causes of conflict and failure to resolve them, resilience and persistence, ambiguity of issues, impossibility to reach a principled agreement, and reduced organizational efficacy (15).

These results are consistent with the observations of Razavi *et al* (2005) who reported that both the managers of physical education offices and officials of physical education in education departments of Mazandaran Province (from the view of the managers themselves) use the strategies of avoidance and domination as the last priorities (8). Kiani mehr (2012) also observed that the staff of physical education offices of Mazandaran Province take advantage of avoidance and domination strategies as the last priorities for settlement of conflicts (21). Results of the present study are inconsistent with findings of Abasi *et al* (2009) who reported that the faculty of state universities in Tehran mostly applies control (domination) strategy. Torabi *et al* (2008) observed that 49.7% of hospital executives in Lorestan Province use a non-confrontational way (avoidance and lenity), 44.6% of them use control (domination) strategy, and 5.7% of them apply a problem-solving strategy (compromise and collaboration) (23). Osanlou *et al.* (2007) reported that 68.3%, 29.3%, and 2.4% of directors of Physical Education Organization employ, respectively, avoidance (non-confrontational) strategy, control (competitive) strategy, and problem-solving (collaboration and compromise) approach when dealing with organizational conflicts (22). Kantek and Gezer (2009), in a study observed that students use collaboration and lenity strategies the most and domination strategy the least (15). Slabbert (2004) reported that low-rank bank managers (or executive directors like directors of physical education offices) mainly apply avoidance strategy (18). Kozan (1989) reported that managers in Turkey considerably prefer collaboration strategy over domination and compromise strategies and avoidance comes after two previous strategies and before lenity in rank; in Jordan, collaboration strategy is applied more than compromise and avoidance, lenity, and avoidance come then, respectively (1).

Careful review of the results of this study tells us that the managers of physical education offices in Guilan and Mazandaran provinces apply the best method as the first priority in settlement of conflicts, so that the problem is solved and both involved sides achieve their interests (collaboration strategy). It can be stated that learning conflict management is essential to improve the way of

adaptation and the use of changes and developments for self, family, organization, and investment (11).

None of the demographic characteristics of managers including gender, age, work experience, interaction of age and work experience, field of study, degree, and interaction of field of study and degree had any impact on prioritization of their conflict management strategies. At the first priority, managers are looking for solutions that are tailored to the demands and norms of both sides and satisfy them (problem-solving or collaboration strategies) and other four strategies are used alike and as the second priority, indicating right decisions and appropriate methods taken by managers to settle the problems between employees in offices. Understanding, awareness, appropriate attitude of managers, relevance of education, necessary trainings, and experience can be important factors in the effective management of conflict in an organization, especially sports organizations and institutions and physical education offices. Accordingly, it can be said that effective conflict management can help managers to cope with new developments and find more appropriate solutions in dealing with threats and optimal use of opportunities. This it can lead to organizational efficiency and productivity. Studies also suggest that conflict settlement in an organization requires a peaceful environment, reduction of discrimination, justice, collaborative learning, violence prevention, and critical thinking. Selection of appropriate ways by managers to resolve and control conflicts in an organization can guide the conflict to a creative and productive direction, cause developments and better performance, improve the quality of decision making, increase the accuracy, pave the way for introduction of new ideas and theories, and increase creativity and innovation in the organization.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, however there were no significant difference between conflict management strategies preference of Mazandaran's and Guilan's managers and their assistant; but, it is important that the preference of both Mazandaran's and Guilan's managers is cooperation suggesting that the managers use good decision making and appropriate styles for resolution of employees' problems in offices. At the end, it is recommended that managers of physical education offices in these two provinces to be trained on the concept of conflict management, its areas of incident, and optimal use of it in dealing with organizational conflicts in on-the-job courses.

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