

Weathering the School Climate: Role of Teachers' Conflict Management Styles

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Abstract: Any work environment is a potential place for a conflict to arise at any given time. Addressing this certainly improves service delivery. This study delved into teachers' conflict management styles as tools in managing school climate in the three elementary school districts of Laoang, Northern Samar. Descriptive-correlational research design was used with universally sampled 376 teachers and 29 school head-respondents who answered the adapted 5-item Likert scale survey questionnaires. The gathered data were interpreted and analyzed using Descriptive Statistics, Pearson r, T-test, One-way ANOVA, and Multiple Regression Analysis which were run through SPSS 16.0. Results revealed that teachers and school heads appraised much practiced the teachers' conflict management styles. Specifically, they rated collaborating style as very much practiced, accommodating and compromising as much practiced, avoiding as fairly practiced, and competing as less practiced. Both respondents assessed the school climate as much favorable. In particular, they rated much favorable on collegial leadership and academic press while moderately favorable on teacher professionalism and institutional vulnerability. T-test found no significant difference between the assessment of teachers and school heads on teachers' conflict management styles and school climate. One-way ANOVA determined that the teachers' conflict management styles and school climate were similar among the three districts. Further, Pearson r revealed a significant relationship between teachers' conflict management styles and school climate. Regression analysis found out that collaborating style predicted collegial leadership and academic press while accommodating style predicted all school climate components. As competing and avoiding style predicted teacher professionalism and academic press, respectively, compromising style predicted both.

Keywords: conflict management styles, school climate, teachers

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Introduction

Any work environment is a potential place for a conflict to arise at any given time. Crawford and Bodine (1996) argued that conflict arises from a discord of needs, drives, wishes, and/or demands. Pammer *et al.*, (2003) argued that disagreements, debates, differing perspectives, clashing ideologies, and justice struggles are inevitable in a pluralistic and unequal society. According to Conflict theory of Machiavelli and Hobbes (Bartunek *et al.*, 1992), conflict is a structural problem that was resolved by managerial intervention to alter reward systems,

evaluation and decision-making criteria, reporting relationships, and other mechanisms of organization design. Thomas-Kilmann (as cited by Eilerman, 2006) with their Conflict Mode Instrument identifies five conflict styles—competing, compromising, collaborating, avoiding, and accommodating. There is no means to completely eliminate conflict, it definitely gives cloud to the school climate and might built an adverse effect to teachers' performance. School climate features the quality and character of school life found within the school and the school community, as well as its holistic organizational pattern and relationships as a result of the means on how the school operates in order to attain its mission in terms of collegial leadership, teacher professionalism, academic press, and institutional vulnerability. As demonstrated by the research results, establishing an appropriate school climate that promotes professional interaction, support, and teacher commitment to students is a strong place to begin (Kelton, 2010).

Conflict management style of teachers could shape school climate and also change each other's behavior in terms of their commitment to work. It is under this premise that the researcher purported to conduct this study.

Material and Methods

This study utilized a descriptive–correlational research design employing simple random sampling to determine the 376 teachers and 29 school heads from the three elementary school districts of Laoang, Northern Samar. The respondents answered the adapted 5-item Likert scale survey questionnaires on conflict management styles (Boucher, 2013) categorized into collaborating, accommodating, competing, avoiding, and compromising style as well as school climate (Smith, 2009) classified into collegial leadership, teacher professionalism, academic press and institutional vulnerability both rated as strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, and strongly disagree. The gathered data were interpreted and analyzed using Descriptive Statistics, Pearson r , T-test, One-way ANOVA, and Multiple Regression all run through SPSS 16.0.

Results and Discussions

Table 1. Degree of Teachers' Conflict Management Style as Assessed by Teacher-respondents and their School Heads

	Teachers		School Heads		Average		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Interpretation
A. Collaborating Style	4.22	0.76	4.24	0.79	4.23	0.78	Very much practiced
B. Accommodating Style	3.34	1.08	3.63	0.81	3.49	0.94	Much practiced
C. Competing Style	2.54	1.02	2.61	0.92	2.57	0.97	Less practiced
D. Avoiding Style	3.55	1.05	3.13	0.98	3.34	1.01	Fairly practiced
E. Compromising Style	3.91	0.86	3.92	0.78	3.91	0.82	Much practiced
Grand Mean	3.51	0.95	3.51	0.86	3.51	0.90	Much practiced

Table 1 presents the degree of teachers' conflict management styles as assessed by teacher-respondents and their school heads. It revealed that both teachers and their school heads appraised collaborating style ($M=4.23$, $SD=0.78$) as very much practiced. This means that

teachers cooperatively worked with their colleagues to resolve issues through assertive communication until they come up to an amenable solution. It implies that most of the teachers want to maintain a highly assertive yet humane manner of managing conflict through appropriate communication and open mind. This validates Pammer's (2003) proposition that recognizing and making sense of conflict, imagining alternatives, and communicating to pursue resolution were among the main dimensions of effective conflict management. Further, Angeles (2013) found out that collaboration conflict management strategy was utilized differently between the elementary and secondary school teachers.

The teachers and school heads rated much practiced the accommodating style ($M = 3.49$, $SD=0.94$). It can be inferred that teachers preserve good companionship among their colleagues. Confirming this is Crawford and Bodine's (1996) contention that conflict could be a constructive challenge offering the opportunity for growth. This also substantiates Nuguit's (2014) findings that majority of the outstanding schools had principals who utilized accommodating conflict management style.

As to competing style ($M=2.57$, $SD=0.97$), the two sets of respondents rated it less practiced. This suggests that teachers took utmost respect of their co-workers feelings and disinclined to insist their personal side of the issue. In like manner, Thomas and Kilmann (2006) asserted that competition has negative repercussions for relationships since it emphasizes win/lose solution. This is also supported by Ghaffar's *et al.*, (2012) finding that according to the viewpoints of teachers, principals frequently or never opted for a competitive approach in conflict management.

Results also revealed that both the teachers and the school heads assessed avoiding style ($M=3.34$, $SD=1.01$) as fairly practiced. This indicates that teachers kept themselves away from committing unpleasant activities that may create any kind of conflict between and among their colleagues. This corroborates with Edmonson's (2008) concept that more are concerned about keeping people happy than making decisions that are in the best interest of the organization. Also, this concurs with the assertion that people sometimes settle to indirect strategies in handling conflict and choose to avoid or withdraw from disagreement showing communicative behaviors as silence, glossing over the differences, and concealing ill feelings (Pammer *et al.*, 2003).

The same table indicates that the respondents appraised compromising style ($M= 3.91$, $SD=0.82$) as much practiced. It can be said that teachers adherence in identifying win-win solution as means of splitting differences is evident. This reaffirms Balay's (2007) findings that both identification and internalization are significant determinants of the use of compromising conflict management strategy. Further, majority of the teachers utilized compromise conflict resolution strategy highly extensive (Angeles, 2013).

As a whole, both the teachers and school head respondents appraised the teachers' conflict management styles ($M=3.51$, $SD=0.90$) as much practiced. It can be concluded that teachers judiciously utilized varied and appropriate conflict management styles depending on the surrounding circumstances. Pammer (2003) argued that education about how to understand and handle conflict is an essential ingredient of democracy, as well as essential for safe and healthy personal and community lives.

Table 2. Level of School Climate as Assessed by Teacher-respondents and their School Heads

	Teachers		School Heads		Average		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Interpretation
A. Collegial Leadership	3.69	0.89	3.71	0.72	3.70	0.81	Much favorable
B. Teacher Professionalism	3.12	0.84	2.94	0.47	3.03	0.65	Moderately favorable
C. Academic Press	3.52	0.89	3.72	0.77	3.62	0.83	Much favorable
D. Institutional Vulnerability	3.34	0.87	3.30	0.79	3.32	0.83	Moderately favorable
Grand Mean	3.42	0.87	3.42	0.69	3.42	0.78	Much favorable

Table 2 shows the level of school climate as assessed by the teacher-respondents and their school heads. It indicated that teachers and school heads evaluated collegial leadership ($M=3.70$, $SD=0.81$) as much favorable. This means that teachers believed that the school where they work exhibits fair leadership, and that they were given equal consideration, support, and opportunities regardless of their rank and power. These results attested Surio's (2015) findings that teachers had harmonious relationship with school heads and their supervisors.

The data on the same table revealed that teacher professionalism ($M=3.03$, $SD=.65$) was rated much favorable by the teachers and their school heads. It can be concluded that teachers recognized and value their co-workers abilities leading to a sound organizational camaraderie. As stressed by Kelton (2010), promoting professional interaction, and support, can establish an appropriate school climate.

Further, the respondents rated academic press ($M=3.62$, $SD=0.83$) as much favorable. This means that teachers were well-provided with the needed resources in teaching, thus, achieving academic goals. This findings support the literature that a positive school climate is associated with academic achievement and positive youth development. This is synonymous with Zander's (2005) affirmation that school climate simultaneously affects students on an individual and collective level.

As to the institutional vulnerability component ($M=3.32$, $SD=0.83$), the teachers and their school heads considered it moderately favorable. It can be inferred that teachers were able to establish linkage with the community yet observed strong adherence to policies and laws coming from higher authorities which contributed much in putting up an encouraging school climate. This reinforces the literature that climate is defined by shared perceptions of behavior. It also reflects with Surio's (2015) findings that involvement of the community to the schools was high. Moreover, organizational climate and community involvement significantly predicted work motivations and teaching performance.

Generally, the level of school climate ($M=3.42$, $SD=0.78$) was appraised by the teacher and school head-respondents as much favorable. This means that school heads observed that teachers themselves were able to establish an effective learning environment in terms of collegial leadership, teacher professionalism, academic press, and institutional vulnerability. Consequently, Balero's (2016) study showed that elementary schools in the province of

Northern Samar had very much favorable situation in terms of school culture. This supports Preedy's (1993) finding which asserts that atmosphere is more pleasant in the effective schools.

Table 3. Test of relationship between teachers' conflict management style and school climate

		Teachers' Conflict Management Style
School Climate	Pearson r	.328
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	Interpretation	Significant

Pearson r was utilized to test for significant relationship between teachers' conflict management styles and school climate. Result of the analysis showed that there was a significant relationship between teachers' conflict management styles and school climate ($r = .328$, $p < .05$). This means that teachers' conflict management styles were associated with school climate. Reaffirming this, Gouwins (2009) posited that safe and orderly environment is not oppressive but is conducive to teaching and learning. Congruent to this finding, Crawford *et al.*, (1996) revealed that conflict is an inevitable part of life which can arise from discord of needs, drives, wishes, and/or demands but learning how to respond it constructively can contribute to a favorable atmosphere in a certain workplace. As Senge (1990) has emphasized, a learning organization is a group of people who function together in an extraordinary way - who trust one another, who complement each other's strengths and compensate for one another's limitations, who have common goals, and whom produce extraordinary results.

Table 4. Regression Analysis of Teachers' Conflict Management Styles and School Climate

School Climate		Teachers' Conflict Management Styles				
		Collabora-ting	Accommod-ating	competing	avoidin-g	compromisi-ng
Collegial Leadership	B	.196	.112	-.029	.018	-.013
	Beta	.242	.215	-.047	.029	-.018
	<i>p-value</i>	.000	.000	.353	.591	.754
	<i>Interpretation</i>	Significant	Significant	Not significant	Not significant	Not significant
Teacher Professionalism	B	.003	.141	.067	.018	-.071
	Beta	.005	.317	.127	.035	-.113
	<i>p-value</i>	.930	.000	.012	.506	.048
	<i>Interpretation</i>	Not significant	Significant	Significant	Not significant	Significant
Academic press	B	.114	.179	-.050	-.080	.108
	Beta	.128	.313	-.074	-.119	.134
	<i>p-value</i>	.019	.000	.143	.025	.019
	<i>Interpretation</i>	Significant	Significant	Not significant	Significant	Significant

Institutional Vulnerability	B	.044	.149	.042	.011	-.038
	Beta	.054	.285	.068	.018	-.051
	<i>p-value</i>	.332	.000	.188	.744	.381
	<i>Interpretation</i>	Not significant	Significant	Not significant	Not significant	Not significant
R	.328					
R ²	.108					
F-value	44.04					
<i>p-value</i>	.000*					
<i>Interpretation</i>	Significant					

Multiple regression analysis was employed to determine whether teachers' conflict management style predicted school climate. It revealed that, generally, teachers' conflict management style explained the school climate 10.8 percent of the time ($R = .328$, $R^2 = .108$, $F = 44.044$, $p < .05$). This suggests that teachers' conflict management styles are concomitant to school climate. This negates Balay's (2007) assertion that conflict resolution was not predicted by any level of organizational commitment.

Specifically, collaborating style ($B = .196$, $\beta = .242$, $p < .05$) and accommodating style ($B = .112$, $\beta = .215$, $p < .05$) predicted school climate in terms of collegial leadership. This means that teachers and school heads being supportive and obliging contributed much in putting up a healthy work environment. This verifies Kelton's (2010) claim that supportive principal behavior and committed and collegial teacher behaviors are equally important to constitute a professional learning community. Parallel to this, Angeles (2013) found out that teachers in both elementary and secondary level differed on the extent of collaboration as a strategy.

Moreover, the data showed that accommodating style ($B = .141$, $\beta = .317$, $p < .05$), competing style ($B = .067$, $\beta = .127$, $p < .05$), and compromising style ($B = -.071$, $\beta = -.113$, $p < .05$) were predictors of teacher professionalism. It can be deduced that teachers' professional capability to carry out their work is heightened when they were given tasks that are in accord to their line of expertise thereby satisfying the expectations of their colleagues. This result is supported by Weber's Bureaucratic Organizational Model which asserted that the authority of each official within the organization must commensurate with the scope of the responsibilities associated with the organizational position filled (Simon, 2009).

In addition, academic press was predicted by collaborating style ($B = .114$, $\beta = -.128$, $p < .05$), accommodating style ($B = .179$, $\beta = -.313$, $p < .05$), avoiding style ($B = -.080$, $\beta = -.119$, $p < .05$), and compromising style ($B = -.108$, $\beta = -.134$, $p < .05$) of conflict management. It can be extrapolated that for teachers to be able to set and achieved academic goals, an appropriate dose of the different conflict management styles must be utilized depending on the problem at hand. This coincides with one of the dimensions of conflict management which stresses that there are different procedures available in confronting and handling conflict (Pammer *et al.*, 2003).

Meanwhile, only accommodating style ($B = .149$, $\beta = .285$, $p < .05$) predicted institutional vulnerability. This means that schools may weaken when teachers are taking too much concession to external dynamic forces. By conferring clearly about the issue new information will come to light which may change the possible course of action (Edmonson, 2008).

Table 5. Test of difference between the assessment of teachers and school heads on teachers' conflict management style

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Degrees of Freedom	T - stat	Sig.	Interpretation
Teachers	3.54	.61	54	.037	.813	Not Significant
School Heads	3.54	.62				

Independent means t-test was utilized to determine the significant difference between the assessment of teachers and school heads on teachers' conflict management styles. It was found that there was no significant difference between the assessment of teachers ($m = 3.54$, $SD = 0.61$) and school heads ($m = 3.54$, $SD = .62$) on teachers' conflict management styles ($t(54) = .037$, $p > .05$). This means that the teachers and their school heads' assessment on teachers' conflict management style are substantive of each other. This supports Angeles' (2013) findings that teachers shared the same extent of utilizing avoidance, compromise, smoothing, and collaboration as conflict management strategy.

Table 6. Test of difference between the assessment of teachers and school heads on school climate

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Degrees of Freedom	T - stat	Sig.	Interpretation
Teachers	3.47	.90	52	-.027	.123	Not Significant
School Heads	3.48	1.13				

Independent means t-test was utilized to determine the significant difference between the assessment of teachers and school heads on school climate. It was found that there was no significant difference between the assessment of teachers ($m = 3.47$, $SD = 0.90$) and school heads ($m = 3.48$, $SD = 1.13$) on school climate ($t(52) = -.027$, $p > .05$). This means that the teachers and school heads had the same valuation of school climate. As Gouwens (2009) has emphasized, in the effective school there is a clearly articulated school mission through which the school heads and staff shares an understanding of and commitment to the instructional goals, priorities, assessment procedures and accountability.

Table 7. Test of difference on the teachers' conflict management styles among the three districts

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	P-value	Interpretation
Between Groups	0.282	2	0.141	0.337	0.715	Not Significant
Within Groups	33.829	81	0.418			
Total	34.111	83				

One-way ANOVA was used to test the significant difference on the teachers' conflict management styles among the three districts. It revealed that the difference on teachers' conflict management styles among the three districts ($F(2, 81) = 0.337$, $p > 0.05$) was not significant. This infers that teachers' conflict management styles in the three elementary

districts of Laoang were comparable. Similar is depicted in the study conducted by Aljibe (2000) which concluded that teachers pursue judiciously the goals of the institution where they work despite the apparent resistance of a few disgruntled elements which is inherent in any organization.

Table 8. Test of difference on the school climate among the three districts

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	P-value	Interpretation
Between Groups	0.136	2	.068	.078	0.925	Not Significant
Within Groups	67.818	78	0.869			
Total	67.954	80				

One-way ANOVA was used to test the significant difference on school climate among the three districts. It revealed that the difference on school climate among the three districts ($F(2, 78) = 0.078, p > 0.05$) was not significant. It can be said that the school climate in the three elementary school districts in Laoang were similar. This confirms the literature that school climate is larger than any one person's experiences. When people work together, a group process emerges that is bigger than any one person's actions. Relatively, Surio (2015) found out that organizational climate in Northern Samar was found "very much favorable".

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following conclusions and recommendations were drawn:

Teachers' conflict management style is associated with the school climate. The teachers' ability to employ conflict management styles appropriate to the given situation or circumstances is vital in sustaining a sound school climate conducive to teaching and learning. Moreover, teachers and school heads being supportive and obliging contributed much in putting up a healthy work environment necessary in nurturing and attaining academic success among school children.

Recommendations

- Teachers should continue to adopt a conflict management strategy which would work toward mutual gains.
- Teachers should be persistent in taking efforts in guarding and sustaining the positive school climate.
- School heads should conduct capability building activities involving their teachers to continually improve their conflict management styles, likewise to further enhance the present status of school climate.
- Studies with similar variables and/or other dynamics affecting school climate should be conducted.

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