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## Conceptual framework to explore the organizational conflicts in national Universities in Sri Lanka and its effects on roles of administrators through their personality traits

Henegama HP

University of Colombo School of Computing, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka

Corresponding Author: Henegama HP

### Abstract

The conflicts inside the organization occur in between the people or in-between the groups. The main causes of organizational conflicts are organizational structure, communication, personal variables, limited resources, demographic characters, personality traits etc. The conflicts are categorized as Intra-individual conflict, Inter-individual conflict, Intra-group conflict and Inter-group conflict and further as vertical conflicts and horizontal conflicts or as functional and dysfunctional conflicts. Different aspects of conflict management include competing, collaborating, avoiding, accommodating and compromising. As explained by Henry Mintzberg in 1960s, managers perform 10 different roles. They are categorized into three groups as interpersonal, informational and decisional roles. In present organizational conflicts can be experienced among administrators, academic and supporting staff and among students and in-between those different groups. A recent study, conducted in Sri Lankan state universities revealed that there is a sizable level of organizational conflicts exist in Sri Lankan universities.

Further some researches have proven that there are research gaps in different aspects of organizational conflicts under the Sri Lankan context. The main objective was to develop a Conceptual Framework based on literature to investigate the organizational conflicts in Sri Lankan state universities, and how the roles of university administrators are influenced by the organizational conflicts through their personality traits. The steps followed in this investigation were secondary data collection (literature), developing conceptual frame work (research modal), hypothesis and objectives. The conceptual frame work was developed and the independent variables were organizational conflicts and dependent variables were managerial roles of the administrators. The influence of conflict management strategies, personality traits and socioeconomic characters of the administrators also would be analyzed as intervene variables. It was further recommended to develop the conceptual framework by receiving comments from experts for the research.

**Keywords:** organizational conflicts, managerial roles, personality traits

### 1. Introduction

As defined by Schramm-Nielson (2002) <sup>[34]</sup>, conflict is a state of serious disagreement and argument about something perceived to be important by at least one parties involved. As explained by Boulding in 1963, in view of political aspect, conflict occurs among the states and among subdivisions and departments in large organizations; in view of sociological aspect conflicts can be occurred within and between families, racial and religious conflicts and conflicts within and between groups and in view of psychological aspects conflicts occurs within the person. There are many sources of organizational conflicts and they are categorized by Jones and George (2003) <sup>[21]</sup> such as incompatible goals, overlapping authority, scarce resources, incompatible evaluation system etc. The main causes of organizational conflicts are organizational structure, communication and personal variables (Robbins, 2003) <sup>[31]</sup>, limited resources, individual stress, misunderstanding and external pressure (Hotepo *et al*, 2010) <sup>[19]</sup> etc. Psychological aspects including personality traits of the people also one reason for occurring organizational conflicts. In general opinion, organizational conflicts reduce the effectiveness and efficiency of the organization and enhances the turbulent organizational culture. It is now recognized that the organizational conflicts within certain limit is essential for productivity (Rahim, 2001). According to Hotepo *et al*, (2010) <sup>[19]</sup>, when the organizational conflicts are managed properly, the positive effects can be used to encourage organizational innovativeness and build cooperation among the employees. Parker (1974) <sup>[27]</sup>, stated that if conflicts arise and are not managed properly it will lead to delay of works, disinterest and lack of action and finally lead to breakdown the group. The group conflicts may result increasing and decreasing of group performance (Stephen, 2005) <sup>[32]</sup>. According to Robbins (2003) <sup>[31]</sup>, organizational conflicts affect the performance of the employees including the managers. Conflict process can be identified as compromising five stages as potential opposition or incompatibility, cognition and

Personalization, intensions, behavior and outcomes. The intensions are decisions to act in a given way to manage conflicts including competing, collaborating, avoiding, accommodating and compromising (Robbins, 2003) [31]. Organizational conflicts results due to two kinds of specific conflicts called inter personal conflicts and intra personal conflicts. According to Danga (2009) [10] and Evans (2013), the conflicts are categorized as Intra-individual conflict, Inter-individual conflict, Intra-group conflict and Inter-group conflict. As defined by Robbins (1983) [30], conflicts can be

categorized as vertical conflicts and horizontal conflicts and further categorized as functional and dysfunctional conflicts (Robbins, 2003) [31]. As explained by Robbins, 2003 [31] the organizational conflicts can be divided as functional conflicts and dysfunctional conflicts. Accordingly, the unit performance of the organization can be in the maximum level when the functional conflicts are there in the organization whereas low unit performance level can be visible when there are dysfunctional conflicts in the organization (Robbins, 2003) [31].

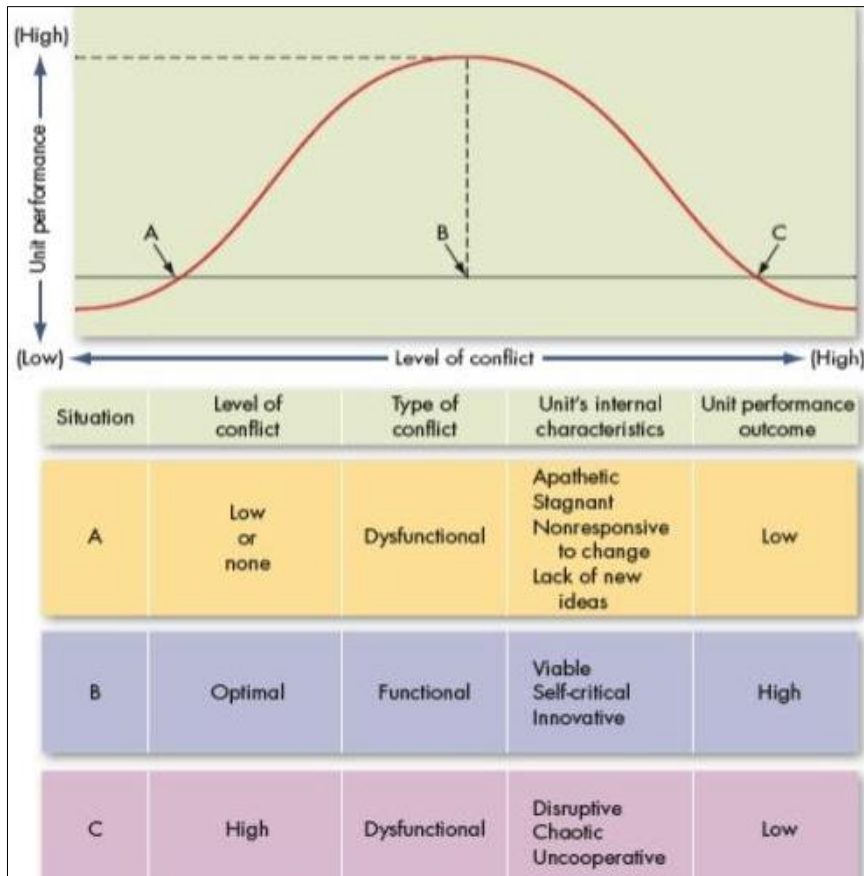


Fig 1: Level of conflict and unit performance (Source: Robbins, 2003) [31]

Conflict management can be identified as the use of resolution and stimulation techniques to achieve the desired level of conflicts (Robbins, 2003) [31]. The study conducted by Longe, 2015 [25] showed significantly positive relationship between conflict management strategies and organizational performance. Conflict resolution occurs when a manager resolves a conflict that has become harmful or serious (Moorhead and Griffin, 2005). Conflict simulation is the creation and constructive use of conflicts by manager (Moorhead and Griffin, 2005). As explained by Robbins (2003) [31], there are several conflict resolution techniques such as problem solving, super ordinate goals, expansion of resources, avoidance etc. and conflict simulation techniques such as communication, bringing in outsiders, restructuring the organization etc. There are two main conflict management theories as traditional theory considers people involved in conflict situations as troublemakers and modern theory considers conflict as a natural and inevitable outcome of human interaction (FAO, 2004) [13].

As explained by Henry Mintzberg in 1960s, managers in organizations perform 10 different roles. They are categorized into three main groups as interpersonal roles,

informational roles and decisional roles. The explanation of each roles are as stated in following table 1.

Table 1: Managerial Roles of Henry Mintzberg

Interpersonal	Figure head
	Leader
	Liaison
Informational	Recipient/Monitor
	Disseminator
	Spokes Person
Decisional	Entrepreneur
	Disturbance Handler
	Resource Allocator
	Negotiator

According to Henry Mintzberg (2000), under the interpersonal role, manger has to perform three different roles as figurehead (as the head of the institution has to perform duties of ceremonial nature), leader (motivate and encourage his employees, reconciling their individual needs with the goals of the organization) and liaison (establish and maintain the contacts within and outside the organization). In

performing the informational roles, manager has to perform as Monitor (scan his environment for information and receive information), Disseminator (passes information directly to his subordinates) and Spokesperson (manager should send some information to outside people.). The decisional role consists with the roles of entrepreneur (act as voluntary initiator of change), disturbance handler (manager involuntarily responding to pressure), resource allocator (manager decides who will get what in his organization) and negotiator (manager spend considerable time on negotiation). Personality traits reflect people’s characteristic patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Personality traits imply consistency and stability of someone who scores high on a specific trait like Extraversion is expected to be sociable in different situations and over time (Diener and Lucas, 2020). Broadly there are five parameters which describe an individual’s personality and they are also called as “Big Five” Factors which was initially proposed by Costa & McCrae in the year 1992 and often describes the relation between an individual’s personality and various behaviors (Management Study Guide, 2020). Big Five factors explains the personality factors of Openness to experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion and Introversion, Agreeableness, Neuroticism. The Socioeconomic characters of age, sex, marital status, educational qualification experience, training and other will be accessed in this research related to the performance of administrators in managing organizational conflicts in state university system.

There are many empirical evidences (researches) have been conducted related to the organizational conflicts in all over the world related to its’ types, causes, effects, conflicts

management etc. Several researches are being conducted to find the relationship in-between organizational conflict, psychological aspects and the role of administration in local and global context.

A study conducted by Hotepo *et al*, 2010 <sup>[19]</sup> in Lagos Metropolis related to the managers from hotels, airlines, road transport etc. revealed that there are inter-personal, inter-group and personal conflicts in their organizations. Further, the results revealed that if the conflicts are not resolved properly the negative effects such as poor performance, lack of cooperation, wasting of resources etc. can be resulted. In addition, the positive effects such as building cooperation, increase of innovativeness, improving the decision-making were experiences in the above same study. Further, it was revealed by the same study that most common strategies for managing conflicts were bargaining, collaboration and avoidance among the managers. An investigation was conducted by Kaveh *et al.*, 2014 <sup>[22]</sup>, in Iran’s Azad Universities with 600 individuals including research variables of individual characters including gender, age, education, work experience and dimensions of organizational conflict, which includes incompatible goals, different values and beliefs, ambiguity and role conflict, problems of communications, ambiguous rules, authority conflict, inconsistent evaluation etc. This study found that the conflict was an inevitable process in the organization and must be managed and each person may be involved with the conflict in work place, according to the conditions of the gender, age, culture, occupation etc. In a study conducted by Donkor *et al* (2015) <sup>[12]</sup> in Coca Cola Company Ltd. in Kumasi Branch has developed their research model as follows (Figure 2).

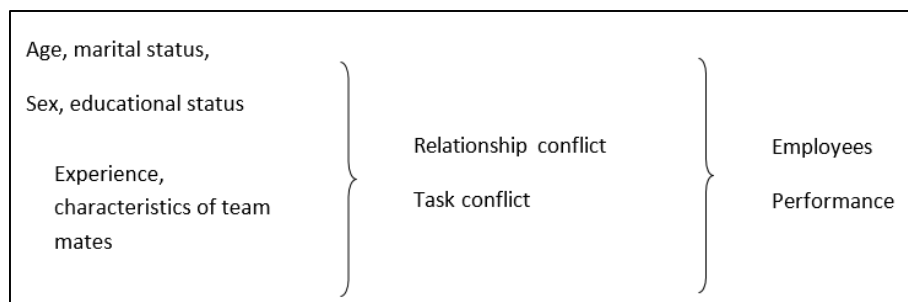


Fig 2: Research framework of Donkor *et al* (2015) <sup>[12]</sup>

The above model encompassed both personal and working environment characteristics, which influence the performance of the employees. The conflicts in the working place are classified as relationship, task and the process conflict. Finally, the output of the model equals to the employees’ performance. A study conducted by Knippen and Green (1999) <sup>[24]</sup>, identified that unresolved conflicts tends to grow into bigger conflicts, the more it grows the greater the chance of collecting more problems. Further, as explained by the above author, some of these problems might arise due to lack of cooperation, poor communication, wasted and contagious conflict. Knippen and Green (1999) <sup>[24]</sup>, in the above study revealed that the management should resolve conflicts properly in their organization to increase the organizational performance and when manage the conflicts properly the organization would increase its performance in terms of utilizing the scarce resources and achieving the organizational objectives.

Chen *et al*, 2017 <sup>[8]</sup> explained that managers at different levels of Emotional Intelligence adopt the different conflict

management styles when dealing of conflicts with peers and superiors. Accordingly the junior managers use dominating conflict management style for subordinates. Further the author explained that male managers also use dominating style for peers in conflict management. Officers of the public organizations use the conflict management strategies of dominating, avoiding, obling and compromise at the conflict management with the peers. As explained by Desivilya (2005) <sup>[9]</sup>, it was revealed that the emotional status is determining the conflict management preference at intragroup level. Further the author said that the conflict management style of integrating and compromising associated with positive intragroup emotional status. Further it was discussed that dominating pattern associated with negative emotions. Further Al-Hamdan Z (2014) <sup>[1]</sup>, explained that the educational level of the managers has the significant effect on conflict management.

A study was conducted to find the employee performance and organizational conflicts in commercial banks in Pakistan found that there is a negative relationship in-between the

organizational conflicts and the employees' performance in the commercial banks (Hasan *et al*, 2009) <sup>[16]</sup>. Amason and Mooney (1993) <sup>[2]</sup>, revealed that conflict can have effect on strategic decision-making and organizational performance. As revealed by Somech (2008), there is a positive relationship between conflict management of integrating and team performance and a negative relationship between dominating and team performance. The individuals that manage conflicts effectively in organizations are perceived as competent communicators and leaders and those who are incapable of managing conflicts may have problems not only reaching goals but also keeping positive and consistent relationships in solving problems (Gross and Guerrero, 2000) <sup>[15]</sup>. Anna (2015) <sup>[5]</sup> revealed that in her study conducted in primary schools in Greece, that the school conflicts are often arise in the schools and when school conflicts occur, they were mainly attributed to both interpersonal and organizational reasons. Further, related to the school administration, an investigation conducted by Anit (2008) <sup>[6]</sup>, in elementary schools managers revealed that conflict management as a team phenomenon in schools. A study conducted by Antonioni (2013) <sup>[4]</sup> revealed the relationship in-between the personality factors and conflict management strategy. According to him the personality factors (personality traits) of extroversion, conscientiousness, openness and agreeableness have positive relationship with integrating style. He further explained the more relationships between the personality factors and the conflict management styles.

Under this literately background it was identified the importance to conduct an investigation to explore the organizational conflicts in the Sri Lankan university system and its influence on roles of administrators through their personality traits.

### Research problem

The organizational conflicts very commonly can be experienced in the present government sector organizations including the Sri Lankan state universities mainly resulting negative impacts for the performance of the university staff. In present day context the organizational conflicts can be experienced among administrators, academic staff, supporting staff and among students and in-between the said different groups. A study conducted in the Sri Lankan state universities revealed that there is a sizable level of organizational conflicts exists in Sri Lankan university system (Henegama and Herath, 2011) <sup>[17]</sup>. The same study revealed that the organizational conflicts affect the decision-making role of the managers, who involve in administration of those universities. The behaviors of employees such as delay in performing and disengaging, leaving the working place, getting disagree for the policy decisions, not cooperating, behaving disrespectfully, more gossiping, making more complaints etc. can be considered as evidences for having organizational conflicts in such organizations (Robertson, 2013) <sup>[29]</sup>. The causes like leadership style, limited resources, organizational structure, policies, professional differences, unresolved conflicts, centralization, attitudes, organizational culture etc. affects for occurring organizational conflicts in the Sri Lankan state university system (Henegama and Ranawaka, 2011) <sup>[17]</sup>. Even though

there are such empirical evidences for having organizational conflicts and its effect for the performance of employees in Sri Lankan state university system, there are not sufficient researches have been conducted to see the real nature, types and the extent of occurring conflicts, relationship in-between organizational conflicts, role of administrators, personality traits and present strategies used for the conflict management in Sri Lankan state university system. Under this context the research problem is identified as a need for the development of the existing tentative conceptual frame work for further research related to organizational conflicts in the Sri Lankan University system.

### Objectives

To develop the suitable conceptual framework to delineate organizational conflicts prevailed in the Sri Lankan state university system, root causes for such organizational conflicts, and how roles of administrators are influenced by the organizational conflicts and to identify the strategies adopted by university administrators in managing organizational conflicts through their personality traits and socioeconomic characters.

### Methodology

Primary and secondary data were collected in this study. Secondary data basically collected by literature survey in the similar researches conducted by local and international researches in the same field. The primary data were collected by conducting personal interviews with few number of university administrators and academic staff members related to the similar field.

This research is under the deductive approach as the research is based on the existing managerial theory and the research is testing the existing theory. The main steps are to be followed in this investigation are secondary data collection and personal interviews, defining theoretical framework (literature reference), developing conceptual frame work (research modal), hypothesis and developing specific objective as the base for the main research.

### Results

Development of the conceptual frame work and defining of the independent, dependent and intervene variables; developing the main hypothesis are done as the key finding of the investigation as stated below.

### Conceptual framework of research

The independent variables are identified as organizational conflicts (8 types of possible organizational conflicts are selected as independent variables). The dependent variable is identified as managerial roles of the administrators including interpersonal roles, informational roles and decision making roles. Interpersonal role consists with the roles of figurehead, leader and liaison and informational role consists with monitor, spokesmen and disseminator. Whereas, the decision-making role consists with the roles of entrepreneur, disturbance handler, resource allocator and negotiator. The influence of the adopted strategies for conflict management and socioeconomic characters with personality traits of the administrators also will be analyzed and they are placed in the research model as intervene variables.

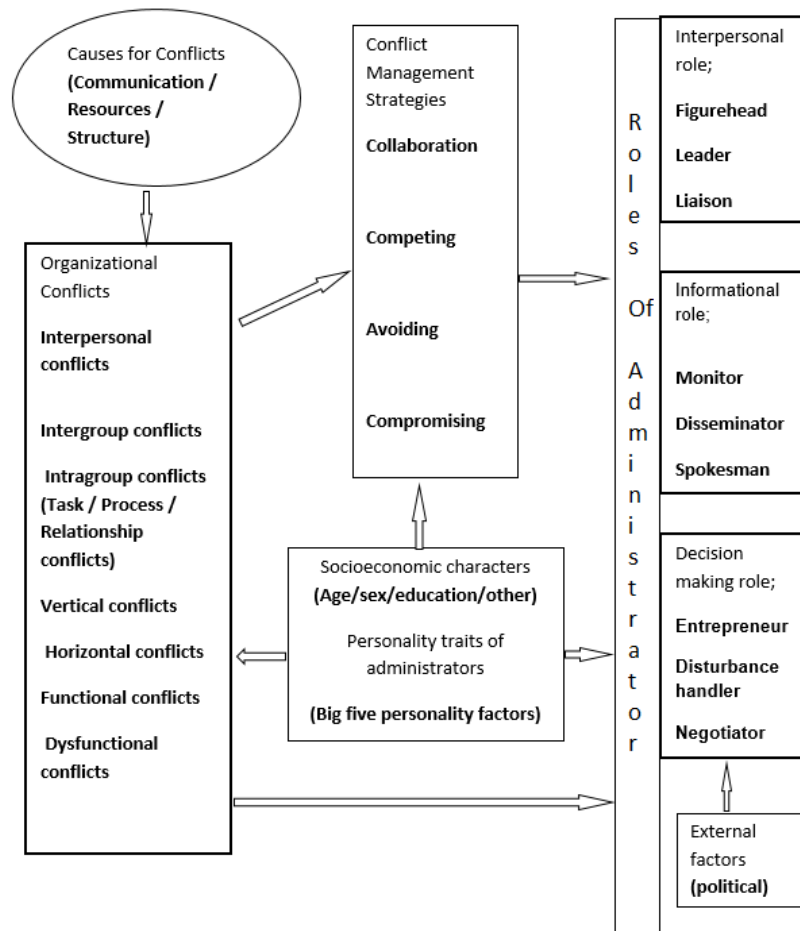


Fig 3: Developed Conceptual Framework (Research Model).

**Main hypothesizes developed by research model**

- H1:** Organizational conflicts occurs due to several reasons such as communication, organizational structure, resource allocation, psychological aspects, socioeconomic characters etc. in the Sri Lankan university system
- H2:** Organizational conflicts could affect to the roles of the university administrators
- H3:** Effect of the organizational conflicts on roles of the administrators can be managed through proper conflict management
- H4:** Personality traits and the socioeconomic characters of the university administrators could effect on the occurring organizational conflicts, management of organizational conflicts and the performance of the roles of the administrators in Sri Lankan national university system
- H5:** There can be some external unknown factors which affect for the decision making of the university administrators

**Discussion**

As the result of this study the conceptual frame work was developed related to the organizational conflicts, conflict management, managerial roles, personality traits and socio economic characters under the context of Sri Lankan state universities. Further the five hypothesis were developed related to the relationships and effects among those variables. The recent research gaps related to the organizational conflicts and its related aspects under the context of Sri

Lankan state universities will be fulfilled by conducting the research using this developed conceptual framework. Further the results and the recommendations from such research will definitely help for the development of the performance of the university academic and administrative staff especially in their performances of the managerial roles.

**Conclusion**

Conceptual framework and the research hypothesizes were developed for the further study. The independent variables are identified as organizational conflicts. The dependent variable is identified as managerial roles of the administrators including interpersonal roles, informational roles and decision making roles. The influence of the conflict management and socioeconomic characters with personality traits of the administrators also will be analyzed as the intervene variables.

**Recommendations**

It is recommended to further develop the conceptual framework by receiving comments from experts and by literature review as more specific for the Sri Lankan context.

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