

GENDER COMPARISON OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES AT SECONDARY LEVEL OF EDUCATION

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Abstract

Education is the major source of development in the society socio economic growth of the country. Education generates physical, mental and spiritual changes in the development as well as collectively in the society. Management is a process for achieving organizational objectives. School Principal should have sufficient knowledge of management and its strategies. The main aim of the study was to investigate the conflict management strategies of the Principals of Secondary schools Islamabad (Pakistan) with reference to their gender and school locale. The objectives of the study were: to identify the prevailing conflict management strategies and practices in rural as well as urban school Principals across gender at Secondary schools; to examine the variations in the conflict management strategies of Secondary school Principals; to identify the differences in conflict management strategies between Secondary school Principals in rural areas and urban areas across gender; to assess the effect of conflict management strategies on the performance of Secondary school teachers

Keywords: Conflict, education, gender, management, school, strategies.

1. INTRODUCTION

Conflict is a process of irreconcilable behavior whereby interference of people with each other effects further actions. One of the reasons of conflict may be the knowledge of rights and lack of knowledge of liabilities. Antagonism, struggles between parties, opposition process and threats to cooperation may be some of the prime consequences of conflict. In daily life, it is hardly possible to live a day without a conflict. Nyamajiwa (2000) defined conflict as disagreements among people regarding their opinions/ interests and purposes. People need to negotiate when conflict arises and in order to do so it is important that they have the knowledge of those factors which give rise to conflict. Miller and King (2005) are of the opinion that one of the factors of conflict between individual and group is the disagreement over compatible goals. Nyamajiwa (2000) has further identified poor information, role conflict, inconsistent goals, competition, etc. as some general basis of conflict in an organization.

As far as schools are concerned, division of labor, line of authority, rules and regulations etc. are bound to give rise to conflicts. However the nature of conflict in schools may be different from other areas. In schools conflict resolution would mean that the needs and desires are fulfilled, differences are settled and different ideas are shared. School employees may have conflicts over different practices of concern and if not treated, may result in inefficiency and ineffectiveness and thereby failure in the achievement of goals. According to Bolino and Turnley (2003) conflict is essential in schools and cannot be ignored. In schools Principal is the leader of the school and since it is the leader who has to manage conflicts therefore he/she should have the requisite qualities and leadership is one of those qualities. Same point is discussed by Bass, (2003) that leadership is the process about what needs to be done and how to do it and process of facilitating individual

and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives. As Maleke (2003) pointed out that success or failure of a school depends on the personal characteristics of the Principal which determine the extent to which a school Principal is able to achieve the school goals through effective management of conflict.

An educational institute can work effectively if its Principal has good qualities of management e.g. decision making, coordination, listening and making good decisions, flexibility, mediation, confidence, self-motivation, reliability etc. Ike (2000) submitted that principals' with long years of teaching experience perform better in mobilizing the non-teaching and teaching staff towards attainment of school goals and objectives.

There are Principals of schools from both genders (male, female). Everyone tries to solve and handle conflict according to their own capability. We need to ponder if gender of the Principal is important in handling conflict or not.

Gender has any affect upon the leadership or not. This issue has always been surrounded with much controversy. Two opposing positions are generally taken in this debate. Taylor and Hardman (2004) were of the view that Gender is not just male or female identity; it should be viewed also as a quality and distinguishing feature of any language. The attributes to gender include one's behaviors, feelings and attitudes. The other distinguishing factors include human interactions that create social structures, the relationships, ideologies, outcomes of self-presentations and perceptions. Neubert and Palmer (2004) narrated that during conflict resolutions the strategies used focus more on gender differences. This is because more women are gaining the status as decision makers with high level positions in organizations and that gender considerations have gained importance in conflict management. However, research work carried out previously was influenced by the typical assumptions about the women. The research design, data interpretation and results were affected by these assumptions. As an example the research work before 1980's related to psychological studies suggested that those conflict management strategies were endorsed by men and women that complement the role of gender in the studies. However, a considerable portion of the social science literature favors the similarity view, claiming that, all things considered (or controlled for), men and women lead in similar ways. According to Bern & Lenny (1976), Kagan (1964 and Macoby (1966) the previous researches on finding out the individual's differences in conflict management styles were conducted with the assumptions about gender as an explanatory variable and concluded that the five conflict management styles are compatible with gender role orientation.

Bern and Lenny (1976) came to conclusion that individual's gender devotion may affect the conflict management characteristics of those who favor their respective gender. They also reported that genderless or neutral individuals have the flexibility in their behavior and can employ either feminine or masculine characteristics during conflict management. During the same time period Bedell and Sistrunk (1973) and Rubin and Brown (1975) reported that women do have competence in conflict management based on contextual variables.

A number of researchers such as Bern (1974), Bern & Lenney (1976) and Spence & Helmreich (1978) were of the view that individual's gender specific role determines the differences in conflict management behavior of men and women. The differences represent pattern of feminine and masculine characteristics. These differences actually determine the way an individual behaves in certain circumstances. This was further supported by Cook in 1985. The research carried out by Broverman, Vogel and Rosenkrantz in 1972 also concluded that men generally develop masculine characteristics such as independence, aggressiveness, assertiveness and competition while women develop feminine characteristics which include emotionality, cooperation and sensitivity.

Some researchers reported that masculinity is the key to individual's progress in an organization and that if women need to progress in any organization they are usually forced to adopt masculine orientation. This was reported in the research work conducted out by Brenner in 1989, Heilman, Martel & Simon in 1989 and Powel & Butterfield in 1979. This was further supported by Fagenson in 1990 and Powel in 1988. Their research suggested that women managers made their way to reach high level positions in organizations because they were more inclined towards masculine characteristics as compared to women in general population.

This hypothesis was supported by additional researches such as the research conducted by Korabik & Ayman (1987) which supported the analogy between gender and conflict management styles and concluded

that women deliberately choose cooperative behavior for managing conflicts. The research conducted by Rahim (1983) and Rubin & Brown (1975) resulted in same conclusion. During the conflict resolution women conflict managers behave softly while in contrast men behave aggressively which may include pressurizing and contention. This was reported by a number of researchers such as Carother & Allen (1999), Gruber and White (1988), Offerman & Schrier (1985) and Putin (1998). In relation to this Monroe, DiSalvo, Lewis and Borzi (1991) reported that male subordinates use relational leverage more often with female supervisor and female subordinates use avoidance with male supervisor.

The Secondary school is a complex system. There is no homogeneity in the classes of management, staff and students so everyone struggles for recognition, reward and popularity so there is chance of conflict. These affect the achievement of aims and objectives of the schools. Everybody wishes for a conflict free school system but it is not as easy as it looks. Conflict occurs at different levels in schools e.g. interpersonal, intrapersonal, inter-group etc. In a conflict situation, Principals get the opportunity to apply some strategy for responding to a conflict. They not only solve the conflict but they use adequate management strategies to control the situation as well.

Robbins (2000) stated that conflict management is basically to resolve the conflict in a group, in a positive manner. Davidoff and Lazarus (2002) stated that purpose of conflict management strategies is to create a situation in which conflict itself is reflected upon and both parties are active in the reflection. Several strategies have been suggested for resolving the conflicts which include avoidance, non-attention, physical separation, limited interaction, compromise and confrontation (Hanson, 1996; Rahim 1992).

As conflicts are unavoidable in every schools life therefore in this study the researcher, as a first step, examined the conflict management strategies being followed by Secondary school Principals located in Islamabad (Urban and Rural), across the gender. After examining this, the researcher analyzed and compared whether or not the Principals of the urban as well as rural Secondary Schools located in Islamabad use similar types of conflict management strategies across the genders. At the end the effect of the conflict management strategies used by Secondary School Principal of Islamabad, on the performance of Secondary school teachers was analyzed.

In an article (Eagly, Alice H.; Karau, Steven J.; Makhijani, Mona G) 1995 Male and female leaders were equally effective. However, consistent with the assumption that the congruence of leadership roles with leaders' gender enhances effectiveness, men were more effective than women in roles that were defined in more masculine terms, and women were more effective than men in roles that were defined in less masculine terms. Also, men were more effective than women to the extent that leader and subordinate roles were male-dominated numerically. These and other findings are discussed from the perspective of social-role theory of gender differences in social behavior as well as from alternative perspectives.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Gay (1992:7) contends that research methodology is an approach to address a research question or problem. Keeping in view the objectives of the study, descriptive survey was conducted by the researcher to collect data from the respondents. Hence, in this study survey was considered the most suitable in collecting data about attitudes and views of people.

The main research instrument was questionnaire for Principals while interview for vice principals and teachers. Questionnaires offered the advantage of being easy and cost effective to administer a large population (**Orodho, 2009**). All existing 97 Secondary Level Schools in Islamabad were the population of this research. For this study the whole population was taken as sample. From every school along with Principals of schools, vice principal from each school and 5 randomly selected teachers were taken as sample. As conflict resolution and management is further delegated to the level of vice principal and teachers therefore questions were asked to them about the conflict management strategies principals' use in schools. This will also further validate the conflict management strategies existing in the educational institutes where the Principal was the main sample. These teachers were selected randomly with an interval of every third occurring person

2.1 Hypothesis

- H1:** There is a significant difference in conflict management strategies of male and female Principals.
- H2:** There is a significant difference in conflict management strategies of Principals of educational institutes in rural and urban areas.
- H3:** There is no effect of conflict management strategies of Principals on the performance of their teachers.

Chart 1

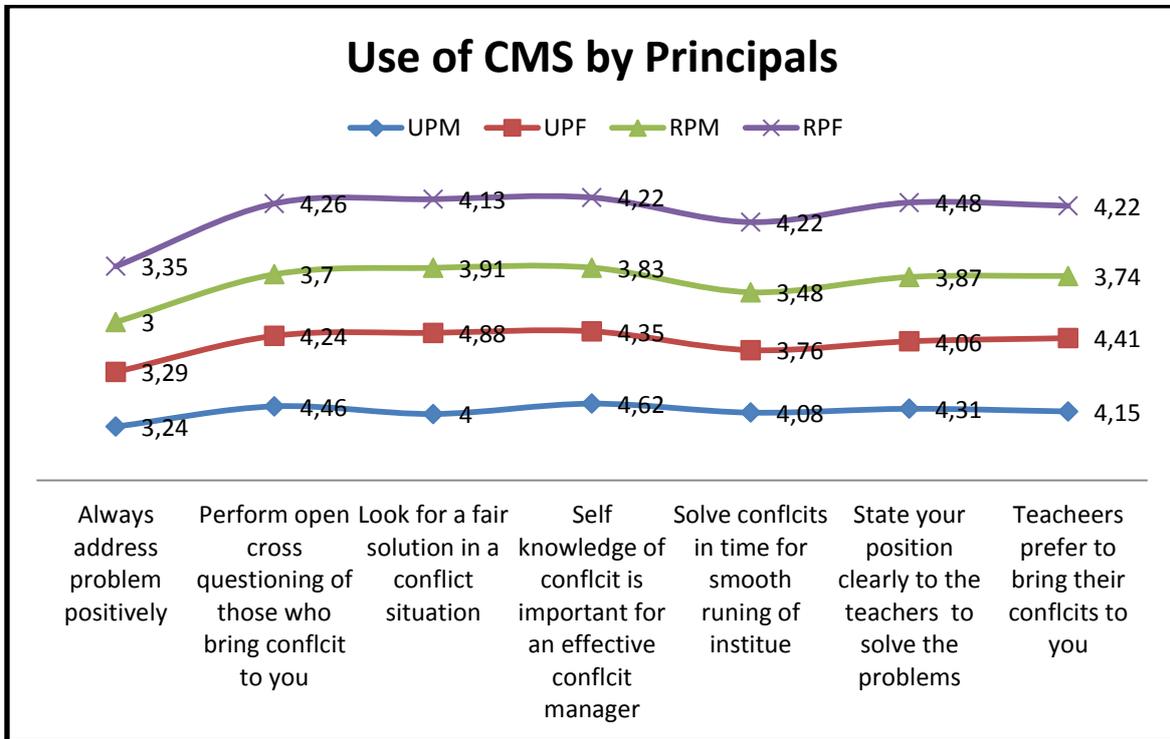
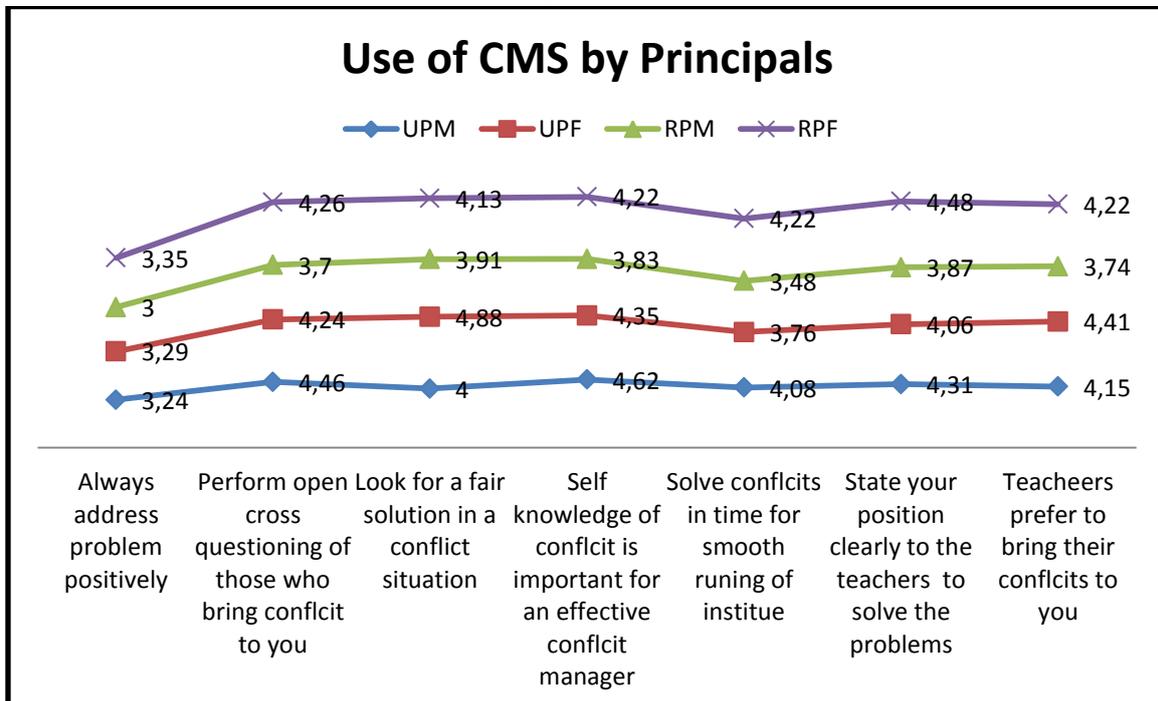


Chart 2



The results of the questionnaires of Principals were tabulated to prove the hypothesis no 1 and no 2. Percentage and Mean were applied for this purpose. Chart-1 and Chart-2 relate to those questions which were asked to Principals regarding the objective number 1 and 2 and 3. The mean scores of all Principals mentioned above fall in the range of 3.00-4.62 which indicate that there is no significant difference in the conflict management strategies of male/ female Secondary School Principals of Islamabad (Pakistan) across locale (rural and urban). As hiring of the principals in Secondary Schools of Pakistan is according to a criteria of the Government of Pakistan in both sectors (urban and rural) that is why area of appointment and posting does not matter. The chart above shows that male/ female Principals (urban and rural area) are very active in dealing and handling conflicts in schools. That's why there is not much difference in their strategies. As far as findings of this study are concerned, no significant difference was found in the use of conflict management strategies of Principals. As Corral-Carlson (2008), Berry (1994), Indelicate (2005), and Dillard (2005) all examined some aspect of the Principal and found that no significant differences existed between male and female Principal conflict-management behaviors. Eagly and Johnson (1990) work: "Contrary to notions about sex specialization in leadership styles, women leaders appear to behave in similar fashion to their male colleagues" (Nieva & Gutek, 1981). Some studies, especially those conducted in the laboratory, have been able to find differences, but more have not (Osborn & Vicars, 1976). The paradox in these findings is that men and women have often been perceived as possessing different strengths and weaknesses, but whether these differences result in either perceived or actual variations in leadership style or communicative behavior remains a point of contention (Wilson, 2003). Wilson (2003) further suggests that "if we implicitly believe that men and women do have differences in [leadership] style, then this may be due to the stereotypical images we have about men and women"

It is also concluded that Principals of Secondary Schools of Islamabad do not rely on any specific conflict management strategies and application of any strategy depends on the nature of conflict. The same is mentioned by Vivar (2006), whereby he stressed that it is critical to select the appropriate approach for each conflict situation as different strategies may lead to different outcomes.

3. ASSESSING THE EFFECT OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES OF PRINCIPALS ON THE PERFORMANCE OF SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS

As far as hypothesis no 3 and objective no 4 are concerned, following questions were asked to Principals.

3.1 Teachers try to linger on the conflicts to get off from their responsibilities

		Value	Asymp. Std. Error ^a	Approx. T ^b	Approx. Sig.
Interval by Interval	Pearson's R	.097	.117	.835	.406 ^c
Ordinal by Ordinal	Spearman Correlation	.157	.118	1.364	.177 ^c
N of Valid Cases		76			

Principals were asked whether their teachers try to linger on the conflicts to get off from their responsibilities. It was based on their replies that 50% of Urban Female Principals disagreed while 50% strongly agreed, 66% Urban Male Principals disagreed while 33% strongly agreed that teachers try to linger on the conflicts. In case of Rural Female Principals, 20 out of 23 agreed to the statement. A little difference is observed with reference to Rural Male Principals i.e. 16 out of 23 strongly agreed to the statement. As per the correlation statistics the significant level .406 is achieved which is fairly greater than 0.05 and is closer to +1 rather than -1 so a positive correlation has been determined.

3.2 Due to principal's conflict management strategies even hard working employees resign their job

		Value	Asymp. Std. Error ^a	Approx. T ^b	Approx. Sig.
Interval by Interval	Pearson's R	.566	.113	5.912	.000 ^c
Ordinal by Ordinal	Spearman Correlation	.595	.097	6.368	.000 ^c
N of Valid Cases		76			

A question was asked to the Principals whether their conflict management strategies affect employees in a way that even hardworking employees resign from the jobs. It was observed that 71% of the Urban Female Principals denied that their conflict management strategies affect the employees to the extent that even hardworking employees resign from the jobs. 29% of the Urban Female Principals confirmed that hardworking employees sometimes resign from the job due to the adoption of a certain conflict management strategy. 77% of the Urban Male Principals denied to the questions asked while 23% agreed to this question. The situation was clearly different in case of Rural Female and Male Principals i.e. only 4% of the Rural Female Principals denied while 100% Rural Male Principals strongly agreed to the statement of the question. As per the correlation statistics the significant level is .000 which means there is perfectly positive correlation.

3.3 Some conflict management strategies leave negative effect on employees and they become hostile

		Value	Asymp. Std. Error ^a	Approx. T ^b	Approx. Sig.
Interval by Interval	Pearson's R	.449	.101	4.323	.000 ^c
Ordinal by Ordinal	Spearman Correlation	.472	.093	4.600	.000 ^c
N of Valid Cases		76			

In order to find out if some conflict management strategies leave negative effect on employees making them hostile, Principals were enquired about their opinion and it was found that 76% of the total Urban Female Principals disagreed to the statement in the question while approximately 50% of the total Urban Male Principals agreed to the statement. In case of Rural Female Principals it was found that 83% agreed to the statement while 91% of the Rural Male Principals also agreed to the statement in the question. As per the correlation statistics, the significant level is .000 which means that there is perfectly positive correlation.

3.4 Principals force decision on teachers to get maximum productivity

		Value	Asymp. Std. Error ^a	Approx. T ^b	Approx. Sig.
Interval by Interval	Pearson's R	-.048	.048	-.414	.680 ^c
Ordinal by Ordinal	Spearman Correlation	-.048	.045	-.417	.678 ^c
N of Valid Cases		76			

Principals were enquired if they enforce their decisions on teachers to get maximum productivity. It was found that 100% of the urban female and Male Principals strongly agreed to the statement in the question. In case of Rural Principals it was observed that 74% of the total Rural Female Principals agreed to the statement while 96% of the total Rural Male Principals also agreed to the statement in the question. As per the correlation statistics the significant level is .680 which is fairly greater than 0.05 and is closer to +1 rather than -1 so there is a correlation determined.

3.5 If teachers do not agree with your conflict management strategy even then they perform duties well

		Value	Asymp. Std. Error ^a	Approx. T ^b	Approx. Sig.
Interval by Interval	Pearson's R	-.370	.098	-3.425	.001 ^c
Ordinal by Ordinal	Spearman Correlation	-.445	.083	-4.271	.000 ^c
N of Valid Cases		76			

Sometimes teachers and supporting staff may not agree to the decisions and conflict management strategies of the Principals but they still perform their duties in a professional manner. It was found that 100% of the Urban Female and Male Principals confirmed that their teachers perform well even if they are not satisfied with the conflict management strategies of the Principal. The situation is a little bit different in case of Principals in rural areas. 39% of the total Rural Female Principals disagreed to the statement in question and 48% of the total Rural Male Principals also disagreed to the statement in question. As per the correlation statistics, the significant level, .001, is achieved which is smaller than 0.05 hence there is no correlation.

It is concluded from the data about the performance of teachers that in urban area, teachers' ratio of resigning from job due to dissatisfaction from the conflict management strategies of Principals is high as compare to male female teachers from Urban area. Moreover 50 % of the male and female teachers from both the sectors prolong the conflict and do not perform their responsibilities in time, which affect the productivity level of the institute. Henry (2009) posits in his research that positive effect of conflict can improve the quality of decisions, stimulate involvement in discussion and enhance group cohesion.

So, the highest effect caused by the independent variable (principals' CMS) was found on teachers.

The results derived after applying the standard statistical procedure revealed that there is a fairly positive correlation between independent and all the five dependent variables thus it approves the alternate hypothesis and rejects the null hypothesis. These results are replicable and can be generalized over the whole population.

As far as questions asked to vice principals and teachers for the authentication of answers given by principals are concerned, it was found that there is not much difference in the responses of Principals, vice principals but as far as responses of teachers are concerned, they have slight difference of opinion however it is negligible.

4. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATION

According to the results of study, it is clear that no one can avoid conflicts. Conflicts exist and every person tries to resolve the conflicts according to his/her abilities. Principals' personal characteristics and qualification is also one of the important factors to resolve the conflicts. There is slight difference in the use of conflict management strategies of rural and urban male/female principals. If we find any difference at any point, it is actually due to the environment in which they are working. It is not practical to apply only one strategy throughout because every situation has different needs and requirements. The above results also prove that teachers do not prefer to work in an institute where Principals' conflict management strategies are not consistent with the teachers' point of view. In the article of Uchendu et. al. (2003) stated that constructively managed conflict induces a positive school performance while poorly managed conflict negatively affects the entire school system because both the Principals and teachers cannot perform to the best of their abilities, under conflict situations. This is in consonance with Fabunmik And Alimba (2010) i.e. poor management behavior of Principals is the main cause of conflict in the Secondary Schools resulting in poor academic performance.

This is the reason that teachers and supporting staff resign from their duties as soon as they get a better choice. Adeyemi (2009) stated in his research that inadequate facilities for teachers can cause conflicts in schools and the effect is poor academic performance. Therefore Principals' conflict management strategies have a significant relationship with the organizational performance in Secondary Schools.

On the basis of above conclusions:

1. **H1:** "There is a significant difference in conflict management strategies of male and female Principals" is rejected
2. **H2:** "There is a significant difference in conflict management strategies of Principals of educational institutes in rural and urban areas". Is also rejected.
3. As far as hypothesis (ii) H3: "There is no effect of conflict management strategies of Principals on the performance of teachers" is concerned, this is also rejected.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of findings and conclusions below are some recommendations:

1. All Principals from both sectors and genders may have sufficient knowledge about different conflict management strategies.
2. There may be formal professional training in the context of conflict management strategies for the Principals as well as for teachers irrespective of their sector and gender.
3. Principals may clear their position to teachers so that they cooperate with Principals even if any decision goes against them.
4. Principals' qualification affects the conflict management strategies, therefore, they may update their

knowledge about conflict management strategies.

5. Principals' self-knowledge of conflict is critical for an effective conflict management and that they may also investigate the conflict themselves.
6. Inter-personal conflicts affect the performance of teachers, therefore, Principals may take the teachers and staff into confidence in order to reduce the interpersonal conflicts.
7. Some conflict management strategies leave negative effect on employees and they become hostile and even hard working employees resign from their jobs. Employees may understand Principals' rank and status. Principals are also required to take hard decisions even though their employees are not happy with those decisions.

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