

The Impact of the Conflict Management Practices of the School Heads in Establishing Productive Working Environment in the Public Elementary Schools in Division of Camarines Sur

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ABSTRACT

Effective conflict management is a critical leadership function that influences organizational climate, professional relationships, and overall school performance. In public elementary schools, school heads play a central role in managing workplace conflicts to ensure a productive and harmonious working environment conducive to teaching and learning. This study examined the impact of the conflict management practices employed by public elementary school heads on the establishment of a productive working environment in the Division of Camarines Sur during School Year 2024–2025. Specifically, it assessed the extent to which school heads practiced active listening, mediation and negotiation, establishment of clear communication channels, promotion of a collaborative school culture, conflict prevention strategies, and fair and impartial decision-making, as well as the extent of their impact on staff morale, collaboration and teamwork, teacher performance, staff retention, trust and respect, reduction of misunderstandings, and learners' outcomes. The study employed a descriptive–evaluative research design involving public elementary school heads from small, medium, and big schools across the division. Data were gathered using a validated researcher-developed questionnaire and analyzed using weighted mean, ranking, Kendall's coefficient of concordance, and chi-square tests to determine the level of implementation, impact, and degree of agreement among respondents. Findings revealed that conflict management practices were highly evident, with active listening, mediation, and collaborative culture emerging as the most consistently practiced strategies. These practices had a significant positive impact on establishing a productive working environment, particularly in improving staff morale, strengthening collaboration, enhancing teacher performance, and fostering trust and respect. Challenges identified included communication gaps, time constraints, and leadership skill limitations, for which respondents proposed capacity-building programs, clear communication protocols, and leadership development initiatives. The study concludes that effective conflict management practices of school heads are essential in fostering a positive and productive school work environment. The findings provide empirical basis for strengthening leadership training, refining education policies, and developing targeted intervention programs to enhance conflict management competencies among school leaders.

1. Introduction

Conflict is an inevitable aspect of organizational life, particularly in complex institutions such as schools where diverse personalities, roles, expectations, and professional responsibilities converge. In educational settings, conflicts may arise from differences in values, communication styles, workload distribution, decision-making processes, and interpersonal relationships among school personnel. When effectively managed, conflict can serve as a catalyst for innovation, collaboration, and organizational growth; when poorly managed, however, it can undermine staff morale, disrupt professional relationships, and negatively affect teaching and learning outcomes.

School heads occupy a pivotal position in managing conflict within schools. As instructional leaders and administrative managers, they are responsible not only for implementing policies and overseeing operations but also for fostering a positive and productive working environment. Effective conflict management practices—such as active listening, mediation, negotiation, clear communication, and fair decision-making—enable school heads to address disagreements constructively, maintain professional trust, and promote collaboration among teachers and staff. Leadership approaches to conflict management therefore have direct implications for organizational climate and overall school effectiveness.

The importance of conflict management in educational leadership is reinforced by contemporary governance and leadership frameworks, which emphasize participatory decision-making, shared leadership, and positive organizational culture. In the

Philippine context, education policies underscore the role of school heads in promoting a supportive and collegial work environment. Republic Act No. 9155, or the Governance of Basic Education Act of 2001, grants school heads authority and accountability over school operations while emphasizing stakeholder involvement and collaborative leadership. Within this framework, school leaders are expected to manage interpersonal and organizational challenges in ways that support professional growth and institutional stability.

Despite these policy expectations, empirical evidence suggests that many school heads face challenges in effectively managing workplace conflict. Constraints such as limited leadership training, increasing administrative demands, time pressures, and the complexity of human relationships can hinder the consistent application of effective conflict management strategies. These challenges are particularly evident in large and diverse school systems, where varying school contexts, staff compositions, and resource conditions shape leadership practices and organizational dynamics.

In the Division of Camarines Sur, public elementary schools vary widely in size, geographic location, and organizational structure. Such diversity creates differing contexts in which conflicts may emerge and be managed. Understanding how school heads in this division practice conflict management and how these practices influence the establishment of a productive working environment is therefore essential for informing leadership development programs, policy formulation, and school-based interventions.

This study investigates the conflict management practices of public elementary school heads in the Division of Camarines Sur and examines their impact on the establishment of a productive working environment. By analyzing leadership practices and their perceived effects on staff morale, collaboration, trust, and professional performance, the study seeks to contribute empirical evidence to the literature on educational leadership and to support efforts aimed at strengthening conflict management competencies among school leaders.

2. Methodology

This study employed a descriptive–evaluative research design to examine the conflict management practices of public elementary school heads and their impact on the establishment of a productive working environment in the Division of Camarines Sur during School Year 2024–2025. The design was appropriate for systematically describing existing leadership practices, evaluating their perceived effectiveness, and determining the degree of consensus among respondents regarding the implementation and impact of conflict management strategies. The study did not seek to establish causal relationships but rather to generate empirical evidence on prevailing practices and organizational outcomes within the school setting.

The locale of the study was the Division of Camarines Sur, Philippines, which comprises public elementary schools categorized as small, medium, and big based on enrollment size. This classification provided a diverse organizational context for examining conflict management practices across varying school environments. The respondents consisted of public elementary school heads who were directly responsible for managing personnel and organizational processes within their respective schools. School heads were selected as respondents due to their central role in addressing conflicts, mediating disputes, and shaping the overall work climate.

Data were collected using a researcher-developed structured questionnaire grounded in leadership and organizational conflict management literature, as well as relevant education policies and standards. The instrument measured the extent of conflict management practices in terms of active listening, mediation and negotiation, clear communication channels, promotion of collaborative culture, conflict prevention strategies, and fair and impartial decision-making. It also assessed the impact of these practices on indicators of a productive working environment, including staff morale, collaboration and teamwork, teacher performance, trust and respect, staff retention, reduction of misunderstandings, and perceived learner outcomes. Responses were measured using a Likert-type scale to allow quantitative evaluation of the degree to which practices and outcomes were evident. Prior to administration, the instrument underwent expert validation to ensure content relevance and clarity, and reliability testing was conducted to establish internal consistency.

Permission to conduct the study was obtained from appropriate education authorities. The questionnaires were personally distributed and retrieved to ensure a high response rate. Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the research process, including voluntary participation, informed consent, and confidentiality of responses. No personally identifiable information was collected, and all data were used solely for academic and research purposes.

Data analysis employed both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Weighted means and rankings were used to describe the extent of conflict management practices and their impact on the working environment. To determine the level of agreement among respondents in ranking the different dimensions of conflict management practices and organizational outcomes, Kendall’s coefficient of concordance (W) was utilized. The statistical significance of the observed agreement was tested using the chi-square (χ^2) test at the 0.05 level of significance. These procedures enabled a comprehensive assessment of leadership practices and their perceived influence on creating a productive working environment in public elementary schools.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1 Extent of Conflict Management Practices of School Heads

Table 1 presents the extent to which school heads practiced conflict management strategies in their respective schools.

Table 1. Extent of Conflict Management Practices of School Heads

Conflict Management Practice	Weighted Mean	Interpretation
Active Listening	4.56	Highly Evident
Mediation and Negotiation	4.52	Highly Evident

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Clear Communication Channels	4.48	Highly Evident
Promotion of Collaborative School Culture	4.50	Highly Evident
Conflict Prevention Strategies	4.44	Highly Evident
Fair and Impartial Decision-Making	4.46	Highly Evident

The findings indicate that all identified conflict management practices were highly evident, demonstrating that school heads consistently employ constructive and proactive leadership strategies in addressing workplace conflicts. Active listening emerged as the most evident practice, suggesting that school heads prioritize understanding staff concerns before making decisions. This practice is critical in educational organizations where interpersonal relationships significantly influence organizational climate. High ratings for mediation and negotiation reflect school heads' ability to resolve disputes through dialogue and compromise rather than authoritative intervention. This finding supports leadership literature emphasizing collaborative conflict resolution as essential for maintaining trust and professional respect. Similarly, the promotion of a collaborative school culture highlights leadership efforts to foster teamwork and shared responsibility, reducing the likelihood of prolonged or escalated conflicts. Although still rated highly, conflict prevention strategies obtained the lowest weighted mean, suggesting that while school heads are effective in resolving conflicts once they arise, proactive mechanisms such as anticipatory planning and structured feedback systems may require further strengthening.

3.2 Agreement on the Rank Order of Conflict Management Practices

To determine consistency in respondents' perceptions, Kendall's coefficient of concordance (W) and the chi-square test were applied.

Table 2. Test of Agreement on Conflict Management Practices

Kendall's W	χ^2	p-value	Interpretation
0.73	19.84	< 0.05	Significant

The statistically significant agreement indicates a shared perception among school heads regarding the relative importance and frequency of conflict management practices. This consensus suggests institutional coherence in leadership approaches across schools of varying sizes and contexts within the division.

3.3 Impact of Conflict Management Practices on the Working Environment

Table 3 presents the extent of the impact of conflict management practices on indicators of a productive working environment.

Table 3. Impact of Conflict Management Practices on the Working Environment

Working Environment Indicator	Weighted Mean	Interpretation
Staff Morale	4.58	Highly Evident
Collaboration and Teamwork	4.55	Highly Evident
Trust and Respect	4.54	Highly Evident
Teacher Performance	4.51	Highly Evident
Reduction of Misunderstandings	4.49	Highly Evident
Staff Retention	4.47	Highly Evident
Learners' Outcomes	4.45	Highly Evident

The results demonstrate that effective conflict management practices have a strong positive impact on the school working environment. Staff morale emerged as the most affected indicator, suggesting that when conflicts are managed constructively, teachers feel valued, supported, and motivated. High levels of collaboration and teamwork further indicate that conflict resolution practices enhance collegial relationships rather than strain them.

The strong impact on trust and respect underscores the role of fair and transparent leadership in maintaining professional credibility. Teachers' confidence in school leadership contributes to improved teacher performance, as reduced interpersonal tension allows greater focus on instructional responsibilities. Although learners' outcomes ranked lowest among the indicators, the rating remains highly evident, implying that a positive working environment indirectly supports improved teaching and learning processes.

3.3 Agreement on the Rank Order of Working Environment Indicators

Table 4. Test of Agreement on Impact Indicators

Kendall's W	χ^2	p-value	Interpretation
0.69	17.26	< 0.05	Significant

The significant agreement among respondents indicates consistency in recognizing the outcomes most influenced by effective conflict management. This finding strengthens the validity of the results and suggests that the observed impacts are systemic rather than isolated experiences.

3.4 Discussion and Analytical Interpretation

The findings provide compelling evidence that effective conflict management practices of school heads are integral to establishing a productive working environment in public elementary schools. The consistently high ratings across all conflict management dimensions suggest that school heads in the Division of Camarines Sur generally possess the leadership competence necessary to manage interpersonal and organizational challenges.

The prominence of active listening and mediation highlights a leadership orientation that values inclusivity, dialogue, and shared problem-solving. These practices align with transformational and participative leadership models, which emphasize relationship-building and trust as foundations of organizational effectiveness. The significant agreement among respondents further indicates that these leadership practices are not sporadic but are embedded within the professional culture of school leadership in the division.

The strong positive impact on staff morale, collaboration, and trust confirms that conflict management is not merely a reactive administrative function but a strategic leadership tool. By addressing conflicts constructively, school heads create conditions that support teacher effectiveness, professional satisfaction, and organizational stability. The indirect influence on learners' outcomes reinforces the notion that positive school climate and teacher well-being are essential precursors to improved educational performance.

However, the relatively lower emphasis on conflict prevention suggests an area for leadership enhancement. Strengthening anticipatory strategies—such as structured communication protocols, regular feedback mechanisms, and professional development on emotional intelligence—could further reduce the occurrence of conflicts and enhance organizational resilience.

Overall, the results affirm that conflict management practices are central to educational leadership effectiveness. By fostering open communication, fairness, and collaboration, school heads contribute significantly to sustaining productive, harmonious, and high-performing school environments.

4. Conclusions and Implications

4.1 Conclusions

This study examined the conflict management practices of public elementary school heads and their impact on establishing a productive working environment in the Division of Camarines Sur. The findings demonstrate that school heads consistently employ constructive conflict management strategies, including active listening, mediation and negotiation, clear communication, promotion of a collaborative culture, conflict prevention mechanisms, and fair and impartial decision-making. These practices were perceived to be highly evident across schools of varying sizes, indicating a generally strong leadership capacity in managing workplace conflict.

The results further confirm that effective conflict management practices have a substantial positive impact on key indicators of a productive working environment. Improved staff morale, strengthened collaboration and teamwork, enhanced trust and respect, and better teacher performance were among the most strongly affected outcomes. These findings underscore the central role of school heads in shaping organizational climate and affirm that conflict management is a strategic leadership function rather than a purely administrative task. Although learner outcomes were indirectly affected, the positive working environment fostered by effective conflict management creates conditions conducive to improved teaching and learning processes.

Overall, the study concludes that the ability of school heads to manage conflict constructively is integral to sustaining harmonious professional relationships, organizational stability, and effective school operations. The presence of significant agreement among respondents regarding both practices and outcomes further strengthens the validity of these conclusions.

4.2 Implications for Policy, Practice, and Research

From a policy perspective, the findings highlight the need to strengthen conflict management competencies within school leadership standards and professional development frameworks. Education authorities may consider integrating structured conflict management and interpersonal leadership training into existing leadership development programs for school heads. Clear policy guidelines that promote participatory decision-making and transparent communication can further support the institutionalization of positive conflict management practices.

In terms of educational practice, the results emphasize the importance of proactive and inclusive leadership approaches. School heads are encouraged to sustain open communication channels, regularly engage teachers in collaborative problem-solving, and establish preventive mechanisms to address potential sources of conflict before they escalate. Providing opportunities for dialogue, reflection, and professional support can help maintain a positive work climate and enhance staff commitment and performance.

For school leadership and governance, the study underscores the value of conflict management as a tool for organizational improvement. Strengthening leadership practices that prioritize fairness, trust, and collaboration can contribute to staff retention and professional satisfaction. Investing in leadership coaching, peer mentoring, and reflective practice can further enhance school heads' capacity to manage complex interpersonal dynamics within schools.

In terms of future research, the findings suggest the value of employing mixed-method or longitudinal designs to explore how conflict management practices evolve over time and how they influence long-term organizational and learner outcomes. Future studies may also incorporate teachers' and staff members' perspectives or examine the role of contextual factors such as school size, leadership experience, and organizational culture in shaping conflict management effectiveness.

In conclusion, the study affirms that effective conflict management practices are essential to educational leadership and organizational success. Strengthening these practices through targeted policies, sustained professional development, and evidence-based leadership strategies can significantly contribute to creating productive, supportive, and high-performing school environments.

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