THE CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STYLES ADOPTED BY MANAGERS IN AN FET COLLEGE IN SOUTH AFRICA

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the conflict management styles (CMSs) adopted by managers in an FET college in South Africa and the extent to which they were implemented. It contributes to the body of literature regarding the importance of advancement of conflict management skills to reduce the major barriers affecting the delivery of skills development in FET colleges. The research design and methodology were quantitative in nature, using a stratified sampling method yielding two strata of data: lecturers (junior and senior); and managers (heads of departments and managers at selected colleges). A structured questionnaire, with closed-ended questions, was administered to elicit information from 300 participants. Data were analyzed by means of descriptive statistics. The empirical findings revealed poor communication about conflict, a strong preference and over reliance on two CMSs which seemed to have resulted from lack of conflict management skills. In addition, the procedures and processes used in the two CMSs were perceived ineffective. The results also suggest that the efforts of the management in resolving conflict were thwarted by lack of communication. This study intensifies the discourse on conflict management in FET Colleges in South Africa which still grapple with inadequacy in providing quality and efficient service. The conclusion for this study is that there is a need to augment our understanding of CMSs and processes that influence how managers move from efforts to eliminate conflict. The role requirements of a manager require the use of different conflict management styles in order to be effective.

Keywords: Conflict, integrative styles, moral judgment, Further Education and Training Colleges

INTRODUCTION

In society when different entities, from individuals to nations, interact with one another to accomplish their goals, their relationship may become incompatible (Mukherjee & Upadhyay, 2018:203). The way conflict is approached and managed, determines whether it is constructive or destructive. An effective conflict management style is important, if individuals and groups of people are to function effectively in any level within an organization. Conflict is therefore, a significant and unavoidable part of our daily lives. Conflict is described in the literature as "a process that begins when one party perceives that the other has negatively affected, or is about to negatively influence something that he or she cares about" (Shih & Susanto, 2010). Al-Ajmi (2007) states that any situation in which opposition or argument occurs because of differing

goals and values, is a conflict. It can also refer to a struggle between at least two interdependent parties with incompatible goals, scarce resources and rewards, and potential interference from the other in achieving their goals (Nguyen & Yang, 2012).

FET colleges in South Africa have been inundated with changes since 1994. Literature indicates that despite multiple changes intended to improve the quality and efficiency of the FET colleges in South Africa, they are still viewed as underperforming, perhaps even impervious to change efforts. Over time these changes have contributed to a condition of malaise and discontent. Too many changes compressed into a short time-space will ultimately become counterproductive as the absorptive capacity of institutions comes under stress, a situation that may result in conflict due to uncertainty. The changes have involved rationalization of college numbers and size, introduction of new programs and plans to phase out others, recapitalization of infrastructure, new forms of college governance, shifts in line-function accountability of colleges, and shifts in staff employment regimes, interspersed with sporadic lecturer training (Kraak, Paterson, & Boka, 2016). Change impact differently on people and institutions testing their ability to adapt and their resilience. Organizational change can frequently result in conflict (Oliveira & Sarmento, 2003), in fact, conflict is often indicated as an inevitable component of organizational change (Andersen, 2006; Raza & Standing, 2011).

However, it could well be argued that conflict by itself is neither good nor bad. For this reason, some amount of conflict can be beneficial in group decision-making as it brings forth opposing viewpoints and prevents group-think (Soieb, Othman, & D'Silva, 2013). On the other hand, if conflict becomes too intense it can make the group dysfunctional, and the hostile emotions involved can adversely affect their wellbeing. The way in which conflict is approached and managed determines whether it is constructive or destructive (Deutsch & Coleman, 2000). Based on this, it becomes imperative to understand the underlying individual positioning toward different conflict management styles (CMS), when managing conflicts.

Several studies have been conducted on conflict management styles over the years. For instance, the first conceptual schemes for classifying conflict revolved around a simple cooperation – competition dichotomy (Tekos & Iordanidis, 2011). Blake and Mouton (1985) proposed a two-dimensional mode which was based on concern for people, and concern for production for classifying conflict-handling modes. Later, numerous scholars suggested a modification of this framework; among them, Thomas (1998) proposed dimension of assertiveness and cooperativeness in classifying the modes. Rahim and Bonoma's (1979) conceptualization has been one of the most popular, as they differentiated the styles of resolving conflict on two basic dimensions: concern for self and concern for others. This combination of the two dimensions results in five styles of conflict management which are dominating: collaborating, avoiding, accommodating, and compromising (Rahim, 2004). Al-Ajmi (2007) concurs with the adoption of various conflict management styles by which interpersonal conflict can be handled. Several other scholars have contributed to our understanding of how individuals approach conflicts (Lang, 2009; Soieb et al., 2013).

As much as there has been research conducted on conflict management, we believe however, that more needs to be done to augment our understanding of CMSs and processes that influence how managers move from efforts to eliminate conflict, to effectively applying conflict

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management styles, suitable in addressing conflicts in FET colleges in South Africa. In view of the preceding information, the research aim can thus be stated as: determining the views of participants regarding the CMSs of managers in FET colleges in managing conflict.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In South Africa, the late 1990s saw a process of policy development for the, then technical college sector, which resulted in the Further Education and Training Act (FETA) (98 of 1998). The democratic government that was formed in 1994 was faced with a college sector that was not fit for its purpose (DoE, 2001; Akoojee, McGrath, & Visser, 2008). The vision for transformation espoused by this act led to the development of a new institutional landscape (DoE, 2001) that merged the 150 colleges into 50 public FET college entities. Later, the FET College Act (16 of 2006) was developed to amend key recommendations of FETA (98 of 1998).

The role of FET colleges, according to the FET College Act (16 of 2006), is to provide intermediate-level education and skills training necessary to meet the South African national development challenge (Akoojee, 2008). FET colleges in South Africa were expected not only to provide skills that respond to the economic development prerogatives of the country, but also to expand access by inclusion. Economic development is intimately tied to social equity by ensuring that those excluded in the past, are incorporated in the new democratic order (Akoojee et al., 2008). Powell and Hall (2004) further state that on the one hand, FET colleges contribute to economic development by providing the skills required to compete in challenging and changing global and national economic contexts. Simultaneously, and on the other hand, they contribute to poverty alleviation and social justice by widening participation in education and training targeted at employability, and most particularly at the employability of those communities most affected by unemployment and poverty. The number of FET colleges have grown over the years, accommodating students who do not qualify to be enrolled in universities or those who prefer technical training over professional studies. Table 1 depicts the total number of FET colleges per province in South Africa.

Table 1: The total number of FET colleges per province in South Africa

FET Colleges									
EC	FS	G	KZN	LIM	MP	NW	NC	WC	Province
8	4	8	9	7	3	3	2	6	National Total = 50

There was a total of 50 FET colleges in the nine provinces in 2016, with 705 397 students registered in that year. Table 2 presents the qualifications of academic staff at FET colleges in 2010, as per the HSRC database. As illustrate by the data in the table, the majority of academic staff at FET colleges in 2010 hold either a diploma, higher diploma or first higher degree, and very few possess an advanced degree. Furthermore, only six percent of staff is qualified as artisans. Nineteen percent of staff have a qualification below the diploma level – a level which

can be regarded as providing an insufficient basis for teaching at the post-school level. In 2010 only 623 employees were in management positions.

Table 2: Demographic data of FET colleges in South Africa

Province	Artisan	%	Higher degree	%	1st Degree/ Higher dip.	%	Diploma	%	Below dip.	%	Total
Eastern Cape	72	17	80	10	289	12	144	6	114	8	699
Free State	33	8	48	6	238	10	144	6	54	4	515
Gauteng	56	13	213	28	581	25	504	22	322	23	1676
KwaZulu-Natal	40	10	71	9	179	8	443	19	301	21	1034
Limpopo	56	13	113	15	271	11	343	15	93	7	878
Mpumalanga	25	6	34	4	173	7	307	13	216	15	755
North West	14	3	48	6	132	6	142	6	95	7	431
Northern Cape	9	2	5	1	26	1	29	1	6	0	75
Western Cape	114	27	158	21	472	20	283	12	218	15	1243
National	419	6	770	11	2359	32	2339	32	1417	19	7304

Conflict Management

In order for managers to understand how to manage conflict, they must first understand what conflict is. Conflict can be defined as the behavior of a person or group, intended to inhibit the attainment of goals by another person or group (Graham, 2009; Al-Ajmi, 2007). Conflict can be the result of a difference in opinions, or a perception that one's needs and desires are not going to be met. The literature indicates that conflict in itself is good for an organization, if it leads to creativeness and effectiveness of the organization (Nischal, 2014). Although disagreement is inevitable when people with different goals and interest work together, the kind of conflict that needs to be managed is the one that disrupts and thwarts the activities, and the smooth functioning of an organization. This kind of conflict is regarded as excessive and toxic in the literature. As such, excessive conflict has to be managed by people with conflict management skills, in order for the organization to function effectively (Al-Ajmi, 2007). As alluded to earlier, even though several scholars have focused in past studies on conflict management, conflict management styles specifically, as used by managers in FET colleges, require further investigation.

The extent to which a certain conflict handling style is effective depends on the requirements of the specific conflict situation, and the skill in which it is used (Morris et al., 1998; Al-Amji, 2007). It could therefore, be argued that in a given conflict situation, a particular style of handling conflict may be more suitable than another. The five styles that were mentioned in the introduction are discussed in the section below.

The avoidance management style is related to a low concern for self, and a low concern for others (Aritzeta, Ayestaran, & Swail, 2005). It can be associated with withdrawal behavior, hiding disagreements and sidestepping confrontations with the other party involved in the conflict, as well as overlooking the problem. People using the avoidance style of conflict resolution satisfy neither their own, nor other people's goals. They may not acknowledge the

existence of conflict, and refuse to address or deal with issues. The avoidance strategy might appear to be suitable for handling some conflict since it implies taking no action at all. This style, according to Gibson, Ivancevich, and Konopaske, (2006) and Hellriegel, Jackson, Slocum,Louw, Staude, Amos, Klopper, Louw, Oosthuizen, Perks and Zindiye (2012), may for example, be desirable in situations where: (1) the issue is minor or only of passing importance, and is thus not worth the individual's time or energy to confront conflict; (2) there is not enough information available for the individual to deal effectively with the conflict at the time; and (3) the individual's power is so low, relative to the other person's, that there is little chance of causing change.

The domination management style is associated with terms such as: coercion, aggression, force and competition. Robbins, Odendaal, & Roodt (2017, p. 539) are of the opinion that "force" can include the use of institutional authority and power, reward and punishment, bribery, and even physical force. Aritzeta et al. (2005, p. 163) state that in this conflict-handling style the "feelings and interests of others are disregarded" and in practice, this view of conflict sees only winners and losers. The problem with this conflict management style approach is that it breeds hostility and resentment. It further produces a backlash in the long run, as people become increasingly unwilling to absorb the emotional cost, and work to undermine the power base of the authoritarian leader (Whetten & Cameron, 2005).

Next, the accommodating approach reflects a conflict management style that would allow the other party to achieve what they desire from the situation (Martin, 2005; Robbins et al., 2003). Managers using this style tend to have a low degree of interest in themselves, and a high interest in welfare of others. This style appeals for cooperation, and appears to be sympathetic in the hope of reducing tensions. However, Rahim et al. (1999) argue that this style is "ineffective and only suitable as a short-term solution because it simply encourages individuals to cover up and avoid expressing their feelings".

The compromising style involves each party in conflict to seek to give up something, thus, sharing occurs. Goodwin and Griffith (2007) and Gibson et al. (2006) state that in conflict situations, compromise is common. This style, as the accommodating style, is associated with intermediate concern for both self and others. People with this style try to achieve a reasonable middle ground so that all parties win. They explore issues to some extent, and move to a give-take position where there are no clear losers or winners. Everybody ends up with something, but not everything he or she wants. Compromising focuses on negotiation and diplomacy, in order to satisfy rather than optimize. However, because the goal is agreement not results, it can lead to negative results in certain circumstances (Al-Ajmi, 2007).

Finally, collaborating in conflict management refers to an individual's high degree of interest in himself/herself and in others (Rahim, 2002). This stands in contrast to the domination and accommodating approaches, with concern for either self or the other person. This style requires the holistic examination of collaboration, clarity, exchange of information and differences between parties (Tunc, & Kutanis, 2013).

Theoretical framework

This research is underpinned by Social Exchange Theory (SET) which was developed by Hormans in 1958 (Devan, 2006). This theory implies that social behavior is the result of an exchange process. The main reason for this exchange is to maximize benefits and minimize costs. In this research, the costs and benefits are not referred to in monetary terms. In accordance with this theory, people measure the potential benefits and risks of social relationships. Therefore, people will tend to terminate or disregard the relationship when the risks outbalance the rewards (Soieb et al., 2013:93).

Various SET philosophers emphasize that this theory includes a number of important assumptions: first, individuals are generally rational, and constantly obligated to estimate the cost and benefits in social exchanges; second, those who are engaged in interactions are rationally exploring certain ways to escalate the profits or benefits that could be acquired from those situations, especially in terms of complying with the basic needs of an individual; third, exchange processes that generate various forms of advantage such as rewards for individuals, and certain benefits in the organizations, lead to the reshaping of social interactions, especially in the workplace; and last, individuals are divided into two categories (mission-oriented and profit-oriented), in an unbound social system which is highly competitive (Cherry, 2010; Hansen, 2011; Devan, 2006). SET suggests that employees reciprocate leaders' behavior towards them with their own matched behavior on a *quid pro quo* (mutual reciprocity) basis, as part of a social exchange relationship development process. Social exchange relationships between leaders and their subordinates develop from interactions between these parties, and are motivated by the mutual benefits derived from these exchanges (Hansen, 2011).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology adopted was quantitative in nature, involving a structured questionnaire. Creswell (2014:4) asserts that "the quantitative approach is termed the traditional, the positivist, the experimental, or the empiricist paradigm". He further argues that "quantitative thinking emanates from an empiricist tradition". It is based on testing theory, composed of variables measured with numbers, and analyzed with statistical procedures in order to determine whether the predictive generalizations of theory hold true. The researcher chose a specific population which comprised of heads of departments, managers, senior lecturers and lecturers.

The quantitative research method was chosen as the most relevant and suitable for this research because the study is aimed at obtaining insight into the effective use of conflict management measures by managers. The use of hypothesis was not regarded as a necessity in this study, as it was not focusing on relationships between variables. In view of the above, questions were formulated to determine staff members' perceptions on effective conflict management. The researcher in this study kept his personal values, beliefs and biases from influencing the data-collection and analysis during the research process.

For the purpose of this study, a simple random sampling procedure was used. The participants, from whom a sample for this research was drawn, comprised of HODs, senior lecturers, lecturers and managers. The total number of questionnaires that were initially distributed to participants was 300. Only 226 were found to be suitable for use, representing a return rate of 75%. Managers were represented by nineteen (n=19) participants and lecturers by two hundred and seven (n=207) members.

In order to pursue the empirical objective stated for this study, a questionnaire was developed as data collection instrument to investigate the experiences of the 300 respondents during the merger of the six former technical colleges, into Ekurhuleni West District. In order to follow this course, the researcher had to obtain permission to conduct research in FET colleges in the Ekurhuleni West District, from the Gauteng Department of Education.

The researchers formulated questions around the aspects of conflict management, and the design of the empirical investigation was a structured questionnaire consisting of 17 items. Members of the EWC FET college staff were required to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with statements concerning conflict management. For this purpose, a five-point scale was used with the following indicators: strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, strongly disagree and disagree.

The content validity and reliability of the items in the questionnaire that was designed to gather information on conflict management styles of managers in the FET colleges were ensured. The items were tested during a pilot study of FET colleges in the Ekurhuleni West District, which administered how consistent the participants were in responding to questions using the pilot. The reliability was measured by using the Cronbach Alpha Coefficient.

Prior to performing the factor analytic procedures, the suitability of the data for factor analyses was assessed. Inspection of the correlation matrix revealed that most coefficients had values of ≥0.3. Furthermore, the measure of sampling adequacy (MSA), as reflected by the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value, was 0.839 for the merger implementation process, and 0.928 for conflict management respectively, exceeding the recommended value of 0.6 (Kaiser, 1974). The Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (Bartlett, 1954) was also significant ($p<0.05$) (Pallant, 2007). The Cronbach Reliability Coefficients was 0.909 (refer to Table 2). Ideally, the values of this coefficient should be above 0.7 (Pallant, 2007).

The researchers first obtained permission from the Gauteng Department of Education under whose jurisdiction the sample of selected colleges fall. Permission was also obtained from the principal of the FET College. Attached to the questionnaire was a cover letter that addressed ethical aspects such as voluntary participation, anonymity and the right to withdraw from the study if participants choose to do so. Data were analyzed by means of descriptive statistics such as frequencies, means and percentages. The scores were from high to low associated with the factor a variety of conflict management styles employed.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

In this section we report on the results of the study that the first author of this article undertook. Two factors derived from the initial study; however, for this article only the factor of 'conflict

management styles' is discussed. The interpretation and discussion is thus, limited to the aspects that directly relate to conflict management styles. The other factor, namely 'managing the implementation of the mandated merger' is reported on by Mestry and Bosch (2013). In the questionnaire respondents were to select 1 (Strongly agree), 2 (agree), 3 (neutral), 4 (disagree) and 5 (strongly disagree). The second factor pertaining to the extent of effective management of conflict is presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Distribution of responses of academic staff and management teams pertaining to management of conflict

Item No.	Frequency of respondents scoring 1-5					Total	% selecting 1 & 2	% selecting 4 & 5
	1	2	3	4	5			
B25	80	109	11	15		225	84	11
B15	59	90	37	28	4	218	15	68
B23	51	104	37	33	1	226	69	15
B16	53	105	30	32	5	225	16	70
B24	38	111	43	29	5	226	15	85
B21	37	114	46	25	2	224	67	12
B14	46	102	30	45	3	226	21	65
B20	34	116	36	34	5	225	67	17
B18	49	113	12	33	19	226	72	23
B11	57	83	34	39	11	224	63	22
B27	42	99	41	39	2	223	18	63
B12	48	95	31	49	3	226	23	63
B19	46	11O	28	36	11	225	21	67
B17	43	100	29	47	5	224	23	64
B29	26	112	39	33	15	225	61	21
B22	35	82	45	45	15	222	53	27
B13	19	91	54	51	9	224	49	27
B26	37	72	43	58	15	225	48	32

The frequency of the staff scores on conflict management are clearly illustrated in the table above and the next table presents the Cronbach's Alpha reliability co-efficient of conflict management styles.

Table 4: Factor management of conflict

No	Factor Name	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha reliability co-efficient
Conflict Management	The extent of effective management of conflict	(17)	0.909

Having displayed the various items underlying the levels, the items, together with their respective mean scores associated with the factor 'a variety of conflict management styles employed', are shown in Table 5. A discussion on selected items follows.

Table 5: Items associated with the factor: conflict management styles

Item No	Description	Mean Score	Rank Order
B.28	My immediate manager has an open door policy as far as disputes are concerned	3.20	1
B.26	During conflict the management team makes use of threats to resolve conflict	2.70	2
B.29	My manager avoids conflict by postponing decisions on controversial issues	2.51	5
B.17	The management team attempts to consider the feelings of others in conflict	2.39	6
B.19	When dealing with conflict the management team consults all role-players	2.39	6
B.12	The college management team attempts to accommodate the needs of all stakeholders	2.36	7
B.11	The college management team uses an impartial party to assist staff members to settle their differences	2.35	8
B.27	The management team acts decisively to reduce potential conflict	2.35	8
B.18	The lack of communication between management and lecturers is a cause for conflict	2.34	9
B.20	The college management team considers all possible solutions when conflict arises	2.32	10
B.14	The management team uses a process of making joint decisions to solve differences	2.31	11
B.21	The college management team resolves conflict by inviting role-players to participate in finding solutions to problems	2.29	12
B.24	The management team uses a participative management style to reduce organizational conflict	2.28	13
B.16	Management resolves all conflict issues/matters fairly	2.23	14
B.23	The management team attempts to reduce potential conflict by	2.23	14

		inviting all lecturers to participate in decision making		
B.15		The conflict resolution management style is consistent in their dealings with the situation at my campus	2.17	15

On an engagement level, respondents indicated a common cause of conflict in many educational institutions, as related to the lack of communication between management and lecturers. This result is evident in the high response (72%) indicating that they (the respondents) either agreed, or strongly agreed with the statement that, the lack of communication between lecturers and management was a cause for conflict (B18).

In response to the statement that, the management team uses a participative management style to reduce organizational conflict (B24), a very high percentage (85%) of respondents either disagreed, or strongly disagreed (see Table 3). With regard to management consulting all role players, the respondents also either disagreed, or strongly disagreed (67%) with the statement (B19). Management was also reported as, not being able to use a process of making joint decisions to solve differences. The respondents (65%) either disagreed, or strongly disagreed with this item (B14). Pertaining to inviting role-players to participate in finding solutions to problems, the majority (67%) of the respondents either disagreed, or strongly disagreed (B21).

Instead, respondents mostly agreed that management used threats to resolve conflict as per the reaction of 48% of respondents (B26). It must be noted that a significant number, 48% of respondents, indicated that no threats were used to resolve issues. Next, the mean score of 2.51 on the item related to avoidance of conflict by postponing decisions on controversial issues indicates that the majority of respondents (61.7%), either agreed, or strongly agreed that their manager avoids conflict by postponing decisions on controversial issues (B29). This could mean that the managers did not deal with conflict.

Furthermore, in terms of the question on the college management team attempting to accommodate the needs of all stakeholders, the results show the mean score of 2.36 and a ranking of 7 out of 20. The data indicates that 63% of respondents polled, either disagreed or strongly disagreed, and the distribution of responses demonstrates that management made limited attempts to accommodate the needs of all stakeholders to reduce conflict (B12). The management also did not attempt to consider the feelings of others in conflict, as reported by the majority (64%) of the respondents who opted for disagree and strongly disagree (B17).

The data points to a majority of respondents (68%) either disagreeing, or strongly disagreeing that the conflict resolution management style of the college is consistent in their dealings with conflicting situations (B15). Most respondents did not agree with the fact that management acted decisively to reduce conflict (B27). The responses of some 63.6% attested to their disapproval.

Finally, it appears from the low ranking (14th) of the question that points to respondents' experiences of the way in which conflict is typically resolved, most respondents did not agree that conflict issues are resolved fairly. Based on some respondents' (70%) information, it could be concluded that the majority did not agree that management resolved conflict fairly (B16). Moreover, respondents also revealed that the college management team were using an impartial party to assist staff members to settle their differences as the majority (63%) indicated (B11).

DISCUSSION

This study sheds light on the conflict management styles used by managers in an FET college in South Africa. A quantitative research approach was used to gather data which was analyzed through the lens of Social Exchange Theory (Hormans, 1958). The theory is based on the notion that people behave in a certain manner, in order to maximize benefits or reduce costs. Thus, the analysis was based on such behaviors. The results of this study clearly indicate a focus on certain conflict management styles, which could have been regarded as the most useful by the FET managers in handling conflict situations. These management styles included domination and avoidance. Both conflict management styles were perceived as ineffective in terms of satisfying the parties involved, reagrding procedures and processes. The literature indicates that conflict is associated with significant cost to organizations (Overton & Lowry, 2013). Although communication is core to any effort of managing conflict, in this research the findings indicate a lack of communication in managing styles of the sampled campuses. Even if participants regarded it as important, the conditions (no consultation, no joint decision-making and exclusion from finding solutions) were not conducive for open communication about conflict management and conflict resolution.

On the contrary, the findings of this study indicate that managers adopted a preference for the implementation of the avoidance style. The college managers often used delaying tactics, in the hope that the situation will dissipate. It can also be argued that the managers had no desire to solve the conflicts; rather they opted for downplaying or ignoring disputes instead of resolving them. This avoidance management style, is seen in relation to a low concern for self and others, and is related to withdrawal behavior, hiding disagreements and sidestepping confrontations with the other party involved in the conflict (Aritzeta et al., 2005; Gibson, Ivancevich, & Konopaske, 2006). It seems that the managers were aware that there was conflict, but took a conscious decision not to resolve it. Unresolved conflict is not good for the parties involved and for the organization as a whole. It can lead to mistrust and more conflict, thus not benefiting anyone, and instead contributing to a more conflict-laden environment.

Perhaps the participants might have regarded the use of avoidance as inappropriate and an unproductive strategy in dealing with conflict. There could be several reasons why managers were using this style: lack of skills, not being assertive, being introverted, and being ill-equipped in dealing with conflict. It seems that the managers lacked basic information needed to construct solutions to the conflicts. This result is similar to those of Al-Ajmi (2007) and Nguyen and Yang (2012) showing that the avoidance style is more likely used in conflict situations.

Another conflict management style that seemed to have gained popularity on the different campuses of the FET College, was that of the use of dominance. A majority of participants attested to the use of threats in resolving conflicts. This style is also known as 'forcing' or 'competing', because people who use it see conflict as a competition in which their primary goal is to win. Dominating people resolve conflict by imposing their will through formal power or any other available means. Managers used their power, authority and positions to achieve their desired outcomes, thereby missing an opportunity for joint gains. It seems therefore, that managers could have benefitted from their inclination towards the use of competition. They

seemed to have placed high value on achieving their goals, even if this had a negative effect on their relationships with the other staff members. Moreover, this approach creates a win-lose situation that can, in the long run, exacerbate rather than resolve conflicts (Nguyen & Yang, 2012; Al-Ajmi, 2007). People who have a predominantly, dominant style of conflict management, usually believe that they are justified in their position and support those who agree with them, while opposing those who disagree. This situation can cause divisions among the members of the organization, and would not be conducive for its smooth running. Similar results show that a dominating conflict management style indicates negative quality relationships as a primary conflict management style (Green, 2007).

The results indicate ineffectiveness of the styles used in resolving the conflict. For instance, regarding the processes, managers were indicated as indecisive in taking action to reduce potential conflict. The perception of indecisiveness of the managers, contradicts the notion that people who have an inclination towards using the competitive style, are decisive. There was also a lack of consistency and fairness in the application of conflict resolutions. Literature indicates that fairness can be achieved if a safe environment has been created. In such an environment members believe that they will be treated fairly. Based on several studies that revealed that the perception of leaders' fairness, strongly influences the willingness of group members to adopt a cooperative approach to each other and to the leader (De Cremer & Tyler, 2005; Van Knippenberg, De Cremer & Van Knippenberg, 2007), Giacomantonio, Pierro, and Kruglanski (2011) conclude that perceptions of leaders' fairness are an important antecedent of cooperative behavior in followers. Moreover, impartiality in resolving conflict might not have sat well with the majority of respondents.

The ineffectiveness of the conflict resolutions was also revealed as related to a lack of consideration for the feelings, and accommodation of needs, of the parties involved. Assessments of one's own competence in conflict management are determined by effectiveness (Kapusuzoglu, 2010). Ineffectiveness has a negative outcome for the organization and its members, as it does not follow rules and does not attain desired goals (Waitchalla & Raduan, 2006). Research has shown that perceptions of competence, mediate the relationship between conflict behaviors and relational features (Papa & Canary, 1995).

CONCLUSION

The recognition of the presence of conflict and its impact on the organization is an important step for managers to take action to assuage it when appropriate. As indicated elsewhere in this manuscript, FET colleges in South Africa are in dire need of stability in order for them to meet the demands for post-school education. In that case the efforts to implement change in the institutions in order to keep up with the demands cannot be left to be thwarted by debilitating conflict.

It could happen that managers focused on the two conflict management styles because of lack of skills. In order to address problems experienced during conflict situations in FET colleges' managers should undergo training in conflict management in order to successfully manage conflict. The intensity and amount of training available for managers may have a

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significant impact on how they will handle future conflict in FET colleges. It is important to note that the role requirements of a manager require the use of different conflict management styles in order to be effective. In-service training and short courses could be developed to provide good communication skills for these managers to manage the conflict more effectively, which could demonstrate transparency and trust towards all stakeholder. The current findings lay the ground for future studies which might include the role of personality in determining the conflict management style. Further research could also be conducted to determine conflict as a contributory factor in destabilization of FET colleges in South Africa.

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