Investigating the Association between School Principals’ Emotional Intelligence and Teachers’ Conflict Management: A Case Study on Elementary Schools, Takab, Iran

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the association between emotional intelligence as one of the factors affecting conflict management among teachers. This association was analyzed through cluster sampling with a sample size consisting of 120 individuals. The results of the study showed that, at the 95% level of confidence, the two secondary hypotheses (i.e. association between emotional intelligence of principals and use of competition and cooperation strategies of conflict management among teachers) were confirmed, but the other three secondary hypotheses (i.e. the association between emotional intelligence of managers and use of avoidance, adaptation and adaptability strategies of conflict management among teachers) were rejected. The primary hypothesis (i.e. association between emotional intelligence of managers with conflict management among teachers) is supported, too.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Conflict, Conflict Management, Strategies of Conflict Management.
Introduction

Different definitions of intelligence have been introduced in scientific studies which sometimes have some points in common. Among the most significant ones, one can point to items such as ability of logical reasoning, programming activities, solving issues and complications, thinking and remembering. Intelligence can lead individuals to achieve their objectives. Individuals who have more challenging aims in their lives are more successful and smarter than those without such aims (Niaz Azari, 2011).

Since 1990s, scientists in their studies have showed that the score of people’s intelligence does not guarantee their success but other characteristics are also necessary for establishment of human communication and life success. They suggested the term “social intelligence” as the ability to communicate with other individuals, have inter-personal knowledge, make proper judgment about feelings, perceive moods and motivations of other individuals, develop effective social performance, and to decrypt non-verbal symbols, which for the first time, the term “social interest” was raised. Then, the new concept of emotional intelligence was introduced for the first time by Peter Solovy and John Mayer (1993) and they defined this term this way: Emotional intelligence is the ability of identifying one’s and other individuals’ emotions, distinguishing between them and using this information to guide thoughts and actions of individuals. In this manner, emotion which had lost its original values was defined, in a cycle of evolutions of theories, as the fundamental factor in the identification of human behaviors including failures and successes which were attributed to rational intelligence for decades (Hin, 2004). Emotional intelligence is not only a positive feature but also a set of distinctive reasoning and emotive capabilities which, compared to social intelligence, do not consider basic emotive issues and resolving personal and social problems (Salasky and Gartyart, 2003).

Problem Statement

Due to increasing complexity of organizations and differences in thoughts, approaches and believes of individuals, conflict is regarded as the inevitable part of organizational affairs. The significant point is that organizational conflict is not basically a necessity but can promote innovation, change, and new insights, or it might lead to waste of energy and organizational resources. In other words, conflict is like a coin with two positive and negative sides, and it is the way of dealing with it that defines its organizational consequences. Therefore, the ability to manage and control the phenomenon of conflict in organizations is undoubtedly one of the significant skills which managers need to master.

Nowadays, human resources are regarded as the largest and most significant organizational property. Because any changes and evolutions of society will occur through changes in ideas, beliefs, and behaviors of human resources, and because the ground of this evolution is the education system, education is considered the basis of evolution in a society. The significance of departments of education in the present world is so considerable that most of sociologists view it as the most important entity in generation of a successful society.
On the other hand, school as the primary location for implementation of programs of this organization has a significant role to play. It has many employees whose performance will influence the procedures of realizing organizational plans. However, one could say that to precisely implement developmental plans, departments of education need respectful and responsible teachers who have interest in doing more useful activity compared with their works and duties.

During the conflict between principals and school teachers, the gravest harm is exerted on the quality of education of students, disrupting the goals of this organization. Among the ways of resolving conflicts, one can point to increasing the level of communication between managers and teachers to a proper level that now emotional intelligence is conceived as a factor affecting the interactions between individuals. In this regard, the present study endeavors to investigate the association between emotional intelligence as one of the factors affecting the style of conflict management of teachers in a statistical population.

**Research Significance**

In the present era, organizations have a significant position in the sociocultural structure. Most of basic and vital activities associated with lives of people are done in organizations. However, achieving comprehensive success, and proving comfort and convenience are not realized by the mere existence of organizations. To do achieve this objective, efficient and effective organizations are required (Mitchel, 1993).

One of the responsibilities of every social organization is achieving objectives which justify the reason for its existence. Realization of organizational aims depends on organized cooperation and interaction of all factors which attribute to the existence of organizations. From among these factors, human is the most important and most complicated one (Meshbaki, 1996).

Studying organizational conflict is important because it can influence the behavior of individuals and analysis of behavior in work settings. Significance of human resources is highly significant compared to other inter organizational resources. Conflict is conceived as the natural part of organizational life, and it is a fact that humankind has been familiar with during his history, yet, unfortunately, it has turned into violence due to improper management and now managers do not have positive approach towards it and regard it as a negative phenomenon (Aliceland Peace Institute, 2002).

Conflict is always accompanied by a feeling of anger, helplessness, pain, anxiety and fear, while conflict and our interpretation of it are negatively oriented. However, conflict is not essentially negative and the ability of managing conflict bring about certain the consequences (USDA Organization, 2002). The significant point is that although conflict is unavoidable and is heated due to differences of objectives, values, and beliefs, one can guide and minimize it. Therefore, awareness of knowledge and skills of conflict management to benefit it is an essential issue.

Among other issues which highlight the significance of the present study, one can point to the ability of managing and controlling conflicts within organizations, which is the most vital managerial skill managers need. Lack of success in this skill results in wasting organizational
resources, which instead of realizing organizational objectives, they are spent to remove the conflicts generated between managers and employees.

Objectives

The objective of present study is to identify the association between manager’s emotional intelligence and conflict management strategies to obtain proper strategies to face and resolve the conflict between managers and teachers of Takab town, Iran. The applied objective of present study is to provide useful information in different domains of organizational behavior to increase educational efficiency and quality.

Research Hypotheses

By doing preliminary studies and considering a theoretical background to answer research questions, the following hypotheses were proposed, analyzed and tested.

Main Hypothesis

There is a significant relationship between emotional intelligence of managers and teachers’ conflict management.

Secondary Hypotheses

5.2.1-There is a significant relationship between managers’ emotional intelligence and teachers’ use of avoidance strategy in conflict management.

5.2.2- There is a significant relationship between managers’ emotional intelligence and teachers’ use of compromise strategy in conflict management.

5.2.3- There is a significant relationship between managers’ emotional intelligence and teachers’ use of competition strategy in conflict management.

5.2.4- There is a significant relationship between managers’ emotional intelligence and teachers’ use of adaptation strategy in conflict management.

5.2.5- There is a significant relationship between managers’ emotional intelligence and teachers’ use of cooperation strategy in conflict management.

Research Method

Because that present study was a non-experimental one, it relied on a descriptive-survey method. After the selection of representative samples from the total population, investigation of frequency, distribution and mutual associations of social and personal variables was conducted, and quantitative data were collected through questionnaires to test the hypotheses.
Review of Theoretical Principles

Emotional Intelligence

Today, emotional intelligence is defined as an intelligence type which includes precise understanding of the person and exact elaboration of emotional moods of other people. Emotional intelligence evaluates individuals in emotional terms, which means that how much they are aware of their emotions and feelings and how they control them. Emotional intelligence is an intermediate factor which can improve group performance, and has the following aspects:

- **Identification of one’s and other individuals’ feelings:** Most self-evaluation skills in this domain do not measure the real ability of individuals in properly understanding the feelings of other people. Therefore, managers might lose valuable information regarding the interaction with other people, but it is a common belief that they will be able to properly understand emotions of other individuals.
- **Use of feelings:** This term means the use of feelings to help in obtaining suitable results, solving problems, and using feelings to motivate people as the principles of professional work.
- **Ability to understand and conceive feelings of other people:** The ability to understand complicated feelings, awareness of their reasons, and how feelings change from one mode to another is called understanding feelings. This awareness helps us to know what encourages and what discourages people. So, we can plan better cooperation with other individuals.
- **Managing feelings:** This term means managing feelings of oneself and those of other people in work settings. One can consider different reactions such as denial of feelings, escaping from problems, confirming the general status of a situation without approving its trend, using feelings to solve problems and coordination of feeling and thinking (Peter Solovy and John Mayer, 2000).

Conflict Management

Normally, some problems and issues occur in an organization between managers and employees which is a setback against achieving objectives, and the most important issue is conflict. Conflict means intrusion, opposition and disagreement. Robbins (2005) believes that conflict is generated when an individual thinks that the opposing party is not seeking agreement or intends to prevent him/her from achieving desired objectives. Thompson regards any behavior as a conflict which is presented by member of an organization to oppose other members.

Conflict is an apparent disagreement between at most two persons one of whom feels that rarity of facility, inconsistency of objectives and intervention of other people prevents an individual from achieving his/her objectives (Suzan, 2007). Trends such as consistent modification of working procedure, higher diversity of employees, and team work contribute to conflict in the present world (Kalanen, Benzing and Perry, 2006). Based on these trends, the way of correctly managing conflicts has a significant role to play in development of organizations (Rahim, 2002).

Conflict management means resolution and, in some cases, control of conflict (Robbins, 2005) which demands strategies which can be selected based on self-confidence, flexibility, breadth of
vision, and action in different ways (Ivoshin, 2000). In fact, strategies of conflict management are the reactions of individuals to conflicting situations, which might change under diverse conditions (Friedman, 2000). Based on Thomas’s theory, one can name the styles of conflict management based on two aspects of cooperation and decisiveness and with terms such as competition, avoidance, adaptation and compromise (Sardessai and Zhao, 2006). The avoidance strategy (lack of decisiveness, cooperation) ignores the interests of parties involved by prevention from facing conflict or deferring a solution. Adaptation strategy (lack of decisiveness, cooperation) means the endeavor to satisfy needs and interests of the opposing party even if demands and interests of an individual are ignored.

The control strategy (lack of cooperation, decisiveness) refers to using autocratic, authoritative, and top-bottom methods to control conflict. In adaptation strategy (moderate cooperation and decisiveness), both parties pay attention to wishes and demands of themselves and interests and expectations of the other party. This strategy satisfies all preferences and expectations of both conflicting parties. Among these styles, cooperation and compromise strategies are more desired as the cooperative styles of organizations and are directly associated with creative management of conflicts, individual and organizational achievements (Sardessai and Zhao, 2006).

The key point in conflict management is the identification and analysis of conflict as well as selection of proper strategies. One of the significant subjects discussed by researchers regarding organizational conflicts is the effect of emotional intelligence of managers on the style of managing employees’ conflicts.

**Review of Literature**

There are different viewpoints and comments regarding the reaction of individuals to conflicts as analyzed in different studies one of which claims that individuals use a distinctive style of dealing with conflict based on their personality and other personal factors. In another approach, response of individuals is based on a special situation in which they are (contingency perspective; Thomas, 1977). Based on the theory of Albert Murphy (1941), conflict between managers and employees can be considered in the form of mutual interactions between leaders and followers, and influential factors in managing conflict among employees are divided into three categories of characteristics of employee, manager and the situation of conflicting parties (Kalanen, 2006).

The increase of studies on conflict has led to the investigation of numerous factors influencing management of conflict among which, one can mention investigation of the association between the style of managing conflict among employees and emotional intelligence of managers, which in this section, some of these researches are introduced:

**Casey (1997):** Casey investigated the effects of elements of emotional intelligence on skills of conflict management and showed that increase in self-respect and emotional self-consciousness can fortify skills of conflict management.
Baron (2000): In different studies, he showed that emotion has a potentially significant effect on conflicts consequences and emotions have widespread and vital role to play in conflicting situations and the real world.

Jordan and Troth (2003): These researchers investigated the possession of emotional intelligence and its function in predicting the reliance on conflict management among nurses and showed that there was a significant association between solution-orientation and cooperation styles.

Rohollah Kalhor (2009): In a study called “Association of Emotional Intelligence and Strategies of Conflict Management Used by Managers of Training Hospitals of Qazvin), he found out that there was a significant relationship between emotional intelligence of managers and non-defensive strategies of conflict management. This association is reverse. A significant association was also observed between the value of managers’ emotional intelligence and two strategies of solution orientation and control.

Zandi (2008): In this study, the following results were obtained during investigation of the association between emotional intelligence and different styles of conflict management:

- There was a significantly positive relationship between emotional intelligence and obtaining cooperation in conflict management.
- There was a significantly negative relationship between emotional intelligence and adaptation style (forgiveness) in conflict management.
- There was a significantly positive relationship between emotional intelligence and compromise strategy of conflict management.
- There was a significantly positive relationship between emotional intelligence and competition strategy of conflict management.

Mirkamali (2008): The researcher investigated the association between emotional intelligence and inclination to generate organizational change in educational managers and showed that there was a significant association between these two factors.

Keramati et.al (2010): Investigating the association between emotional intelligence and strategies of conflict management used by managers, the researchers found out that there was a significant relationship between the above factors. That is, increase in emotional intelligence is followed by increase in using solution-orientation strategies compared to non-opposition and control strategies.

Statistical Population

The statistical population of present study consisted of all managers and teachers of Takab town in elementary schools.
Sampling and Defining the Sample Size

The sampling method was cluster sampling as statistical population was different and widespread in factors such as employment status (regular and payday), education, age, work experience and more significantly, in geographical terms. A total number of 120 questionnaires were distributed and collected in statistical population of present study.

Tools of Data Collection

In this study, two basic methods were selected to collect information based on the subject:

**Documentary Method (Library):** By using this method, information of literature and theoretical principles of present study were collected from books, essays and researches.

**Survey Method:** To define the style of managing conflicts of employees, the standard questionnaire of Putnam and Wilson (1998), consisting of 30 questions) was used which included strategies of non-opposition, avoidance, compromise, solution-orientation, cooperation, compromise and control of competition style. To measure the aspects of emotional intelligence, the standard questionnaire (30 questions) of Pytraydz and Farrnham (2002) including four items of understanding the feelings of oneself and other people, controlling feeling, social skills and optimism, was used in a five-item Likert scale.

Validity and Reliability of Measurement Tools:

Validity of present study was verified through library studies, comparison of other questionnaires in similar sources (with associated subjects), and consultation and collection of professors’ comments. Data from the questionnaires were used to test hypotheses and objectives of present study. To verify the reliability of present research, Cronbach’s alpha was used, the coefficients of which were respectively 0.89 and 0.83 in questionnaires of Putnam and Wilson (1998) and Pytraydz and Farrnham (2002).

Data Analysis

The collected data are provided in two inferential and descriptive sections. In descriptive section, the table of frequency distribution and statistical indexes such as mean and standard deviation are shown. In inferential section, Pearson’s correlation coefficient is illustrated based on hypotheses of present study.

Findings

There is a significant relationship between managers’ emotional intelligence and teachers’ use of avoidance strategy in conflict management.

Table 1. Relationship between managers’ emotional intelligence and teachers’ use of avoidance strategy in conflict management.
Based on Table 1 and obtained results (level of significance), the above hypothesis is rejected at the 95% level of confidence. That is, there is no significant and positive association between emotional intelligence of managers and teachers’ use of avoidance strategy in conflict management.

There is a significant relationship between managers’ emotional intelligence and teachers’ use of compromise strategy in conflict management.

Table 2. relationship between managers’ emotional intelligence and teachers’ use of compromise strategy in conflict management.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotional Intelligence</th>
<th>Use of Compromise Strategy</th>
<th>Correlation Coefficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Intelligence</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of Compromise Strategy</td>
<td>0.161</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correlation Coefficient</td>
<td>0.184</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on Table 2 and obtained results (level of significance), the above hypothesis was rejected at the 95% level of confidence. That is, there is no significant and positive association between emotional intelligence of managers and teachers’ use of compromise strategy in conflict management.

There is a significant relationship between managers’ emotional intelligence and teachers’ use of competition strategy in conflict management.

Table 3. Relationship between managers’ emotional intelligence and teachers’ use of competition strategy in conflict management.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Emotional</th>
<th>Use of Competition</th>
<th>Correlation</th>
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</table>

Based on Table 3 and obtained results (level of significance), the above hypothesis was rejected at the 95% level of confidence. That is, there is no significant and positive association between emotional intelligence of managers and teachers’ use of competition strategy in conflict management.

There is a significant relationship between managers’ emotional intelligence and teachers’ use of competition strategy in conflict management.
Intelligence | Strategy | Coefficient
---|---|---
Emotional Intelligence | 1 | 0.258 | 0.031
Use of Competition Strategy | 0.258 | 1 | 0.031

Based on Table 3 and obtained results (level of significance), the above hypothesis was confirmed at the 95% level of confidence. In other words, there is a significant and positive association between emotional intelligence of managers and teachers’ use of competition strategy in conflict management.

There is a significant relationship between managers’ emotional intelligence and teachers’ use of adaptation strategy in conflict management.

Table 4. Relationship between managers’ emotional intelligence and teachers’ use of adaptation strategy in conflict management.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Emotional Intelligence</th>
<th>Use of Adaptation Strategy</th>
<th>Correlation Coefficient</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Intelligence</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of Adaptation Strategy</td>
<td>0.024</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on Table 4 and obtained results (level of significance), the above hypothesis is rejected at the 95% level of confidence. That is, there is no significant and positive association between emotional intelligence of managers and teachers’ use of adaptation strategy in conflict management.

There is a significant relationship between managers’ emotional intelligence and teachers’ use of cooperation strategy in conflict management.

Table 5. Relationship between managers’ emotional intelligence and teachers’ use of cooperation strategy in conflict management.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotional Intelligence</th>
<th>Use of Cooperation Strategy</th>
<th>Correlation Coefficient</th>
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Based on Table 5 and obtained results (level of significance), the above hypothesis was confirmed at the 95% level of confidence. In other words, that there is a significant and positive association between emotional intelligence of managers and application of cooperation strategy of conflict management among teachers.

Main Hypothesis: There is a significant relationship between emotional intelligence of managers and teachers’ conflict management.

Table 6. Relationship between emotional intelligence of managers and teachers’ conflict management

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotional Intelligence</th>
<th>Managing Teachers’ Conflicts</th>
<th>Correlation Coefficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.231</td>
<td>0.054</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing Teachers’ Conflicts</td>
<td>0.231</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on the Table 6 and obtained results (level of significance), the above hypothesis is rejected at the 95% level of confidence. That is, there is no significant and positive relationship between emotional intelligence of managers and teachers’ managing conflicts, but due to the fact that level of significance is less than 0.06, one can say that there is a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and teachers ‘managing conflicts at the 0.94% level of confidence.

Conclusion and Further Suggestions

Due to significance of employees’ conflict management in organizations and positive consequences of applying proper conflict management in development and perfection of organizations, the present study endeavored to investigate the association between managers’ emotional intelligence and styles of teachers’ conflict management to introduce a proper strategy (preferably cooperation style). The results of present study showed that there was a significant relationship between competition and cooperation strategies and aspects of managers’ emotional intelligence. The same thing did not hold true for other styles. In general, there was a significant and positive association between managers’ emotional intelligence and teachers’ conflict.
management. Based on research findings, the following propositions are provided for the present study:

- Due to lack of proper knowledge about emotional intelligence and its effect on solving conflicting situations, organizations are recommended to hold training courses to introduce this concept.
- Due to lack of association between avoidance, adaptation and adaptability of managing teachers’ conflicts and aspects of emotional intelligence, managers are recommended to pay more attention to other strategies of conflict management to improve educational quality.
- Because there was a significant relationship between managers’ emotional intelligence and competition and cooperation strategies in conflict management, managers are recommended to use these strategies more than other ones.
- As discussed above, there are different factors influencing managers’ conflict management, but the present study only referred to managers’ emotional intelligence and other factors such as characteristics of employees and location of parties. Researchers can analyze these factors in their future studies to obtain a better knowledge of necessary condition for guiding employees towards using cooperation strategies.
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