

## dianoesis

Vol 13 (2022)

Thomas Hobbes: Individualism, Freedom, Sovereignty



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doi: [10.12681/dia.37790](https://doi.org/10.12681/dia.37790)

### To cite this article:

Manolis, K. (2024). The role of school leadership in relation to conflict management at school:: A survey based upon five empirical researches. *Dianoesis*, 13, 189–198. <https://doi.org/10.12681/dia.37790>

**The role of school leadership in relation to  
conflict management at school.  
A survey based upon five empirical  
researches**

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**Abstract:** The role of the manager is decisive in terms of the effective or non-effective management of conflicts, as through the techniques he chooses to use and many times through the leadership style he chooses to apply, he will influence the attitudes and perceptions of teachers towards disagreements and consequent conflicts.

**Keywords:** conflict management – school management – school leadership – administration – resolution strategies – school culture – empirical research

### **Introduction**

The school workplace is an environment in which differences between teachers inevitably arise, which in some cases can lead to conflicts (Msila, 2012). The causes that probably trigger such disagreements and subsequent conflicts, despite the variety of examples, seem to have in common the

lack of compatibility between the feelings or the perceptions of the employees in each school unit (Corvette, 2007).

The forms in which these conflicts manifest themselves are also varied, as well as the consequences they can bring to the overall functioning of the school unit, as they can strengthen the interest of teachers and mobilize them in terms of achieving common goals and visions or vice versa they can lead to the formation of a climate of denial and suspicion, which does not allow cooperation towards the realization of the common vision.

In any case, it seems that the role of the manager is decisive in terms of the effective or non-effective management of conflicts, as through the techniques he chooses to use and many times through the leadership style he chooses to apply, he will influence the attitudes and perceptions of teachers towards disagreements and consequent conflicts.

## **1. Description of Empirical Research**

### **Empirical Research by Olu Okotoni & Abosede Okotoni (2003)**

Okotoni O. & A. (2003), in their research examines conflict management in school administration in Secondary Education of Nigeria. The purpose of this research is to determine both the causes and effects of the conflicts in the School Administration. While he considers that a basic need is the peaceful atmosphere that favors learning. This specific study attempted to provide answers to the following research questions:

- Whether there is a relationship between conflicts and mistreatment of staff by management?
- Are managers properly trained in conflict management?
- What is the government's role in reducing the rate of conflict in the education sector?
- What strategies can managers use to manage conflict effectively?

- How can students participate in the administration of their schools to reduce the frequency of conflicts?

The methodology used was random sampling and secondary schools were selected in the three districts of Osun State. The sample was 304 people and consisted of school principals, teachers and staff members. Primary and secondary data were collected. Primary data were generated from questionnaires, interviews and observations, while secondary data were obtained from official sources.

The main findings of the present research strengthen the awareness of school members to the undeniable existence of conflicts and their understanding. Apparently, although conflicts occur regularly at school they are not a danger in themselves. The risk arises from their improper management.

In addition, through the research, the main causes of conflicts within the school system were identified as the partial implementation of the salary regime, the forced and compulsory retirement of employees, the incompetence of the Administration, the superior/inferior member syndrome, improper motivation of teachers, lack of discipline from both staff and students, personal conflict, role conflict and exuberance in relationships. Whereas, the lack of knowledge, the choice of wrong approach, the ignorance on the part of the students has led the issue of conflict management to a fire, where the use of dialogue is chosen as the most appropriate of the strategies that will normalize the situation.

### **Empirical Research by Salleh & Adulpakdee (2012)**

Salleh and Adulpakdee (2012), in their research, presented the perceptions of teachers and school managers about the causes of conflicts that arise in school units and what are the most effective methods for their management. Whereas, the purpose of the present study is to investigate the causes of conflicts and to determine how school principals manage conflicts occurring in selected Islamic private schools in Yala province. More specifically, the study attempts to answer the following research questions:

- What are the causes of conflicts in Islamic private schools in Yala province? and
- How do school principals manage conflicts that occur at school?

The methodology followed was random and focused sampling. The study sample was 313 respondents, consisting of 11 principals and 302 teachers working in Islamic private secondary schools in Yala Province, Thailand. The tools used were a survey questionnaire and a semi-structured interview with the selected respondents. Quantitative data were processed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 15.0 for Windows.

The main findings of this research showed the following:

- that each of the private Islamic schools in Yala Province, Thailand, inevitably faced conflict;
- the causes of conflicts were mainly caused by the existence of the four types of interpersonal relationships which are: a) between managers and teachers, b) between teachers, c) between teachers and students and d) between parents and teachers,
- the principal is the person who holds the most important role in resolving conflicts in schools.
- conflicts can appear in controlled or uncontrolled situations in schools and depending on the principal's management style which will be based on the knowledge, experiences, decisions, attitudes and characteristics of each school, they can be effectively dealt with,
- managers should learn more about conflict management so that their management is more effective;
- this study also recommended to the principals to improve relations between non-Muslim and Muslim teachers without prejudice and religious barriers and to clearly state the teachers' responsibilities for each task, finally
- the correct management of conflicts by the managers of each school unit will create a favorable workplace for all employees, where relationships, trust and respect will prevail. Having such work environments will result in boosting team spirit and increasing productivity.

### **Empirical Research by Msila (2012)**

In her research, Msila (2012), focuses on the School Administration and whether it is trained in conflict management. This study aims to understand the barriers associated with conflict and school leadership. In light of this, it explores the question: What are the conflict management needs of school principals? In detail, it attempts to investigate the following research questions:

- the skills that school principals should have for conflict management
- the way managers build appropriate strategies to deal with conflicts.
- how principals can introduce an effective school climate that fosters school growth, despite conflict.
- the creation of teams in schools that will be properly structured to effectively deal with conflicts.

The methodology used in the present study was through qualitative research – interviews with open and closed questions and the eight 8 participants were selected through purposive sampling. They were selected from four schools that were experiencing conflict problems and from four schools that were functioning without conflict problems. Each participant was interviewed twice during the study to ensure validity of the results. In addition, the researcher also applied the observation between the two interviews, studying the communication and cooperation of the teachers.

The key findings of this research showed that any conflict hinders school progress and that schools experiencing conflict will not prosper. In addition, all participants underlined that teaching and teachers' morale are negatively affected, while a holistic preparation of principals for conflict management is required. Finally, dynamic leadership lists the following skills: managing and dealing with one's own emotions, dealing with third party conflicts, the ability to enforce, negotiate and mediate.

### **Empirical Research by Riasi and Asadzadehb (2015)**

Riasi and Asadzadehb (2015), in their research, studied the relationship between the management of educational units and conflict management styles. The purpose of this research was to investigate the value of the five forms of conflict management of normalization, avoidance, cooperation, competition and compromise in school units.

This particular study attempted to answer the research question whether there is any relationship between school leadership and each of the five conflict management styles or not

The methodology used was that the total size of a society was included and it included forty-nine (49) teachers - principals of high schools located in the city of Birjand in eastern Iran. To collect the data, a questionnaire with 20 closed-ended questions was created and the results were processed using SPSS software.

The main findings of the present are that principals believe that conflict resolution, by directly discussing the issues with their teachers, is more effective. On the other hand, the conflict avoidance style is believed to be the least effective. While the smoothing style is the best means of managing conflict in the school environment, among the five styles. In addition, based on the above results, the following recommendations are made for managers:

- When there is conflict in an educational unit, principals should carefully examine the situation and then choose the appropriate conflict management style based on the specific situation.
- Principals must be good listeners, listen to their teachers and then manage the conflict so that both parties are happy with the end result.
- Principals should motivate (morally or financially) and reward their teachers, so that conflicts in the school environment are avoided.

- Teachers to respect the role of the school leader/principal in the organization, who has the right to resolve conflict and actively work with them to manage conflict.

### **Empirical Research by Shanka (2017)**

Shanka (2017), in his research tried to identify the main sources of conflicts between teachers and school leaders and to determine which strategies are used in the proper management and resolution of such conflicts. The purpose of this study was to investigate various strategies used to manage and resolve conflicts between teachers and school leaders

In this light, it explores the following research questions:

- what are the sources of conflict between teachers and school leaders?
- what conflict management strategies are followed? and
- what are the techniques for resolving school conflicts?

The methodology followed was simple random as well as purposive sampling and was conducted in public primary schools in Wolaita zone of Ethiopia. The sample includes 196 participants, of which 146 were teachers and 50 school principals. Questionnaire and interview were the main data collection tools distributed to both teachers and principals and included open and closed questions.

The main findings of the present research showed that the important causes of conflicts were 1) institutional (lack of or unfair allocation of school resources and poor infrastructure), 2) labor (work overload and dissatisfaction, lack of teaching skills, intolerance among teachers, lack of accountability and responsibility, poor implementation of educational policies, lack of staff training and lack of reward systems), and 3) leadership (poor implementation of regulations, poor communication, lack of leadership skills, lack of involvement in decision-making, inferiority-superiority syndromes, bias in allocation of positions and lack of clarity in education sector policies and guidelines).

Conflict management strategies should include leadership skills, following rules and regulations that embrace change as



well as having a clear distribution of participating teachers in decision-making and providing equal opportunities for training and understanding of roles. In addition, in the cases of resolving differences that arise in school units, techniques of discussion, punishment, coercion, compromise and avoidance should be included.

Finally, this study concluded that school leaders need to understand the sources of conflict and have a mechanism in place to allow staff to voice their concerns. Whereas, leaders should continuously build and develop leadership skills, be open to change, engage and provide their staff with development opportunities.

### **Composition of the individual investigations (points of convergence-divergence)**

In the above research, reference is made to both the causes and the strategies to resolve the conflicts that occur in school units. While the role of the leader / manager is decisive. Specifically:

Regarding the causes of conflicts in the school environment, Okotoni O. & A. (2003) and Shanka (2017) recognize as the most important causes the incompetence of the administration, the improper motivation of teachers by the school director, the conflict roles and exuberance that exist in relationships, intolerance among teachers, lack of accountability and responsibility, poor implementation of educational policies, lack of staff training, poor communication, lack of involvement in decision-making, inferiority and superiority syndromes and bias in the allocation of seats. While Salleh & Adulpakdee (2012) consider that the causes of conflicts are mainly caused by the existence of the four types of interpersonal relationships in the school environment which are the relationships: a) between principals and teachers, b) between teachers, c) between teachers and students and d) between parents and teachers.

Regarding the place of resolving school conflicts, Salleh & Adulpakdee (2012) suggest that the school leader's

management style should be based on the knowledge, experiences, decisions, attitudes and characteristics of each school, so that conflict problems can be addressed with efficiency. Riasi & Asadzadeh (2015) from their research concluded that the conflict avoidance style is the least effective, while the smoothing style is the best means of managing conflicts in the school environment, among the five styles. Finally, Shanka (2017) concludes that in the cases of solving the differences created in school units, techniques of discussion, punishment, coercion, compromise and avoidance should be included.

We could also note, in terms of school conflict management strategies/policies, that all five (5) of the above researches mention Alleh & Adulpakdee (2012,) that the principal/leader is the person who holds the most important role for conflict resolution in schools and should have the following skills according to Msila (2012) and Shanka (2017): ability to manage and deal with own emotions, deal with third party conflicts, ability to enforce, negotiate and mediate as well as being open to change, engaging and providing their staff with development opportunities. While Riasi & Asadzadeh (2015) suggest that school principals/leaders should be good listeners, listen to their teachers and then manage the conflict so that both parties are happy with the final outcome.

We conclude after these, that according to Salleh & Adulpakdee (2012), the correct management of conflicts by the managers of each school unit will create a favorable workplace for all employees, where relationships, trust and respect will prevail. Having such work environments will result in boosting team spirit and increasing productivity.

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