

Personal Conflict: How Do University Teachers Deal with It?

¹Yongyut Khamkhong and ²Natamon Nanposri

¹Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Phranakhon Rajabhat University, Thailand

²Rajapark Institute, Thailand

E-mail: yongyut.k@pnru.ac.th

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Abstract

Personal conflicts among teachers do not only affect their physical and mental health but also their working performance. If managed carefully, the teamwork can be functioning effectively. If not, it might lead to frustration, resignation or even crimes. This study examined the conflicts the university teachers have experienced and their chosen conflict management styles using Thomas–Kilmann Model for interpretation and reflections. Five teachers, selected by purposive sampling, from two governmental universities provided their personal reflections in a set of in-depth interviews. Their reflections were studied with descriptive analysis together with documentation on theories and strategies dealing with personal conflicts. The results showed that three of them who used various strategies are still holding on the job and progressing professionally while the other two, with limited strategies, chose to leave. Most of them adopted *Avoiding* style and still carried the pain even if the conflicts were subsided or ended already. It is suggested that the teachers adopt various conflict management strategies to deal with the problems. The university management above the program level should also impose systematic measurements for the prevention and solution to the personal conflicts.

Keywords: Personal Conflict; Teachers; Personal Reflections

Introduction

On May 18, 2016, a 60-year-old teacher shot two of his colleagues in the classroom in front of their students. A few hours later, he turned the gun to himself, leaving several pages of the written explanation of his action to the police. The three dead teachers are PhD holders

teaching in the same team for educational administration program in one of the oldest universities in Bangkok. The news sent a shockwave to all teachers countrywide (Matichon, 2016).

As reported in the daily news, there are countless of small and big crimes and thousands of legal lawsuits each year stemming from the personal conflicts among teachers in Thailand. Yet there are very few studies on the issues. It is worth knowing how the university teachers, who are supposed to lead the public intellectually, deal with their personal conflicts.

Personal conflicts in any teams will affect the workers' performance. A business survey found that 81% of more than 2,000 American adults experienced personal conflicts in their workplace. Four out of 10 reported the loss of productivity (Huhman, 2014). Conflicts in a team will result in absenteeism and affect employee's loyalty to the organization (Huan & Yazdanifard, 2012). Personal conflicts benefit nobody and if left unresolved, it may escalate to violence or unwanted situation.

Personal conflicts among teachers can have a significant impact on the team, their health and their working performance. These conflicts can arise from a variety of sources, such as personal relationships, conflicting beliefs, or a clash of personalities. When teachers are experiencing personal conflicts, they may find it difficult to focus on their work and may become less effective in the classroom. As a result, students may struggle to learn and may not receive the quality education they deserve. Teachers who are experiencing personal conflicts may benefit from seeking support from colleagues or seeking professional counseling to address these issues (Miller, 2014).

Research has shown that teachers who are experiencing personal conflicts may be more likely to experience burnout and to leave the profession (Ingersoll, 2001). This can have a negative impact on the quality of education that students receive. When teachers leave, students may be left with inexperienced teachers or substitute teachers who are not as effective as the original teacher. Additionally, high teacher turnover can create instability in schools, which can negatively affect student achievement (Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 2004). Therefore, it is essential for schools to recognize the importance of addressing personal conflicts among teachers and to provide support to help teachers manage these conflicts.

This study aimed to examine the personal conflicts the teachers have experienced and see what strategies they adopted to deal with the problems. Theories and documentation regarding the conflict management were brought for reflections together with the interviewed data from the

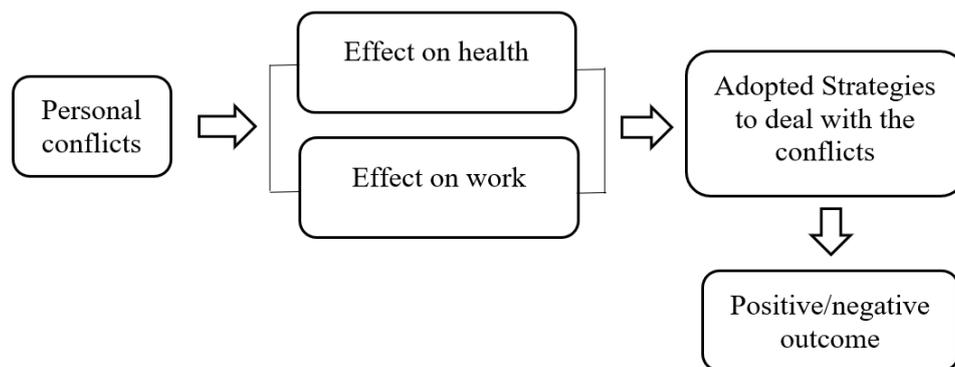
sampling group. The results may be useful for the university's management and teachers especially those who are having the personal conflicts.

Objective of the Study

This research aimed to study the teachers' personal conflicts and their strategies to deal with the problems.

Conceptual Framework

The study emphasized the personal conflicts the teachers experienced and the strategies adopted to deal with the conflicts. Effects on their work and health were studied. The adopted strategies may yield positive or negative results.



Research Methodology

This study utilized qualitative methodology. Five teachers who have experienced personal conflicts volunteered to give data through a set of in-depth interviews. All of them were selected purposively. Their identity was strictly concealed out of their request. The researcher employed Thomas-Kilmann Model (2008) to analyze the interviewed data and provided supportive information from documents, theories and concepts related to conflict management.

Literature Reviews

Conflict management is an essential skill for individuals to develop, particularly in work or organizational settings where conflicts can arise frequently. Effective conflict management can help individuals to resolve conflicts in a constructive and positive manner, which can lead to better

relationships and improved outcomes. Conflict management involves various strategies and techniques, including negotiation, compromise, collaboration, and communication. Individuals can learn these skills through training and practice, which can help them to become more effective in managing conflicts (Rahim, 2002).

Conflicts in educational institutions can be categorized into various aspects. The common findings are as follows:

Conflict between teachers and administrators: Conflicts between teachers and administrators can also have negative impacts on students. For instance, a study by Rumberger and Palardy (2005) found that when teachers felt unsupported by their administrators or disagreed with their policies, they were more likely to report feeling dissatisfied with their jobs and less committed to their schools. This can lead to increased absenteeism and decreased effectiveness in the classroom, ultimately affecting student outcomes.

Conflict with students or parents: Teachers may also experience conflicts with students or their parents, which can affect teaching and learning. For example, a study by Davis and Finney (2019) found that teacher–student conflicts were associated with lower levels of student engagement and academic achievement. Similarly, conflicts with parents can lead to a breakdown in communication and collaboration, which can negatively impact student outcomes.

Conflict between teachers: When teachers are in conflict with each other, it can create a tense and unpleasant work environment that can negatively impact students. For example, a study by Lunsford and Zavattaro (2016) found that when teachers had conflicts with their colleagues, they reported feeling less satisfied with their jobs, which can lead to burnout and reduced engagement with their students. Moreover, conflicts between teachers can lead to communication breakdowns and result in misunderstandings or mixed messages being conveyed to students.

Some related researches are as follows:

A study at St. Theresa International College, Thailand, found that most teachers preferred to use accommodating, compromising, avoiding and the dominating style respectively when dealing with personal conflicts with their colleagues. The respondents are 52 teachers and they did not want to confront each other. The softer approach was chosen by most of them (Khamkhong & Tayco, 2018).

Lee (2003) studied conflict management styles among faculty and staff of a college in Taiwan and found that the majority of the respondents used integrating style most often and used

obliging style least often. Among emotional intelligence indicators, self-motivation received the highest scores while managing emotion the lowest. Integrating and compromising styles have positive relationships with emotional intelligence. Gender, academic rank and position also influenced emotional intelligence.

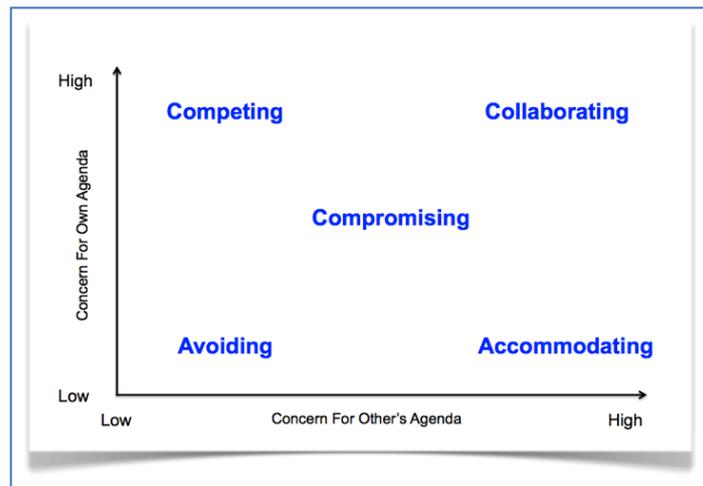
Skordoulis et al. (2020) studied the relationship between emotional intelligence and conflict resolution among secondary education teachers in Greece. The analyses have revealed that the main reason for workplace conflicts in secondary schools is the existence of informal groups. In addition, emotional intelligence seemed to have a direct relationship with conflict resolution styles. The average score of emotional intelligence among the respondents was high.

Burden (1982) studied the conflict between personal life and professional life of 15 elementary teachers in Arizona, USA, and found that the balanced personal life positively affected their teaching. The teachers' stress usually comes from overcommitment to work and they need to learn to separate personal life from professional life. Once they do activities at their personal life, they can release the stress from professional life.

Theories on Conflict Management

There are several theories of conflict management that can help individuals and organizations to better understand and manage conflicts. One such theory is the Social Identity Theory, which suggests that individuals identify with certain groups and may engage in conflict to protect or promote their group's interests. This theory emphasizes the importance of understanding individuals' group identities and the potential for conflicts to arise due to group membership. By recognizing the role of social identities in conflicts, individuals and organizations can work towards addressing underlying issues and finding solutions that benefit all parties involved (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Another important theory is the Integrative Bargaining Approach. This approach focuses on finding solutions that meet the needs and interests of all parties involved in the conflict. It involves identifying common ground and working collaboratively to find mutually beneficial solutions. This approach can be particularly effective in situations where relationships are important, such as in the workplace, where long-term relationships between employees and employers can be vital to success (Fisher & Ury, 2011).



Thomas–Kilmann Model

Source: Workshop Bank (2023)

In this study, the researcher based the analysis from the Thomas–Kilmann Model (2008) which classified conflict management styles into five categories: 1) *Competing*: one pursues his concerns at the other's expense. Competing is assertive and uncooperative, a power-oriented mode. When competing, an individual will use whatever power seems appropriate to win his or her position. Competing might mean standing up for your rights, defending a position you believe is correct, or simply trying to win. 2) *Collaborating*: one is trying to work with other to satisfy the concerns of both. Both individuals choose to find alternative that meets both sets of concerns. A creative solution was met when both of them sit down and discuss what benefit them both. 3) *Compromising*: one seeks mutually acceptable solution that partially satisfy both parties. Compromising is in the middle ground between competing and accommodating. They do not give everything to each other but they choose not to compete. It is a quick middle-ground position, not a long term one. 4) *Avoiding*: one does not pursue his or her concerns or the others, he does not address the conflict. Avoiding might be the form of sidestepping an issue, postponing it until a better time, or simply withdrawing from a threatening situation. 5) *Accommodating*: one neglects his concerns to satisfy the concerns of others. When accommodating, it is the self-sacrifice and it may appear as selfless generosity, obeying another person's order when you do not want to, or you are just simply yielding to the other's idea.

Strategies to deal with personal conflicts

Dealing with teachers' personal conflicts in school can be challenging, but there are several strategies that can be effective. The first step is to encourage open communication

between the parties involved. Teachers should be encouraged to express their concerns and perspectives in a safe and supportive environment. Active listening techniques can also be helpful in promoting understanding and empathy between individuals (Katz & Lawyer, 2015).

Another effective strategy is to involve a neutral third party in the conflict resolution process. This could be a mediator, counselor, or administrator who is trained in conflict resolution and can facilitate constructive conversations between the parties involved. Research has shown that the use of third-party mediators can be effective in reducing conflict and improving communication and collaboration between individuals (Lange & Heijden, 2019).

It is also important to establish clear policies and procedures for addressing conflicts within the school environment. This can include guidelines for reporting conflicts, expectations for behavior and communication, and consequences for violating these guidelines. By establishing clear expectations and consequences, individuals are more likely to engage in constructive conflict resolution behaviors and avoid negative behaviors that can escalate conflicts (Stoop, van der Houwen, & van der Heijden, 2018).

Another effective strategy is to use collaborative problem-solving techniques to address conflicts within the team. This can involve identifying the root causes of the conflict, generating possible solutions, and working together to identify the best course of action (Rahim, 2017). Research has shown that collaborative problem-solving approaches can be effective in reducing conflict and improving team performance (Tjosvold, Tang & West, 2014).

It is important for teachers to build positive relationships with their colleagues and to maintain a focus on shared goals and objectives. By emphasizing the importance of collaboration and teamwork, teachers can create a more positive and supportive work environment that encourages constructive conflict resolution behaviors (Gibson & Zell, 2017).

To keep balance in relationship with others, Covey (1989) has offered the ‘win-win’ principle to effectively collaborate with others. Covey argues that win-win solutions are more effective than win-lose or lose-win solutions because they promote collaboration, trust, and long-term relationships. This habit requires individuals to adopt an abundance mentality and to look for ways to create value for everyone involved.

Research Results

The five interviewed teachers are 3 women and 2 men. They are aged between 38–58. They all have worked more than 10 years teaching at a university level, in the faculties of humanities, and management science. Two of them are PhD holders. One of them is studying for PhD and working at the same time. Three of them are working in the same university but in different programs. The other two are working in another university. Both universities are the state-owned and in Bangkok.

They volunteered to provide personal data with a set of in-depth interviews. Five questions were asked: 1) What personal conflicts have you experienced in your workplace? 2) What effects have you experienced from those conflicts in term of physical and mental health? 3) What effects have you experienced from those conflicts on your working performance? 4) What personal strategies did you use to deal with the personal conflicts? 5) What is the outcome of the usage of those strategies?

Here are some excerpts from the interviews and the analysis based on Thomas–Kilmann Model's conflict management styles.

Teacher A:

“... I am so different from other team members by many things. I am the oldest, for instance. At first, I can sense that they are skeptical of me. After that the program head started to hate me. Several of them then followed the leader. They hate me and they always find faults at everything I do. I can feel the hate from their eyes and from time to time, they would bark at me with abusive language. I couldn't sleep at night and many times I wanted to use violence to end all the conflicts. But violence is not in my blood and I worried about my daughter. Luckily, not all of them followed the leader. One of them felt sorry for me and befriended me. That might be one of the reasons I can tolerate the conflict. At least I have someone to talk to in the office.”

When asked about the impacts to his working performance, he answered:

“They convinced some students to hate me. But luckily, most students still love me. So, the classroom is still my heaven to stay away from all these malicious acts. ... At the end, I made decision to yield everything on their demand. I accepted everything they wanted from me even if it's sometimes inhuman. For example, I was told to clean the floor, wash dirty plates, and do labor works to service them. I always received the jobs nobody wanted to touch. I just wanted to keep

the job. I just wanted to be a teacher for my students and did not want all these conflicts. I avoided all of my haters and stayed alone most of the time. ... the bad memory still haunted me until today. I tried not to look back.”

“... During the peak time of the problems, I can hardly concentrate on the teaching. It’s difficult for me to sit down and prepare the lessons for the class. I felt sorry for my students.”

Teacher A chose *Accommodating* and *Avoiding* styles at the same time. He accepted all the abuses with silence, with the greater desire to keep the job. He served the concerns for others at his own expense. That is the hallmarks of the *Accommodating* type. At the same time, he avoided all the problems and avoided the contact with other team members. The conflicts sometimes derailed him from the teaching job but he is still there with the team.

Teacher B:

“... The things turned bad after I brought my best friend to the team. She turned to be my No. 1 enemy. She manipulated everyone against me. I’m the most senior teacher in the team and now everyone united so well to hate me. They reported against me to the university’s management. The investigation on financial problem was made on me. They reported on my behavior. They lied about this and that to make me look bad in the eyes of everyone including my students. My heart broke that my best friend who I offered the job turned on me. Now, I am about to lose the job from all the darkness I didn’t make. I am just unlucky to be in this team. But I won’t sit idly. I have to get even on them. Everything they do to me, I will do to them.”

“I felt so lonely and I know I cannot stay. I ate lunch alone. I walked alone. I have nobody to talk to in my team. We used to be close but things changed after I brought in my friend. I did some projects to help students and my team accused me of mismanaging the budget. They lied to students about me and I felt so sorry for students to be in the middle of the silly conflicts of the teachers. I was called in by the dean and was under investigations on several things. I know my time was up with my team. I couldn’t cope with the stress.”

Teacher B resigned during the time of this study. I was told prior to her decision and that’s why I specifically picked her for the interview as I wanted to listen to her story directly. Teacher B and her team members filed several legal reports against each other. They will appear in court for several lawsuits including defamation, uploading misinformation on the Internet, among others. Each lawsuit usually takes years to complete in Thailand.

Teacher B adopted the *Competing* style by looking at her concerns at the other's expense. It's the tit-for-tat tactic that nobody will win. It's the lose-lose situation that benefits nobody at the end. She felt victimized by other team members and she felt emotional when she talked about her best friend who is now her enemy. The lawsuits will make everyone suffered and she knew it. Teacher B already left her job and she is in the mode of revenge.

Teacher C:

"... My boss who is the team leader hates me. She used her power to harass me. I have to endure her abusive language, the endless and unbearable accuses she always created against me. I was so stressed that I had to seek help from a psychiatrist. I developed depression and have to take medication everyday to calm my emotion. I thought about suicide and felt so helpless. My boss is so powerful that she convinced everyone to ignore me. A pure dictatorship style. I consulted my husband and he told me to leave. I love this university and I love my students but the problems I have really affected me physically and mentally. I cannot concentrate on my work in class and outside class. I cried often in front of my students. My boss sometimes yelled at me in front of my students and I felt so shameful. I don't know what to do."

"I am older than most of them. I am slow by nature. Things have changed in the style of teaching and learning. I was seen as the ancient, outdated teacher by other team members. But I need income and a job to support my family, too. They bullied me with harsh words that nobody can accept. I don't know who to blame. Should I blame them or should I blame myself? I tried to move to other teams but nobody accepted me. I am lonely here."

Teacher C resigned shortly after the interview. She is now living under the care of her family. She still has problem with mental health and is under medication.

Teacher C adopted *Avoiding* style. She does not seek to address the problem and tried to avoid it as a whole. She felt victimized and she felt helpless to the situation. The personal conflict was too large for her. The prolonged conflict affected her health directly.

Teacher D:

"... I have problems with my boss. She didn't like my look and the way I am since the first day of my work here. It's the clash of personality. We are so different. Besides, I am quite slow at my work and when I do things. This might make her angry at me. She bullied me often and she

used her power to persecute me in many ways. She cut my workload and she seemed to enjoy it when she saw me crying. I turned to religion and sought calmness from the Buddha. I was so stressed that I couldn't sleep at night. I couldn't control my emotion and sometimes I cried in the office alone. My family told me to leave the job but I don't know what to do with my age. I love teaching students. I am now old and it's difficult to find a job in Bangkok at my age. I feel tensed every time I have to come to the office. I have no problem with the classroom and students because I love them. I don't know what to do. I used to report this problem to the management but no action was taken. I only consulted my good friends here and there to console myself. They felt sorry for me and that's all they can do. The power made my boss crazy, I believe that."

"... At one time in a meeting, my boss yelled at me with the vulgar words I never dreamed of hearing it among university teachers. It's the worst experience in my life. I sometimes doubted why the management did support my boss to lead the team."

"... The number of students is decreasing every year. All of us don't have enough classes to teach. We are like vultures fighting for classes to teach. This turned to emotions and it looks very disgusting. It is the limited resources that everyone wants to fight for it, for survival. So, they are turning against someone like me who is different from the team. They want to get rid of me, so they can have more share of resources. I don't know how long I can endure all of these problems."

Teacher D blamed her age and her personality. She is more in the *Avoiding* style as she did not try to compromise with her boss. But she did not stand still either because she tried to seek help from the management but received no response. She found religion as a way to escape from the stressful situation.

Teacher E:

"... My team was broken into two groups. We were against each other all the time. I hate the situation that much. The other group has the program head in it and they are against us especially me for no reasons. Maybe I am the only male in the team. I was so stressed that my family can sense it easily. I love the job and I don't know who to turn to for help. It's also not my style to report the situation to the upper management. It made me feel like a child. So, I endured the stress quietly. Luckily, I still have a friend in the team and we tried to help each other, console each other in the time of stress. I was not alone. I tried to ignore the problems and looked at the problems from afar. At the end, the boss retired and the team turned to be better again. It's like

the gift from heaven for me and our team. Now, we work in the positive environment and we all are growing professionally and psychologically.”

“... During the highest time of the stress, I turned to do research writing in order to clear my mind from all the hate and the endless conflicts. I was in front of my computer all day reading and writing. The research made me sane. I was growing intellectually amid the all tensions in my team. ... The research has no politicking; it cannot persecute me. It cannot use harsh words to my ears. It's only the pure upgrading skills for my writing and thinking. This is how I deal with the team conflict.”

Teacher E chose the *Avoiding style* in order to get away from the problems in the team but he also chose to focus on something beneficial to his professional growth. This is not the direct tackling with the conflict but it is personal strategy to survive amid all the conflicts surrounding him. By the time of the interview, he became a prominent and well-known researcher inside and outside the university. He grew professionally and he chose to ignore the bad situation.

Discussion

It will be useful to know the current situation of university affairs in Thailand. The decrease of student number in most universities is becoming a crisis because it is leading towards the layoff of the teachers. The teachers are therefore working under the stress and fear because of this uncertainty of their future. Thailand has seen the population growth of 0.2% in 2022 which is among the lowest in the world. In 2022, there were 502,000 births in the country compared to over a million births 30 years ago. The slumping birth rate was due to the modern lifestyle, the choice to remain single or couples choosing not to have children (Thai PBS World, 2022).

There is a phenomenon of ‘over supply’ as there are too many universities and colleges in the country, while there is lesser birthrate each year. There were once about 200 universities and colleges, and now there are around 150. More universities are going to collapse (ThaiAC, 2020). In 2020, there were 445,364 seats for the first-year students in all universities, but there were only 370,000 students applying for university level. Many unpopular programs have no students (MGRonline, 2019). And teachers, no matter how high quality they are, are now unwanted.

Not only the universities were affected by the lower birthrate, but also schools. In 2021 alone, over 300 schools were closed down because all classrooms are empty (Thai PBS World, 2022).

With all the problems above, thousands of teachers in all levels have been laid off already. The fear of losing the job is automatically in the mind of university teachers as they realized that the resources they used to have are diminishing. Everyday might be the day of worries for many of them. That's why each team started to have this fear of losing job in the near future. It is understandable that they want to be the last to hold on the job. So, the personal conflict within the team is predictable.

Furthermore, I have selected teachers who already have experienced the conflict within the team, so everyone of them poured out their grievances and worries to me via the interview. However, it does not mean that all teachers in all universities are having severe problems like the interviewed ones in this study. Many programs are still popular and highly demanded by students. The teachers do not have to fight for the classes to teach.

For the clearer picture, I summarized the obtained data into this table:

	Effects on health		Effects on work	Thomas-Kilmann Model				
	Body	Mind		Competing	Collaborating	Compromising	Accommodating	Avoiding
Teacher A	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓
Teacher B*		✓	✓	✓				
Teacher C*	✓	✓	✓					✓
Teacher D	✓	✓	✓					✓
Teacher E		✓						✓

*Note: Teacher B and C already left the job.

Those still have the job

There is something in common among those interviewed teachers who chose to cling on a job even if they have conflicts in the team. It is the combination of survival skills that help make them justify their persistence to stay. Those are Teacher A, D and E. This is in line with the study by Munduate et al. (1999) which found that the more conflict management styles you used, the more effective the results were.

Teacher A chose *Accommodating* style to yield to all demands by his team members as he said he wanted to stay on the job. At the same time, he also used *Avoiding* strategy as he did not want to associate with the team. At the end, he said he experienced better relationship with them. It might be the fact that the other team members perceived him as harmless, not a competitor. However, he reported the negative effects on his body, mind and work. Among the five interviewed teachers, he was the only one who mentioned the use of violence even if he chose other alternatives.

Teacher D received severe effects on her body, mind and work too. She chose *Avoiding* style. However, she also sought for comfort from religion as a refuge. Her case is in line with a study by Alves et al. (2017) which stated that religious practices can help people cope with stress and adversity. Religion can also help us gain a sense of purpose and meaning in life (Tiliopoulos, 2015). Teacher D also sought help from the management but she did not get any response from them. She cried alone often and she desperately needed help. She has a high chance to resign from the team.

Teacher E chose the *Avoiding* style and at the same time spent his time on research writing. He chose to grow in other areas related to his university job. He ignored his conflict in the team completely and stayed in his own world. I asked him why he did not fight back with the team leader, he said *“It’s the no-winning situation. There’s no use doing that. By not fighting back and staying away from her, I have more time and energy to fight with my research. It’s more constructive, more positive game.”*

Those who left the job

Teacher B and C chose to leave the job with different reasons. Teacher B said it’s her mistake to bring a friend to the team. Her best friend turned against her and she suffered greatly from this. She did not mention about the effect on her physical health but her heart ached. She chose *Competing* strategy by fighting back. Now the lawsuits between the rivals are in court and it will take years for the court to make the ruling. The competing style was hardly the best option for working as a team. Even in business as studied by Ma (2007) which found that successful Chinese businesspeople did not choose competing or any confrontational styles as the first option when dealing with their stakeholders. They preferred softer styles like compromising and collaboration.

Teacher C chose *Avoiding* strategy. She tried to avoid all the conflicts but the storm her boss created on her was too large for her to deal with it alone. She tried to move to other teams but no one accepted her. She sought help from a psychiatrist and was on medication on depression. She was the only interviewed teacher who mention 'suicide'. The mental part was hit the hardest on Teacher C and at the end, she has to leave the job and the university she loves.

Why without help for the victimized?

Four out of five interviewed teachers reported the problems with their team leader. I asked them why the team leader is so powerful that they can persecute anyone and was left untouched. The answers from all of them made me understand better the norm of the management of the governmental university. One of them gave me this rough information. In her university, there are about 80 programs of study and 450 teachers in total. They are responsible for teaching about 12,000 students of bachelor, master and doctorate degrees. Also, there are about 400 supporting staff to assist teachers. Roughly calculating, there are at least 5 teachers taking care of each program and this number was mostly the minimum regulated by the university laws. One faculty can have 10–15 programs under their supervision. The dean and his/her team are in charge of the overall management of all programs.

The head of each program has a tenure of 2 years for the position and can continue endlessly as the faculty sees fit. If the program head is strong and received the full support from the management, he or she would be untouchable by the team members. The problem was usually found when the team leaders have low emotional intelligence as they are unlikely to adopt positive or compromising style, similar to what Lee (2003) found in her study. By the nature of the government service, no management wants to interfere into the program level's affairs. It is so independent and it was expected to manage themselves alone. The government job yields favorable and stable income that you want to stay as long as possible. To lay off the teachers, it is almost impossible except that the university council sees the proper reasons to do so such as the breach of contract, morality issue or the lack of students. Hence, it opens the chance for persecution, bullying and politicking in the program level.

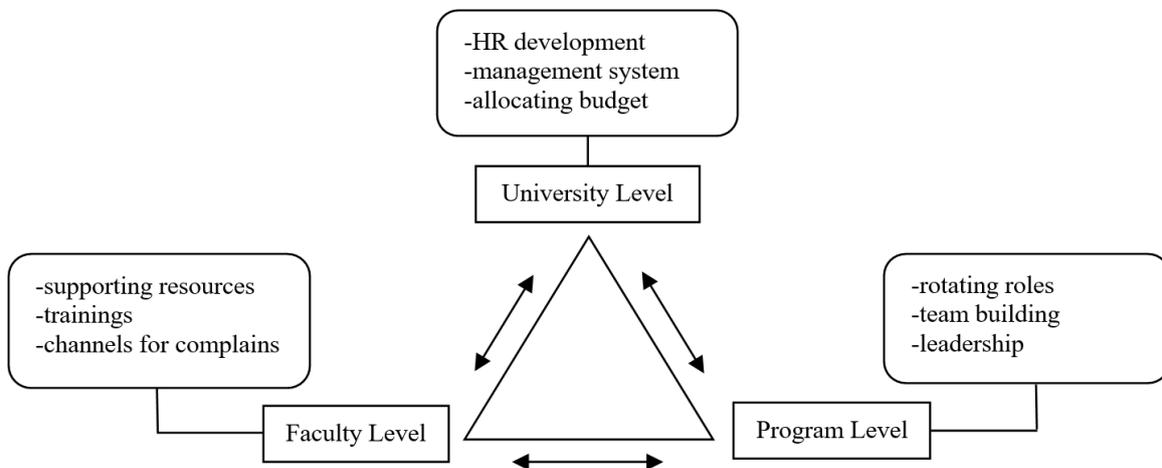
The internal conflicts within the program level become the norm that I have heard from most teachers I met during my time as a university teacher. It is a 'sink-or-swim' unwritten rule that all teachers need to adapt to the team or else you have to bear the mental burden like those in the interviewed group. The management above do not want to interfere in the program

because they also have their problems to deal with. They are having bigger problems to solve and they are having a lot of projects to complete each semester as well. But each teacher who has personal conflict can submit the petition to the management. At least, they can try.

To sum it up, the program level is independent on their internal management. It is small but powerful as they are looking after their own students. If there are any conflicts inside the team, it will be very quiet. It is also almost impossible for a team member asking to be transferred to other teams when he/she received maltreatment or persecution. The troubled team has to deal with their problems, mostly, internally as a professional.

Overall Synthesis

The research has yielded the possible concept for creating balance of the personal conflict management. Even if the personal conflict may occur at the program level, but it will eventually affect the efficiency of the three stakeholders, namely, the university management, the faculty management, and the program team. Each level should consider their different functions regarding the conflict management as shown in the diagram below.



The university management can help on the policy making covering the human resource development, the administrative system and the budget allocation. By looking at the managerial line, it may appear that the management will only supervise the faculty level. In reality, it should impose the appropriate system where individual teacher can voice their complains or give opinions to the top level as well. The faculty level where the dean is the head, shall provide resources to help the program grow as the team. Training on teamwork, for example, should be encouraged

by the faculty level. And the most important of all is the channel for launching complains from the program level as they are their immediate boss by the managerial line. At the program level which is the smallest unit in the university, each of the team members should rotate, so all of them can play any roles when the time comes. Rotating roles can prevent the power struggle in the team. The appointed leader should receive enough training to make them able to lead effectively and professionally.

Conclusion

Each interviewed teacher told his/her part of stories from their past experience. It's purely from their personal accounts. In this study, we wanted to focus on their adopted strategies to deal with the conflict. It is interesting to see that the same teachers who chose the same conflict management strategy, like Teacher C and Teacher E, have the different ending. While Teacher C is now under mental treatment by a psychiatrist, Teacher E is growing as a prominent researcher. Their life's background and mental stamina could be different. Also, emotional intelligence might have a role in their decision too. Like what Chan et al. (2014) found in their study that the emotional intelligence is related to the conflict management styles. The ones with lower emotional intelligence tend to use avoiding style. At the same time, the story of Teacher C and E has proved that there are other factors involved in our life's decisions that helped determine our ability to overcome the conflicts. Teacher E chose *Avoiding* style, too, but he also chose to escape from the personal conflict to research writing, which was proved to boost his confidence and success at later time.

Those who are still holding to the job have adopted more than one strategy to deal with the conflict. Beside Teacher E, Teacher A tried to 'accommodate' his team members by accepting all the unwanted tasks. He totally accepted everything in order to survive. And he did survive, at least until the time of the interview. Teacher D chose *Avoiding* style and she also turned to religion to console herself from the conflict in the office. She has something to turn to for comfort and that made her able to stay in the team – at least for now.

We might put it into the conclusion that the teachers, who used more than one strategy, whether by Thomas–Kilmann Model or others, have a high chance for them to survive the personal conflict in the team. It reflected that they are struggling to overcome the hurdles in life and that they are not giving up. However, the struggle shall be in line with peaceful means or in

the negotiation theme. Also, the resilience to the changing environment and the positive attitude to move on with life were proved to be an effective tool for teachers in their workplace.

Suggestion

The university's management especially at the faculty level can help solve the problems of personal conflicts within the program as the faculty is the immediate supervisor to the program. They should provide appropriate channel for petition submission from the troubled teachers. There is the need for the neutral person to listen to all grievances and negotiate for the middle ground beneficial to all parties. Or else, the troubled teachers will have to face all the problems alone, and in some severe cases, the unwanted events might occur.

Limitation: All the obtained data was from the interviews of the five selected teachers and there are no accounts from other team members or their opponents. It is quite subjective and, in short, one-sided. Also, all of them are from state universities which have different working environment and management styles from the private ones.

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