

The relationship between principals' reward power and their conflict management styles based on Thomas–Kilmann conflict mode instrument

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ABSTRACT

This paper studies the relationship between principals' reward power and their conflict management styles. The five conflict management styles that we use in this study are based on Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument and include accommodating, avoiding, collaborating, competing, and compromising styles. This study can be classified as a regression analysis and is a descriptive study. Our statistical society for this research included all principals of high schools located in the city of Birjand. The results indicated that there was a significant relationship between principal's reward power and accommodating conflict management style. The results also revealed that there was no significant relationship between principals' reward power and the other four conflict management styles.

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1. Introduction

A strong education system can help to boost the economic growth of a country, therefore it is important to pay attention to education. Iran can be considered as a growing economy (Amiri Aghdaie et al., 2012; Riasi & Amiri Aghdaie, 2013; Riasi, 2015a; Riasi, 2015b); therefore, it is important to study different aspects of the education system of this country because education can contribute to economic growth. One of the core elements of a strong educational system is educational management. Educational management is mainly concerned with the act of operating educational organizations and it must be particularly concerned with the goal of education (Bush, 1986; Bush, 1995; Bush, 1999; Bush, 2003). What managers do and how they make a difference in managing their organization have been studied for many years by various researchers (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Burs, 1978; Glatter & Kydd, 2003; Payne, 1875; Senge, 1990; Simon, 1945; Taylor, 1895; Yukl, 1994). There is a huge diversity in frameworks and methodology of research in the field of educational management (Heck & Hallinger,

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2005). Conflict management is of the most important roles of educational managers and particularly school principals. Educational organizations should pay too much attention to conflict management and be aware of how to settle these conflicts efficiently in order to be able to make use of the capacities of their employees in the best possible way. Power is a natural process that exists in an organization (Haugaard & Clegg, 2012; McClelland & Burnham, 2003). Managing an organization without having the power to do so is impossible, therefore the concept of organizational power is of great importance in studying conflict management. This study tries to evaluate the relationship between principals' reward power –which is one of the most vital sources of organizational power- and five different conflict management styles.

2. Sources of Organizational Power

French and Raven (1959) identified five sources of organizational power, namely: coercive, referent, legitimate, expert and reward power (Fig. 1). Many scholars have studied these five sources of organizational power and some of them tried to identify new sources (Carson et al., 1993; Finkelstein, 1992; Podsakoff & Schreisheim, 1985).

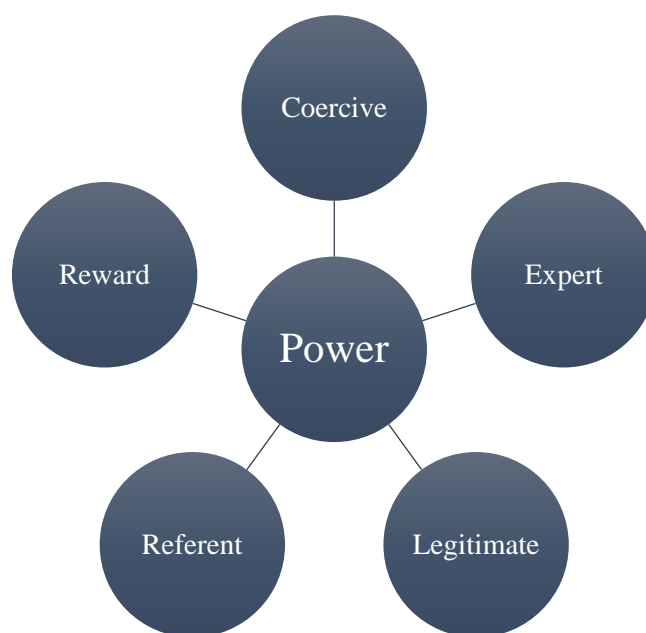


Fig 1. Five sources of organizational power

In this section we introduce these five sources of power briefly. Coercive power is the ability to influence other people by using threats, punishments or sanctions; in an organizational setting the coercive power facilitates the act of controlling employees by ensuring that they obey organizational policies (Merchant, 2013). Legitimate power comes from the position that a person holds within the organization and can be defined as the ability of that person to influence the behavior of others. Those who have the legitimate power can ask others to do different things but this power is limited to the scope of the formal authority of that person (Lunenburg, 2012). Reward power is the ability of a person to influence others by using financial (e.g. bonuses, pay rises) or nonfinancial rewards (e.g. praise, job promotion, flexible working hours, recognition) (Lunenburg, 2012). Reward power can be used until the reward is considered favorable by the employees. Also in order to be effective, the rewards should be related to the performance of employees; if there is not a direct relationship between the rewards and the performance, the employees will disregard it and the reward power will be ineffective. In other words, if reward power is used well, it can motivate the employees, but if it is not used properly, for example through favoritism, it will demotivate the employees (Merchant, 2013). Expert power is related to expertise of a person in a particular field. In general the ideas of people who are expert in a field are more accepted by others; this is also true in an organizational setting. In organizations,

employees accept the orders of expert people because they think that the experts can make better decisions and have better solutions. In order to obtain expert power, employees must perceive credibility and trustworthiness in the power holder (Luthans, 2011). Referent power emerges when other people admire a person, respect him for some reason, or simply like his personality. Since referent power is related to interpersonal relationships between the power holder and the employees, it can also arise from charisma or personal connections. The current study will only focus on reward power.

3. Conflict Management Styles

Conflict is very important for team effectiveness but it should be managed carefully to make a positive contribution (Amason et al., 1995). A five-category model for classification of different methods for handling conflict modes was first introduced by Blake and Mouton (1964), the five modes for handling interpersonal conflicts in their model are: forcing, withdrawing, smoothing, compromising, and problem solving. This scheme was then reinterpreted by Thomas (1976). According to Thomas-Kilmann conflict mode instrument there are five modes for handling interpersonal conflicts in this scheme including competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding, and accommodating (Thomas & Kilmann, 1974; Kilmann & Thomas, 1977). As it was interpreted by Thomas (1976) these five conflict management styles are based on two dimensions: assertiveness and cooperation. These two dimensions and the five conflict management styles are illustrated in Fig. 2.

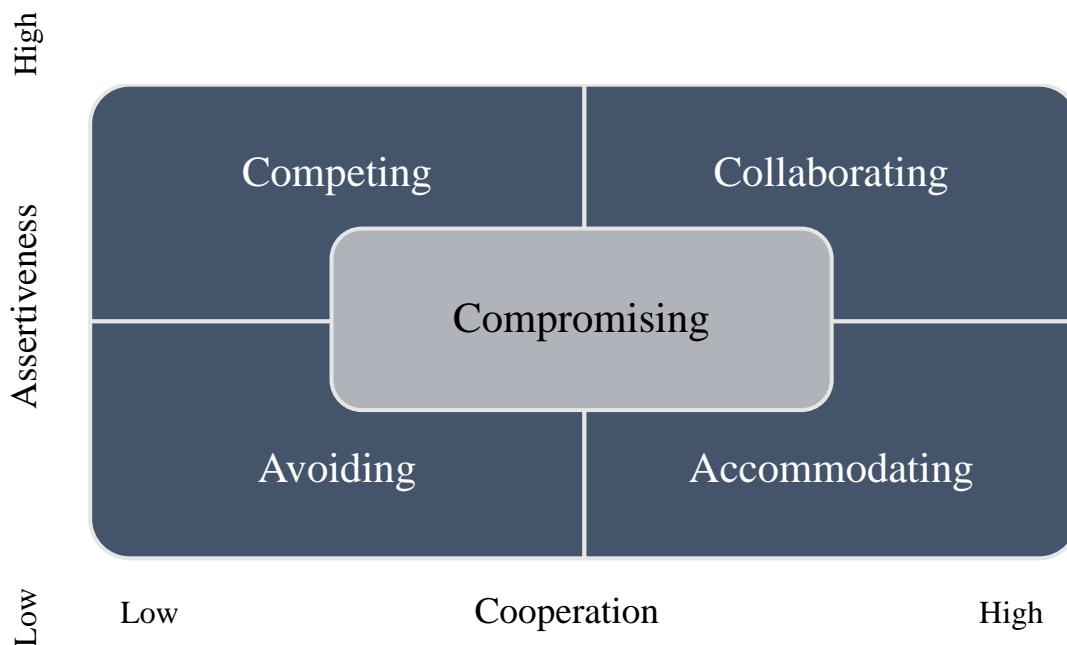


Fig. 2. Based on Thomas-Kilmann conflict mode instrument

In this model, cooperation is the degree by which we are attempting to satisfy the other person's concerns who is involved in the conflict and assertiveness means the degree by which we are attempting to satisfy our own concerns (Kilmann & Thomas, 1977). Accommodating style is when we cooperate with the other person to a high extent and this cooperation might be at our own expense and be against our objectives. In other words, we are exhibiting cooperative but not assertive behaviors. Accommodating style is more effective when the other person has a better solution for the problem. Avoiding style is when we try to avoid the issue that caused the conflict and is used when the issue is trivial. In this case an individual exhibits neither assertive nor cooperative behaviors. In other words we are neither pursuing our own objectives nor cooperating with the other party to reach their goals. Collaborating style is when we and the other party are involved in the conflict collaborate with each other in order to satisfy the goals of both parties. In this case an individual exhibits both assertive and cooperative behaviors to a large degree. The cooperative style is usually used in complicated situations

where we wish to find a novel solution for settling the conflict (Meier, 2011). Competing style is when we want to achieve our goals and objectives but we do not want to cooperate with the other party. In this case an individual exhibits assertive and non-cooperative behaviors. This style is used when we have to make quick decisions. Compromising style is when an individual exhibits median levels of assertiveness and cooperativeness. This style is more appropriate when we need a temporary solution (Meier, 2011).

The relationship between organizational, social variables and the five conflict management modes (i.e. avoiding, accommodating, collaborating, competing, and compromising) have been studied by many researchers (e.g., Blake & Mouton, 1964; Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967; Burke, 1970; Aram et al., 1971; Thomas & Walton, 1971; Ryan & Clemence, 1973), but in this paper we try to find relationships between reward power and these five conflict management styles.

4. Methodology

Our statistical society for this research included all principals of high schools located in the city of Birjand. Birjand is located in eastern Iran and is the provincial capital of South Khorasan. Since the total size of our statistical society was 49 we decided to include the entire statistical society in our analysis. In other words, the size of our sample is equal to the size of our statistical society. Fig. 3 shows the personal characteristics of questionnaire respondents.

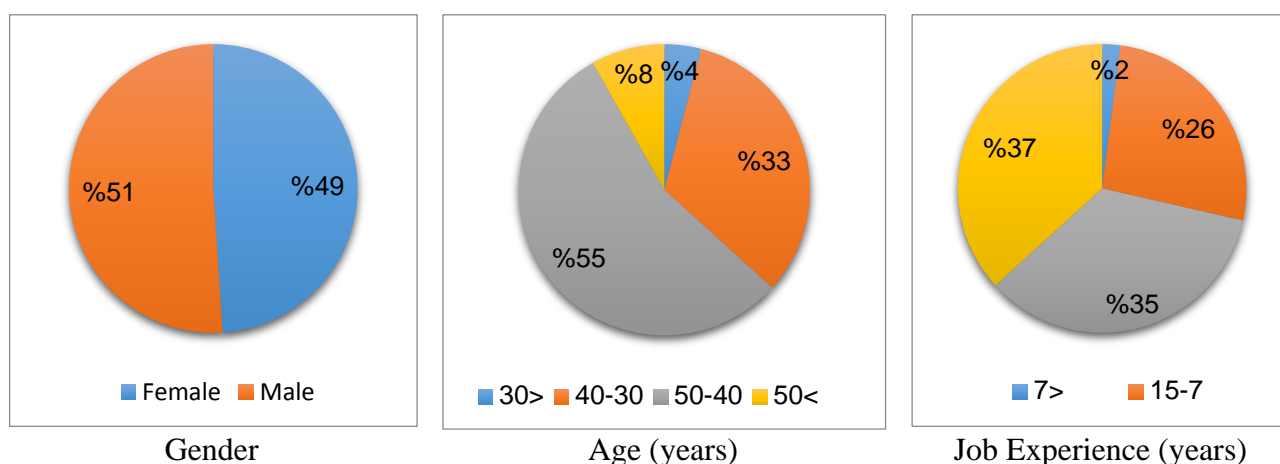


Fig 3. Personal characteristics of the questionnaire respondents

(The figure shows the percentage of school principals in each category)

In order to collect our data a questionnaire with 20 questions was created; each statement in the questionnaire was scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5. To check the reliability of the research questionnaire, internal consistency and split-half methods were used. The Cronbach's alpha was calculated with SPSS software. The questionnaire's Cronbach's alpha (Cronbach, 1951) was 0.79, indicating suitable internal consistency and reliability. In the split-half analysis, results indicated that Cronbach's alpha was 0.81 for the first 10 questions of the questionnaire, and 0.77 for the latter 10 questions. Since the difference between the two amounts was not significant, the reliability of the questionnaire was accepted. In order to confirm the validity of the questionnaire, its content validity was examined. The content validity was unanimously accepted by a group of three faculty members in the field of educational management.

Kolmogorov–Smirnov test (KS test) was executed in order to make sure that the data were normally distributed. For this test, the confidence level was set at 95 percent. According to KS test results the P for our data was equal to 0.63. Since $P=0.63$ is higher than 0.05, the null hypothesis was accepted and it was concluded that our data followed a normal distribution.

The data analysis was performed by using SPSS software. In this study the average of points from each questionnaire question obtained from the groups of our statistical sample is our benchmark for evaluating the relationship between principals' reward power and each of the five conflict management styles. Table 1 shows the mean, variance, and skewness for reward power and each conflict management style. In this table, MX1 refers to reward power, MY1 refers to avoiding style, MY2 refers to accommodating style, MY3 refers to competing style, MY4 refers to compromising style, and MY5 refers to collaborating style.

Table 1

Mean, Variance, and Skewness for reward power and the five conflict management styles

	Variance	Skewness	Mean
MX1	0.476	- 0.338	3.8418
MY1	0.374	0.888	2.6563
MY2	0.689	0.203	3.2278
MY3	0.263	0.284	2.7857
MY4	0.277	- 0.746	3.8231
MY5	0.195	- 0.644	4.4898

Our research question is: "Is there a relationship between reward power and each of the five conflict management styles or not?" The best way to find the answer to this question is by using Spearman's rank correlation coefficient. For this reason the correlation between principals' rank in choosing reward power with each of the five conflict management styles was calculated. Table 2 shows the correlation coefficients between reward power (MX1) and the conflict management styles (MY1 through MY5). Our H0 and H1 hypotheses are:

One-sided test of significance and positive correlation coefficient:

H0: $\rho=0$

H1: $\rho>0$

One-sided test of significance and negative correlation coefficient:

H0: $\rho=0$

H1: $\rho<0$

Table 2

Correlation coefficients between reward power (MX1) and the conflict management styles (MY1 through MY5)

	MX1
MY1	(sig =0.086) 0.198
MY2	(sig =0.034) 0.263
MY3	(sig =0.310) 0.073
MY4	(sig =0.138) 0.159
MY5	(sig =0.492) - 0.003

Based on the calculated correlation coefficients in Table 2 and the corresponding significance levels we can see that only the accommodating conflict management style (MY2) has a significant correlation with reward power (MX1) at 95 percent confidence level. Also we can see that collaborating style (MY5) has a negative correlation with reward power (MX1).

5. Conclusion

According to Table 1 we can see that collaborating conflict management style maintained the highest mean. In other words the principals believe that settling conflicts by discussing the issues directly with their employees was more effective. On the other hand, the avoiding style had the least amount for mean; which indicates that principals do not prefer this style compared with others and think that it was less efficient. When comparing the variances in Table 1 we can see that accommodating style the highest variance, which means that the variability of principals' opinions about this conflict management style is the highest among the five styles. From Table 1, we can also observe that the collaborating style had the least variance. From Table 2 we understood that there was a significant relationship between principals' reward power and accommodating style at 95 percent confidence level. From this table we can also understand that there was no significant relationship between reward power and the other four conflict management styles (avoiding, collaborating, competing, and compromising).

Based on our results we have the following recommendations for principals:

- 1) When facing conflicts, principals should examine the situation carefully and then choose the appropriate conflict management style based on that specific situation.
- 2) Principals should be good listeners, they should listen to their employees and then manage the conflict such that both parties will be happy with the final result.
- 3) Principals would better use incentives (monetary or non-monetary) in order to avoid conflict in their organizations
- 4) Employees should respect the role of principal as the main power in the organization who has the right to settle the conflicts and should actively collaborate with him in settling the conflicts.
- 5) Principals would better avoid destructive conflicts in order to eliminate the negative effects of conflict.
- 6) Using the reward power is a good way to settle most organizational conflicts, especially in a school setting.

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