



## A Study of Principals' Conflict Management Styles in Government Degree Colleges of Punjab

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**Abstract:** *The conflict has become integral in educational institutions. Institutional administrator plays a vital role in handling the conflict efficiently. The way leaders control the conflict can affect the staff and institutional performance. This research focuses on identifying the conflict management styles of principals. This study was descriptive and quantitative in nature. Teachers working in government degree colleges located in central Punjab were the target population of the study. There are 339 government degree colleges in central Punjab and 4623 teachers (male and female) are working in these colleges. The sample was selected by using the multistage sampling technique. Sample of this research comprised 884 teachers (male and female). The questionnaire was used for the collection of data. Mean standard deviation and frequency in descriptive statistics whereas independent sample t-test and one-way ANOVA was used in inferential statistics. Results of the study revealed that principals are using different styles to manage conflict. The dominating style was being used by female principals, whereas male principals preferred to use compromising and avoiding style to handle conflict in government degree colleges of Punjab.*

**Key Words:** Conflict Management, Conflict Management Styles

### Introduction

The organization is going through rapid change in the twenty-first century to meet global challenges. Change in any institute is persistent and educational institutes are required to adjust and maintain flexibility to continue workable. A large part of research on organizational conflict has been carried out in organizations, which have non-academic settings, but it does not mean that educational institutions are free from conflict (Reio & Ghosh, 2009). Conflict exists in the educational institutions, which is considered a negative force and its existence in the institutes is strongly disliked by faculty members (Hearn & Anderson, 2002).

Conflict is distinct as a communication process articulated in inconsistency, a difference of opinion within or between persons, groups and institutes (Rahim, 2001). The five types of conflict management styles consist of; integrating (problem-solving), dominating, accommodating or obliging, avoiding and compromising. A mutually acceptable solution is sorted out by integrating style of managing conflict. Sharing of information symbolizes the style. The authoritative style represents where one party loses and the other party has a winning situation. In dominating style one party puts emphasis on their own view on another party.

The obliging style includes high consideration for others' matters while low regard for one's wishes. Low concerns are

associated for both the parties in avoiding style. It is chosen by persons when they want to refute and disengage from a conflict situation. In a compromising style an intermediate solution is approached that indicates modest regard for both of the parties (Trudel, & Reio, 2011). In the workplace, people do not negotiate with each other as a result, chances of conflict rise which ultimately generates problems in an organization. According to Mayer (2004), if institutes are unable to manage the conflict increase the probability of future conflict and lessens the staff productivity. Unmanaged conflict negatively affects the output of employees' performance. This research explored the principals' preferences regarding their styles of managing conflict in the workplace.

### Operational Definition of Terms

#### Conflict

Conflict refers to any inconsistency, interpersonal and organizational differences within or between individuals, groups, or institutions.

#### Conflict Management

Planning efficient strategies diminish the destructive conflict in order to maximize the learning and effectiveness in an organization.

#### Conflict Management Styles

Use of various strategies to resolve the conflict in different circumstances.

### Research Objectives

The objectives of the study were:

1. Identify the conflict management styles of principals in Government Degree Colleges of the Punjab.

2. Explore the differences in the views of the teacher regarding conflict management styles of principals with respect to their demographics (gender, experience and designation).

### Research Questions

Following research questions were formulated to address the study objectives:

1. Which style principals use to manage conflict in Government Degree Colleges of the Punjab?
2. What are the differences in the views of the respondents regarding conflict management styles of principals in Government Degree Colleges of the Punjab with respect to their gender?
3. Is there any difference in the views of teachers regarding the conflict management style of principals with respect to their designation?

### Literature Review

#### Rahim and Bonoma Model for Conflict Management Styles

Rahim and Bonoma (1979) developed a model for conflict management styles based on the Blake and Mouton (1964) Managerial Grid. Similar to the two dimensions, concern for people and concern for production, proposed by Blake and Mouton, Rahim and Bonoma's model uses the two dimensions, concern for self and concern for others. Rahim and Bonoma (1979) suggest that people manage conflict in a style that directly relates to the person's concern for themselves and their concern for others. Two axes of model showing for self-consideration and intention for others on the conflict handling strategies.

### Concern for Self

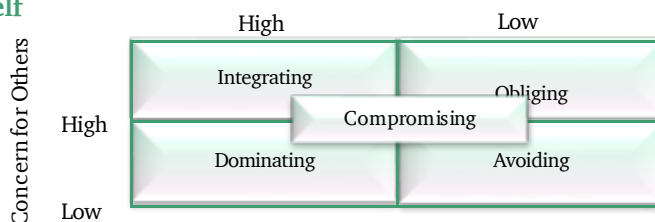


Figure 1: The Styles of Handling Interpersonal Conflict

Individuals' dominant styles are found in their scores which place them within the areas of low-low, low-high, high-low, high-high, or middle-middle. Each of the five areas is assigned a conflict management style that aligns with the placement on the grid.

These strategies of conflict handling are categorized as: avoiding, compromising, dominating, integrating, and accommodating. Persons who do not consider others' wishes and also have low consideration for them adopt an avoiding approach to handle the conflict. Integrating the mode of conflict is suitable for seeking mutual resolution. In order to find a joint solution that would be helpful for both parties, an integrating style is preferred by the persons. A person with high regard for his/her wishes and low regards for others' interest usually use dominating style. It is a win-lose situation. This mode of handling conflict is also referred to as competing. In an obliging mode to handle conflict, one party tries to satisfy the needs of the other without considering their own wishes. It is also referred to as an accommodating mode of conflict handling. Finally, a person chooses the mid-way approach i.e. compromising, to seek a suitable resolution for him and for others (Bartlet, 2009).

Administrators and leaders choose their style by considering the situation to handle them (Rahim, 2001). According to Hocker and Wilmot (1995), change in conflict handling style depends upon the situation and a person evolves in conflict. One needs to opt for the best efficient strategy to handle the conflict according to the prescribed context in which the conflict takes place (Rahim, 2001).

Rahim (1983) categorized the conflict management styles into five styles; avoiding, compromising, dominating, integrating, and accommodating. All the conflict resolution styles are suitable in different situations (Conerly & Tripathi, 2004). Therefore, individuals use different styles in different situations to manage conflict. Friedman, Tidd, Currall, and Tsai (2000) study also supports using various styles instead of having an authoritative style. The persons who like to

choose the dominating style to handle conflict may yield such an environment that maximizes the future conflict. Contrariwise other studies sustained the use of one persistent style to resolve conflict (Kuhn & Poole, 2000). Conflict can be managed properly if someone better understands the use of different styles in different situations (Conerly & Tripathi, 2004). Each style has its own importance, and no style is better than the other one. For instance, three of the conflict styles likewise integrating, authoritative and ignoring were associated with the competency approach (Gross & Guerrero, 2000). Whereas, Friedman, Tidd, Currall, and Tsai (2000) stated that persons who chooses problem-solving style yield a less conflict setting, though those dominating and avoiding styles are more likely to produce conflict based setting in institutes.

### **Conflict Management Styles and Demographics**

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In case of differences in choosing conflict style on the bases of gender showed that females tend to use cooperative strategies. That may also include integrating, obliging and sometimes avoiding (Klenke, 2003; Brahnam, Margavio, Hignite, Barrier, & Chin, 2005). Whereas, male utilizes their influence in terms of dominating and, in some circumstances, prefer avoiding strategy. Chan, Monroe, Ng, and Tan, (2006) research did not find any difference mainly in accommodating, compromising and integrating styles.

The length of experience has an effect on conflict management styles. Research on school teachers showed that teachers' job experience was related to their preferences in choosing style to handle conflict. Hamayun, Muhammad, Khan, and Attia, (2014) conducted research in higher education institutions in Pakistan to explore the conflict-handling styles of teachers and administrators. Their study findings clearly showed that gender, designation and qualification affect the styles of conflict management.

## Methodology

The study was descriptive and quantitative in nature.

## Sample

All the teachers working in Government Degree Colleges located in central Punjab were the accessible population of the study. The Rationale for taking a sample from central Punjab is that it has a greater percentage of the population as compared to other zones of Punjab, and the number of colleges in central Punjab is comparatively more than the others. There are five divisions in central Punjab which cover 21 districts out of 36. In these five divisions (Faisalabad, Sahiwal, Sargodha, Gujranwala and Lahore), there are 339 male and female Government Degree Colleges. Total of 4623 teachers (male 1950 and female 2673) are working in these colleges.

The multistage sampling technique was used for the selection of samples. In the first stage, 50% of the district from each division was selected randomly. In the second stage, 30% of total male and female colleges were taken randomly from the selected districts. Therefore, the total colleges were 70 (male 25 and female 45). Total of 1768 teachers (male 666 and female 1102) working in these degree colleges of Punjab. Further, 50 percent of teachers of the total population, were taken

randomly from the selected district' Government Degree College. In this way, the sample of the study comprised 884 teachers (male 333 and female 531).

## Instrument

### Conflict Management Style Questionnaire CMSQ

To explore the conflict management style of principals, Conflict management style (CMSQ) was used. CMSQ was developed after reviewing the literature related to different approaches to conflict handling; accommodating, avoiding, dominating, integrating, and compromising. Five-point Likert-type scale (strongly disagree, disagree, undecided, agree, strongly agree) was used for measuring the conflict management styles of principals. CMSQ consists of 15 items, each subscale with three items.

A pilot study was conducted on a small sample. For this purpose, 80 teachers (40 male and 40female) were taken randomly from the Government Degree Colleges of the Lahore district. These were not included in the sample to be studied.

The reliability was calculated by applying Cronbach Alpha. Cronbach's alpha coefficient of overall CMSQ and five styles are given in table 1.

**Table 1.** Reliability of Instrument CMSQ

| Instrument          | No. of Items | Cronbach Alpha |
|---------------------|--------------|----------------|
| CMSQ overall        | 15           | .90            |
| Integrating style   | 3            | .94            |
| Dominating style    | 3            | .93            |
| Accommodating style | 3            | .80            |
| Avoiding style      | 3            | .83            |
| Compromising style  | 3            | .79            |

## Data Collection

It was planned to collect the data personally by the researcher. But due to COVID-19 data collection phase suffered a lot. All the educational institutions remain close due to this pandemic. By considering the COVID-19

situation and external barriers to complete lockdown in the country from March 2020 to September 2020, it was planned to collect data online through Google form. A questionnaire was created on Google form in April 2020. Teachers were approached via social media. A questionnaire was posted on relevant Facebook

pages consisting of people from male-female colleges in the five divisions of Punjab. Teachers were also approached on messenger. A questionnaire link was shared with them along with the consent form. Teachers were requested personally and reminders were also given to whomever it was required for their responses. Similarly, some of the male and female teachers were also approached via Whatsapp. A questionnaire link was shared with them.

However, the response rate remained slow. Therefore, it took a lot of time to complete the data collection phases. The total sample of the study consists of 884 teachers. The response rate remained 70%. The whole process of data collection was completed in four months i.e. April 2020 to July 2020.

### Ethical Considerations

Research ethics was considered for the study. Participants' consent was taken and

confidentiality of data was ensured. No benefits or payments were provided for those who participated; likewise, no negative impact was incurred on those who chose not to participate.

### Data Analysis

Descriptive and inferential statistics were applied for the analysis of the data. In descriptive statistics, the mean and standard deviation was computed to identify the perceived level of workplace incivility. While in inferential statistics, independent samples t-test and ANOVA were applied to find out the difference in the opinion of teachers on the bases of demographic variables (gender, designation).

### Question No 1

What do principals describe using conflict Management styles in Government Degree Colleges of the Punjab?

**Table 2.** Mean and Standard Deviation for Averaged Conflict Management Styles of Government College Principals.

| Variables     | Min  | Max  | M    | SD   |
|---------------|------|------|------|------|
| Integrating   | 1.00 | 5.00 | 2.92 | .82  |
| Dominating    | 1.00 | 5.00 | 2.65 | .96  |
| Accommodating | 1.00 | 5.00 | 2.76 | .87  |
| Avoiding      | 1.00 | 5.00 | 2.74 | 1.01 |
| Compromising  | 1.00 | 5.00 | 2.93 | .84  |

Table 2 depicts the mean value for the five conflict management styles. The highest mean was reported for the compromising conflict management style ( $M = 2.93$ ,  $SD = .84$ ) while the lowest mean was for the dominating style ( $M=2.65$ ,  $SD = .96$ ). Compromising Style was the highest used conflict management style adopted by Principals of Government degree colleges of the Punjab.

This result indicated that Principals have moderate concern for one's goals and others' goals. The second preferred style was

integrating ( $M= 2.92$ ,  $SD = .82$ ) then accommodating style ( $M=2.76$ ,  $SD=.87$ ). Avoiding style ( $M=2.74$ ,  $SD= 1.01$ ) and dominating were least preferred styles ( $M =2.65$ ,  $SD = .96$ ).

### Question No 2

What is the difference in the conflict management styles principals on the bases of gender in Government Degree Colleges of the Punjab?

**Table 3.** Difference between Male and Female Principals Regarding Conflict Management Styles

| Factors           | Gender | N   | Mean | SD   | t-value | Df  | Sig. |
|-------------------|--------|-----|------|------|---------|-----|------|
| Overall CM Styles | Male   | 268 | 8.53 | 1.64 | 1.58    | 622 | .11  |
|                   | Female | 356 | 8.32 | 1.55 |         |     |      |
| Integrating Style | Male   | 268 | 8.60 | 3.02 | 2.54    | 622 | 0.11 |
|                   | Female | 356 | 7.97 | 3.03 |         |     |      |
| Dominating        | Male   | 268 | 7.61 | 2.75 | -2.58   | 622 | .010 |
|                   | Female | 356 | 8.21 | 2.95 |         |     |      |
| Accommodating     | Male   | 268 | 8.36 | 2.64 | .53     | 622 | .594 |
|                   | Female | 356 | 8.25 | 2.59 |         |     |      |
| Avoiding          | Male   | 268 | 9.04 | 2.41 | 2.38    | 622 | .018 |
|                   | Female | 356 | 8.56 | 2.51 |         |     |      |
| Compromising      | Male   | 268 | 9.04 | 2.50 | 2.01    | 622 | .044 |
|                   | Female | 356 | 8.63 | 2.52 |         |     |      |

Table 3 shows that an independent-sample t-test was applied to find out the difference in the teachers' perception regarding conflict management styles of male and female principals. Results indicated that there was no significant difference of male ( $M=8.53$ ,  $SD=1.64$ ) and female principals ( $M=8.32$ ,  $SD=1.55$ ),  $t(622)=1.58$  at  $p=.11$  regarding conflict management styles.

Result indicated that there was significant difference between male ( $M=7.61$ ,  $SD=2.75$ ) and female principals ( $M=8.21$ ,  $SD=2.95$ ),  $t(622)=-.25$  at  $p<.05$  regarding the use of dominating conflict management. Female principals more likely to use dominating conflict management style than male principals in government degree colleges of the Punjab. There was significant difference in mean score of male ( $M=9.04$ ,  $SD=2.41$ ) and female principals ( $M=8.56$ ,  $SD=2.51$ ),  $t(622)=2.38$  at  $p<.05$  regarding the use of avoiding conflict management style. It is concluded that male principals more likely to use avoiding conflict management style as compared to female principals. There was significant difference between male ( $M=9.04$ ,  $SD=2.50$ ) and female principals ( $M=8.63$ ,  $SD=2.52$ ),  $t(622)=2.01$

at  $p<.05$  regarding the use of compromising conflict management style. Mean scores of male teachers was higher than the female teachers regarding the use of compromising conflict management style. Male principals more likely to use compromising conflict management style than female principals in government degree colleges of the Punjab.

However, there was no significant difference between male ( $M=8.60$ ,  $SD=3.02$ ) and female principals ( $M=7.97$ ,  $SD=3.03$ ),  $t(622)=2.54$ ,  $p=0.11$  regarding the use of integrating conflict management style. Findings of the study revealed that there was no significant difference between male ( $M=8.36$ ,  $SD=2.64$ ) and female principals ( $M=8.25$ ,  $SD=2.59$ ) teachers perception  $t(622)=.53$  at  $p=.59$  regarding use of accommodating conflict management style of principals on the bases of gender.

### Question No 3

What is the difference in the conflict management styles of principals on the bases of designation in Government Degree Colleges of the Punjab?

**Table 4.** Difference in Mean Scores of Conflict Management Styles of Principals in views of Teachers on the bases of their Designation

| Factors           |                | Sum of Squares | Df  | Mean Square | F    | Sig. |
|-------------------|----------------|----------------|-----|-------------|------|------|
| Integrating style | Between Groups | 86.60          | 2   | 43.30       | 4.72 | .009 |
|                   | Within Groups  | 5694.88        | 621 | 9.17        |      |      |

|                     | Total          | 5781.48 | 623 |        |       |      |
|---------------------|----------------|---------|-----|--------|-------|------|
| Dominating Style    | Between Groups | 203.26  | 2   | 101.63 | 12.64 | .000 |
|                     | Within Groups  | 4989.48 | 621 | 8.035  |       |      |
|                     | Total          | 5192.74 | 623 |        |       |      |
| Accommodating Style | Between Groups | 47.73   | 2   | 23.86  | 3.52  | .030 |
|                     | Within Groups  | 4209.62 | 621 | 6.77   |       |      |
|                     | Total          | 4257.35 | 623 |        |       |      |
| Avoiding Style      | Between Groups | 2.927   | 2   | 1.46   | .23   | .790 |
|                     | Within Groups  | 3843.84 | 621 | 6.19   |       |      |
|                     | Total          | 3846.76 | 623 |        |       |      |
| Compromising        | Between Groups | 29.569  | 2   | 14.78  | 2.33  | .098 |
|                     | Within Groups  | 3938.11 | 621 | 6.34   |       |      |
|                     | Total          | 3967.68 | 623 |        |       |      |

Table represents that Analysis of variance was applied to find out the difference about the use of all the conflict management styles of principals in views of teachers on the basis of designation (Lecturer, Assistant Professor, Associate Professor). Results revealed that there was significant difference in the perception of male and female teachers about the use of integrating conflict management styles of principals on the bases of teachers' designation,  $F(2, 621) = 4.72, p < .05$ . Results revealed that there was significant difference in mean scores of male and female teachers about the use of dominating conflict management styles of principals on the bases of designation,  $F(2, 621) = 12.64$  and  $p < .05$ .

Teachers views about accommodating conflict management style of principals with respect to their designation:  $F(2, 621) = 3.521$  at  $p < .05$ ; about avoiding conflict management style:  $F(2, 621) = .236$  at  $p = .790$ ; about compromising conflict management style:  $F(2, 621) = 2.331$  at  $p = .098$ .

It is determined that teachers had different opinion regarding the use of conflict management styles of principals. Therefore, it is concluded that principal use different styles to manage conflict with staff by considering their designation.

**Table 5.** Tukey HSD for Integrating Conflict Management Styles of Principals on the bases of Teachers' Designation

| Dependent Variable | (I) Designation     | (J) Designation     | Mean Difference (I-J) | Sig. |
|--------------------|---------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|------|
| Integrating style  | Lecturer            | Associate Professor | 2.39*                 | .015 |
|                    | Associate Professor | Lecturer            | -2.39*                | .015 |

The TukeyHSD was applied to find out the mean difference in teachers' perceptions about the use of integrating conflict management style of principals on the bases of their designation. Results show that teachers working on the post of lecturer ( $M=8.47, SD=3.005$ ) have a significantly

different opinions from the teachers working on the post of associate professors ( $M=8.07$ ,  $SD=3.071$ ) about the usage of integrating conflict the management style of principals.

**Table 6.** Tukey HSD for Dominating Conflict Management Style of Principals on the bases of Teachers' Designation

| Dependent Variable | (I) Designation     | (J) Designation     | Mean Difference (I-J) | Sig. |
|--------------------|---------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|------|
| Dominating style   | Lecturer            | Assistant Professor | -.59*                 | .026 |
|                    |                     | Associate Professor | -3.69*                | .000 |
|                    | Assistant Professor | Lecturer            | .59*                  | .026 |
|                    |                     | Associate Professor | -3.10*                | .000 |
|                    | Associate Professor | Lecturer            | 3.69*                 | .000 |
|                    |                     | Assistant Professor | 3.10*                 | .000 |

The TukeyHSD indicates that teachers have a statistically significant difference in their opinion about the use of dominating conflict

management style of principals on the bases of their designation (Lecturer, Assistant Professor, and Associate Professor).

**Table 7.** Tukey HSD for Accommodating Conflict Management Style of Principals on the Bases of Teachers' Designation

| Dependent Variable     | (I) Designation     | (J) Designation     | Mean Difference (I-J) | Sig. |
|------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|------|
| Accommodating CM Style | Lecturer            | Assistant Professor | .51*                  | .041 |
|                        | Assistant Professor | Lecturer            | -.51*                 | .041 |

The TukeyHSD was applied to find out the mean difference in teachers' perceptions about the use of accommodating conflict management style of principals on the bases of their designation. The result shows that teachers working on the post of lecturer were significantly different from the teachers working on the post of assistant professor in their opinion about the usage of accommodating conflict management style of principals.

## Result and Discussion

An overview of important findings is presented along with the supportive and contrast result in the light of literature. The first question of the study was to investigate the most preferred style of principals use to manage conflict in Government Degree Colleges of the Punjab?

The result showed that principals are using a compromising style to a large extent. While the avoiding and dominating style were the least adopted style to manage the conflict. This result indicated that Principals look into middle ground to find the solution to the problem. Gross and Guerrero (2000) reported that respondents find integrating style most effective, whereas, dominating is only suitable when both of these are used together in a conflict-handling situation. Avoiding was assumed as ineffective while obliging and compromising were perceived as neutral. These findings are similar to the previous study by Rahim (2001). Their studies found that when both the parties tend to have equal power, a provisional solution to a complicated problem is required, then the compromising style is moderately suitable and effective in this situation.

Another study conducted by Dillard's (2005) on secondary school assistant principals also found that compromising is most highly preferred and integrating style on second preference for managing conflict in workplace. Similarly, study conducted by Adams (2006) in North Carolina on college principals and found that collaborating and compromising styles are the most chosen and dominating style is not much preferred to manage the conflict. Ghaffar, Zaman, and Naz (2012) study findings are also consistent with the present research result.

Avoiding and dominating styles have been reported at least preferences for managing conflict in workplace. Avoiding style evolved low concern for both the parties. It is considered when principals refute and do not involve in a conflict situation. The dominating style is associated with a win-lose situation. It may create an uncongenial, toxic and unhealthy environment in organization.

Conflict handling has become an important task for educational administrators in institutions. More focus is put on working in a group or as a team with collaboration. The emerging and growing popularity of collaborative trends as a team in educational organizations could elucidate why educational administrators of all demographic are most likely to use compromising and problem-solving approaches to handle conflict.

The next question was to explore the differences in respondents' views regarding strategies of conflict and workplace incivility with respect to principals' and teachers' demographics (gender and designation).

Findings showed that dominating style was more adopted by female principals. Whereas, compromising and avoiding conflict management style was more used by male principals than female principals in government degree colleges of Punjab. Conversely to the present study findings, Brewer, Mitchell, and Weber's (2002) study result showed that males preferred to use dominating strategy of conflict while females were more likely to use avoiding. Conversely, a study conducted on university faculty found no

any relationship between strategies of conflict and gender (Gordon, 2008; Bartlet, 2009; Trudel, 2009).

Perceptions of male and female teachers varied about the use of conflict management styles of principals on the bases of their designation (Lecturer, Assistant Professor, and Associate Professor). Further it was found that all the conflict management styles showed significant differences except avoiding and compromising style on the bases of teachers' designation (Lecturer, Assistant Professor, and Associate Professor).

Brewer, Mitchell, and Weber (2002) study revealed that integrating style is more likely to use by individual who has a high rank in institutions. Whereas, avoiding and accommodating strategies of conflict are preferred by individual at lower organizational rank.

The result is consistent with the study conducted by Hamayun, Muhammad, Khan, & Attia (2014). They conducted research in higher education institutions in Pakistan to explore the conflict-handling styles of teachers and administrators. Their study findings clearly showed that gender, designation and qualification affect the styles of conflict management. Hence it is stated that education level and post of the job also affect the conflict style of the principals. Sometimes, the high-ranked authority adopted an obliging approach and the occasionally authoritative style among staff. Therefore, the change in demographic variables will affect the conflict styles.

## **Recommendations**

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The following recommendations are presented here by considering the major findings.

1. Principals need to adopt the most suitable conflict handling strategy. As the compromising strategy is perceived as moderately suitable and operative only in some circumstances.
2. There may be needed to design training programs to manage conflict for the teachers and administrators to solve the interpersonal problems. This will

increase their job productivity and diminish the deadly facets of conflict.

3. It is further recommended that principals may also be encouraged to adopt an integrating style for conflict management. Because integrating style is known as problem-solving style.
4. In training, principals need to be informed about the negative and hostile effects of an avoiding and dominating approach to resolving interpersonal conflict.

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