CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STYLES AND JOB SATISFACTION: A STUDY AMONG MALAYSIAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES' ACADEMICIANS

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ABSTRACT

The present study aims to investigate the relationship between conflict management styles and job satisfaction among academic staff in Malaysian public universities. Self-administered questionnaires were distributed to 300 academicians of various fields at public universities in northern part of Malaysia. Subsequently, data were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and Partial Least Squares - Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). The findings indicate that several conflict management styles such as integrating, obliging, and compromising were positively significant with job satisfaction. However, the dominating and avoiding styles of conflict management were found to be negatively related to job satisfaction. Thus, all of the five styles of conflict management were significantly related to job satisfaction. Several suggestion and recommendation were forwarded at the end of the report based on the findings of the present study.

Keywords: Conflict management styles; Job satisfaction; Academic staffs

INTRODUCTION

Academicians in public and private higher education institutions are involved thoroughly in every development of a nation's education sector in order to drive the nation towards a high-income nation. They deliver teachings, conduct researches and also provide professional consultancies to people for high-level job requirements in industry as this significantly contributes to the development of social economics especially in human capital development (Choong *et al.*, 2013). In addition, they also play an important role in sustaining the quality of education as they served as the backbone of any success achievements in higher education institutions.

Lately, public universities in Malaysia are facing increasing turnover rate among the academicians as this is a main problem for Malaysian Higher Education sector. As Choong *et al.* (2013) indicated that the increasing turnover rate among academicians in public universities initiate a cumulative recruiting cost, decrease in service quality, lack of management team exertions and demoralized colleagues. The key feature that augment the academicians to walkout from their organization is due to dissatisfaction with their job imbalance workload, job burnout, and personal disagreement with their peers and superiors. Consequently, this will trigger conflict between the academics, peers and superiors. Conflict that occurs between them will be affecting on their daily tasks and the organization's

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performance. Therefore, it is hard to ignore the issue of job dissatisfaction among the public universities academics in Malaysia.

Moreover, Alzahrani (2013) discovered that one of the critical factors that influence an employee's job satisfaction is the effectiveness in handling conflict that transpires in the organization. Rahim (2002) revealed that applying the dual concern model of five conflict management styles is the most effective approach to handle conflict among employees. The five conflict management styles are integrating, obliging, compromising, dominating and avoiding. Each of these styles has distinct consequence on job satisfaction (Farhangi, 2008; Slabbert, 2004).

Job satisfaction studies among academicians in Malaysian Public Universities are occasional as not many studies conducted in the higher education sector in Malaysia. The harshness of the high turnover rate in Malaysia's higher education (MHE) sector is becoming apparent each year and this condition has been associated to the issue of job satisfaction. This was proven from statistics showing the average turnover rate among academic staffs accumulate each year. The turnover rate in MHE sector was 30% in year 2015 as a result of 7% increment from year 2014 (Sofiah, Zabid & Lionel, 2016). A study conducted by Azman *et al.* (2015) verified that the high turnover trend is mostly happening among the academicians due to dissatisfaction in terms of payment and workload. Thus, there is a significant need to study and understand this issue in order to get an effective way to condense the growing rate of turnover.

Although previous studies on job satisfaction have been largely devoted to service sector employees (Mehrad, 2015; Tazekand, Nafar, & Keramati, 2013; Azizi, Ghytasivand, Fakharmanesh, 2012) rather less attention was realized in higher education as one of vital contributor to national economic development. Therefore, this study was embarked in effort to bridge the gap in the study of conflict management styles and job satisfaction in the context of higher education sector among academicians in Malaysian Public Universities. Specifically, the present study will examine the relationships between five conflict management styles namely; integrating (INT), obliging (OB), compromising (COM), dominating (DO) and avoiding (AVO) on job satisfaction (JS).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conflict Management Styles

A conflict management styles model was developed by Rahim (2002) which consisted of two dimensions namely intended for self and concern for each other with each axis measured as high and low. The first dimension clarifies the level to which an individual pursues to fulfil his needs and the second one expresses one's concern about the needs of others (Rahim 2002). There are five styles for conflict management in Rahim's model such as integrating, obliging, compromising, dominating and avoiding. This study will utilise the model developed by Rahim (2002). The integrating style is considered as one of the more effective problem-solving approaches. The resolution of conflict requires openness, information sharing and a clear expression of the problem among the parties involved in the conflict (Rahim, 2010).

The obliging style indicated that the parties concerned may forgo his privilege by giving in to the demand of the opposite party. Rahim (2010) insisted that this style is usually adopted by individuals who play down the differences that they have with other parties and prefer to find a common ground.

Further, an individual who adopts the dominating style typically intends to expand his/her personal interest and restrain others' needs by using powerful responses. Next, avoiders ignore the problem and do not even make any effort to resolve the conflict. Finally, compromising style was categorized as dividing resources in some equitable method without resorting to alternative solutions that may seemed unfair to each party's interests.

Conflict Management Styles

Job satisfaction is a topic of wide interest to employees who work in organizations as it focuses on all of their feelings towards the job. Nevertheless, what makes a job satisfying or dissatisfying does not depend only on the nature of the job, but also on the expectations that individuals have of what they should get from their jobs. The Maslow Theory was influential and proposed that human needs form a five-levels of hierarchy ranging from physiological needs, safety, belongingness and love, esteem to self-actualization.

In addition, job satisfaction has been argued by some researchers from the need of fulfilment perspective (Mehrad, 2015; Dhanapal *et al.*, 2013). This theory has dominated on the study of the nature of job satisfaction and formed a basis for the development of job satisfaction assessment. Job satisfaction can be defined as affective orientation that an employee has towards his or her work (Wegge *et al.*, 2007). It can be considered as comprehensive premonition on the job or as a related constellation of attitudes on various aspects or facets of the job. The comprehensive approach was used when the overall attitude is of interest while the facet approach was used to explore on which part of the jobs yield satisfaction or dissatisfaction. According to Spector (1985), one of the most popular job satisfaction instruments has summarized the following aspects of job satisfaction namely; appreciation, communication, co-workers, fringe benefits, job conditions, nature of the work itself, the nature of the organization itself, an organization's policies and procedures, pay, personal growth, promotion opportunities, recognition, security and supervision.

Conflict Management Styles and Job Satisfaction

As Eslami & Gharakhani (2012) stated, between the five conflict management styles, the integrating style holds the major role in developing employees' job satisfaction and enhance their commitment levels toward the organization. Those whom have applied this style confronted conflicts directly and attempt to discover creative solutions to the problems by balancing between their own needs as well as that of the others. Besides that, the superiors also will be able to manage their matters and relations with their staffs by applying the integrating style of managing conflicts.

In attempt to relate with the current study in education sector, Griffin and Steen (2011) has discovered that the conflict management styles of compromising and obliging which ascribed to principals were positively associated to secondary level teachers' job satisfaction in higher secondary schools. The principals and teachers were inclined to resolve conflicts occurred using these two styles as they believe it will close up the relationship between the principals and teachers. Therefore, they will be satisfied and more committed to their jobs.

On the other hand, Dhanapal *et al.* (2013) found that dominating and avoiding styles were negatively associated with job satisfaction. This is because dominating style is only satisfying personal interest without considering the interest of the other party at all, meanwhile, avoiding style means both parties are not putting any effort to solve the conflict. These styles disallowed employees to express their opinion and involved partially in decision-making process in order to solve the conflict. Consequently, unsolved conflict will affect employees' job satisfaction and they are not motivated to commit for their organization.

Therefore, applying the effective conflict management styles is very important in improving and increasing the level of job satisfaction among superior and employees. Furthermore, effective conflict management styles will show the amount of superiors' tendency toward organizations affairs and maintain good relationship with the employees. In actual fact, applying accurate styles lead to appear positive atmosphere and relation between managers and staff and also increase level of organization outcome (De Dreu, Van Dierendonck, & Dijkstra, 2004).

Based on above discussion, the hypotheses for this study are derived as follows:

H^1: Integrating style has positive significant relationship with job satisfaction.
H^2: Obliging style has positive significant relationship with job satisfaction.
H^3: Compromising style has positive significant relationship with job satisfaction.
H^4: Dominating style has negative significant relationship with job satisfaction.
H^5: Avoiding style has negative significant relationship with job satisfaction.

METHODOLOGY

Sampling

Self-administered questionnaires were developed and distributed to 300 academic staffs in public universities located in Selangor and Kuala Lumpur and were chosen based on simple random sampling. The questionnaires containing conflict management styles scales and job satisfaction related scales were distributed by hand to the respective academic staffs. The measurements were utilized based on five-point Likert scale ranging from (1) "strongly disagree" to (5) "strongly agree". Descriptive statistics of the final sample are shown in Table 1. Variables such as gender, race, educational background, and working length were considered as control variables.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of sampling

Profile	Description	Frequency
Age	27-32	20
	33-38	35
	39-44	155
	> 45 years	90
Gender	Male	143
	Female	157
Length of Service in Current University	0-10	139
	11-20	67
	21-30	78
	> 30 years	16
Length of Service in Academic Profession	0-10	68
	11-20	95
	21-30	122
	> 30 years	15
Current Designation	Dr.	118
	Associate Professor	163
	Professor	19

Additionally, the Partial least square – Structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) were used to assess the goodness of measures and to test the hypotheses for this study. The mediation was tested using the bootstrapping approach as suggested by Preacher and Hayes (2008).

Measurement

The Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory (ROCI-II) Form B (Rahim, 1983) was adopted in this study to measure the five styles of conflict management, consisting of 28 items which include integrating (7 items), obliging (6 items), compromising (4 items), dominating (6 items) and avoiding (5 items). The items were measured on a five- point Likert type scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The reliability coefficients for integrating, obliging, compromising, dominating and avoiding styles were 0.89, 0.86, 0.83, 0.75 and 0.73 respectively. Whereas, job satisfaction was measured based on the Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS) developed by Spector (1985) containing 25 items. The Cronbach's alpha for the scale is 0.83. The measures were anchored by five-point Likert scale ranging from (1) "strongly disagree" to (5) "strongly agree".

FINDINGS

Goodness of measurement

The goodness of measures for the variables in the study were assessed using construct validity, convergent validity, discriminant validity, and reliability analysis. For construct validity, Hair, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2013) indicated that every loading that are greater than 0.50 on a particular construct are considered significant. Consequently, loadings below 0.50 were removed and there were no reported cross loadings. As a result, the constructs were found to be valid for this study. Based on the results, Table 2 shows the factor loadings for each construct.

Table 2: Loadings and cross loadings

	JS	**AVO**	**COM**	**OB**	**INT**	**DO**
JS1	0.823					
JS2	0.845					
JS3	0.931					
JS4	0.867					
JS5	0.865					
JS6	0.725					
JS7	0.645					
JS8	0.532					
JS9	0.554					
JS10	0.589					
JS11	0.685					
JS12	0.665					
JS13	0.821					
JS14	0.878					
JS15	0.751					
JS16	0.534					
JS17	0.553					

JS18	0.546					
JS19	0.858					
JS20	0.821					
JS21	0.637					
JS22	0.652					
JS23	0.631					
JS24	0.725					
JS25	0.729					
AVO1		0.611				
AVO2		0.623				
AVO3		0.665				
AVO4		0.576				
AVO5		0.689				
COM1			0.754			
COM2			0.621			
COM3			0.856			
COM4			0.743			
OB1				0.798		
OB2				0.976		
OB3				0.757		
OB4				0.945		
OB5				0.851		
OB6				0.873		
INT1					0.822	
INT2					0.734	
INT3					0.857	
INT4					0.862	
INT5					0.896	
INT6					0.867	
INT7					0.871	
DO1						0.711
DO2						0.723
DO3						0.842
DO4						0.848
DO5						0.851
DO6						0.732

Subsequently, to determine the convergent validity, factor loadings, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE) were analysed. Table 3 exhibits the all factor loadings which are above 0.50, the composite reliabilities are above 0.70, and the AVEs are above 0.50. Thus, the convergent validity of the constructs was accepted.

Table 3. Results of measurement model

Model Construct	**Items**	**Loadings**	**AVE**	**CR**
Obliging Style (OB)	OB1	0.798	0.827	0.851
	OB2	0.976		
	OB3	0.757		
	OB4	0.945		
	OB5	0.851		
	OB6	0.873		
Dominating Style (DO)	DO1	0.711	0.722	0.837
	DO2	0.723		
	DO3	0.842		
	DO4	0.848		
	DO5	0.851		
	DO6	0.732		
Integrating Style (INT)	INT1	0.822	0.764	0.857
	INT2	0.734		
	INT3	0.857		
	INT4	0.862		
	INT5	0.896		
	INT6	0.867		
	INT7	0.871		
Compromising Style (COM)	COM1	0.754	0.737	0.862
	COM2	0.621		
	COM3	0.856		
	COM4	0.743		
Avoiding Style (AVO)	AVO1	0.611	0.711	0.769
	AVO2	0.623		
	AVO3	0.665		
	AVO4	0.576		
	AVO5	0.689		
Job Satisfaction (JS)	JS1	0.823	0.863	0.879
	JS2	0.845		
	JS3	0.931		
	JS4	0.867		
	JS5	0.865		
	JS6	0.725		
	JS7	0.645		
	JS8	0.532		
	JS9	0.554		
	JS10	0.589		
	JS11	0.685		
	JS12	0.665		
	JS13	0.821		
	JS14	0.878		
	JS15	0.751		
	JS16	0.534		
	JS17	0.553		
	JS18	0.546		
	JS19	0.858		
	JS20	0.821		
	JS21	0.637		
	JS22	0.652		
	JS23	0.631		
	JS24	0.725		
	JS25	0.729		

Furthermore, the correlations between the measures were compared by the square root of the AVEs in order to assess the discriminant validity. Table 4 shows the correlations between the measures were lesser than the square root of the diagonals. The items measuring the constructs of discriminant validity for this study are satisfactory. Lastly, reliability was also accessed via Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which should have a value higher than the recommended value of 0.60 as indicated by Nunally and Berstein (1994). In addition, all of the constructs have alpha values above the recommended value and therefore, the measures are considered as reliable (see Table 4).

Table 4: Discriminant Validity of Construct

	JS	AVO	COM	OB	INT	DO
JS	**0.812**					
AVO	-0.323	**0.835**				
COM	0.543	-0.343	**0.921**			
OB	0.632	-0.223	0.554	**0.906**		
INT	0.512	-0.345	0.622	0.465	**0.923**	
DO	0.533	-0.222	0.512	0.756	0.612	**0.833**

Note: *The bolded diagonals represent square root of the AVE while the off-diagonals represent the correlation.*

Hypotheses testing

Job satisfaction was selected as the dependent variable, and therefore the R^2 value revealed that 69% of the variance for job satisfaction was described by the five conflict management styles. Integrating style ($\beta = 0.273$, $p < 0.01$), obliging style ($\beta = 0.252$, $p < 0.01$) and compromising style ($\beta = 0.184$, $p < 0.01$) were found positively significant with job satisfaction while dominating style (($\beta = -0.163$, $p < 0.01$) and avoiding style ($\beta = -0.197$, $p < 0.01$) was negatively significant with job satisfaction. Therefore, all of the hypotheses are supported (see Table 5).

Table 5: Coefficient Beta and R^2 for Job Satisfaction

Hypotheses	Relationship	Coefficient (β)	R^2	Result
1	Integrating Style →Job Satisfaction	0.273***	0.69	Supported
2	Obliging Style →Job Satisfaction	0.252***		Supported
3	Compromising Style → Job Satisfaction	0.184***		Supported
4	Dominating Style → Job Satisfaction	-0.163***		Supported
5	Avoiding Style → Job Satisfaction	-0.197***		Supported

Note: **** $p < 0.01$*

CONCLUSION

The current study has found that the five conflict management styles have significant relationship on job satisfaction. In this respect, integrating style, obliging style and compromising style have had positively significant relationship on job satifaction. At the same time, dominating and avoiding styles resulted in negatively significant on job satisfaction. By this means, academic staffs will be satisfied with their jobs after which their superiors able to handle conflicts effectively. The findings of this study has reflected on the results of previous empirical studies (e.g. Alam & Fakir, 2010; Ayodele & Olorunsola, 2012; Fatimah, Amiraa, & Halim, 2011; Graham, 2009). Therefore, when superiors applied the styles of integrating, obliging or compromising in handling conflicts, it will minimize on the negative feelings and generate a stronger sense of satisfaction among employees. On the other hand, superiors that utilize the dominating style and avoiding style tend to exhibit discontentment, discourtesy and increases employees' intention to quit and extremely dissatisfied with their jobs.

The undertaken study has initiated a significant relationship of all five conflict management styles on job satisfaction in the context of higher education sector, particularly in Malaysia. As indicated by Alam (2009) studies on conflict management styles and job satisfaction in higher education sector was infrequently observed and an implementation apparatus to administer organizational conflicts is an observable circumstance to the employees. Moreover, the findings can serve as a guideline to the faculty management in resolving job satisfaction issues among the academic staffs. Understanding conflict management styles can help the academic staffs to recognize and evaluate situations that could lead to conflict. By having the ability to monitor and assess difficult situations, the academic staffs will be able to anticipate such conflicts at their workplaces.

All in all, the findings have achieved its objectives in which its hypotheses were supported. The integrating, obliging and compromising styles practiced by the faculty management were perceived to lead to higher value of job satisfaction among the academicians. To maintain and ensure the professionalism and quality of conflict management within the organizations and amongst the staffs, it is recommended that the enhancement of interpersonal skills is important in addressing conflict effectively. It can proximately harmonize a conflict situation at workplace.

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