

RESEARCH ARTICLE

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STYLE OF COLLEGE STUDENTS AT THE PHILIPPINE NORMAL UNIVERSITY (PNU)

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on determining the conflict management style of selected 3rd and 4th year students at the College of Teacher Development (CTD) of the Philippine Normal University (PNU). Literature on systems approach in organizational analysis, culture and conflict, negotiation and conflict management system design is presented and used as basis for the research framework. Hall's (1969) conflict management style survey is used as the main instrument and basis for the analysis of research results. The study reveals that the respondents are open to the use of several conflict management styles in addressing interpersonal conflicts.

Keywords: Conflict management style

INTRODUCTION

An increasing interest in organizational conflict management system design has emerged over the past decade. Universities and colleges are among those organizations that have expressed mounting concern in finding alternative means of managing and resolving conflict. Many factors contribute to this exploration of alternatives including workforce and student body diversity, an environment that encourages faculty, staff and students toward participatory and democratic university governance, the rising cost of litigation, and leadership and employee turnover. Added to these are the increasing media attention to university violence and demoralization among faculty, staff and students.

As the national center for teacher education, the Philippine Normal University is recognized as the premier teacher-training institution in the country. Innovations in terms of the university's programs relative to the curriculum, research and extension have always been highlighted by PNU vis-à-vis its recently revised vision and mission statements. In all of these university undertakings, the focal point of success has always pointed to the overall quality of its students. As future teachers, PNU students have been continuously engaged in numerous pioneering programs and activities geared toward their academic growth and development.

One of the many realities that students encounter is relevant to their exposure and immersion to the many facets of human conflicts, particularly inter-personal conflict. These include conflicts: between and among students, student and professor, student and administrative staff, student and janitorial personnel, student and security services personnel, and, student and administration, among others.

In view of the foregoing, a study examining the conflict management style of students was conducted to determine how students responded and resolved conflicts that they may have encountered. The results may be used as the basis for future development of a conflict management system designed for school settings. The theory of systems approach in organizational analysis along with perspectives on high and low context cultures and a comparative analysis of different conflict management system designs relevant to negotiation are discussed and analyzed. In particular, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What is the dominant conflict management style of students at the Philippine Normal University?
2. What other conflict management styles students prefer to use in addressing interpersonal conflicts other than the dominant one?

The first question aims to provide a research-based data regarding the conflict management style of PNU students vis-à-vis the various alternative dispute resolution systems. The second question focuses on the factors that need to be considered by the university in

developing its conflict management system design.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

An important approach to better understand an organization is to examine the main assumptions underlying the perspective of organizations as systems. According to Silverman (1971: 27), a proponent of systems theory as an approach in organizational analysis, organizations are composed of a set of interdependent parts. Every part of an organization "contributes and receives something from the whole". For instance, an academic organization such as a university is composed of academic and non-academic offices, colleges or departments that are interrelated or interdependent. These interdependent parts are generally working toward a common vision, mission and goal for their organization. Furthermore, organizations have needs for survival that is, as social systems, organizations are governed by a series of needs which they must satisfy, if the organizations are to survive (Langlois, 1982; Luhmann, 1995; Silverman, 1971). Hence, as a system, an organization is expected to examine to which it utilizes its available resources for optimum need-satisfaction. Using the example earlier, any university would have its own set of needs – needs that to be satisfied will depend on the manner it maximizes the use of all the available resources, both human and non-human. These university needs are not only related to the basic functions of a university (instruction, research, production and extension), but also to the social-political-economic needs of all the members of the academic community. Finally, it was argued that if organizations have needs, then they are also taking action to satisfy those needs (Langlois, 1982; Luhmann, 1995; Silverman, 1971). Logically, organizations are, therefore, responsible for their behavior and actions in their objective to address their needs. Applied within the context of a university, members of the academic community are responsible for their behavior and actions in meeting their needs.

It is important that an organization is examined and analyzed as a system in consideration of the underlying assumptions presented in the foregoing. From a standpoint of an organization as a system,

the next section provides a perspective of looking into the importance of examining whether the organization is characterized by a high or a low context culture.

High Context Culture and Low Context Culture

High context cultures are characterized by being relational, collectivist, intuitive and contemplative where people have high regard on interpersonal relationships (Avruch, 1998; Hall, 1976). Developing trust among the members of the culture is of paramount importance and the people generally prefer group harmony and consensus rather than individual achievement (Hall, 1976). People in high context cultures also emphasize the 'we-identity' than the 'I-identity' (Avruch, 1998). In terms of communication, words are considered not as important as context (i.e., the speaker's tone of voice, facial expression, body language, gestures or postures). In addition, communication tends to be more indirect and more formal along with the use of flowery language, humility, and elaborate apologies (Avruch, 1998; Hall, 1976).

Low context cultures, on the other hand, are typically characterized by being logical, linear, individualistic and action-oriented where people usually value logic, facts and directness (Avruch, 1998; Hall, 1976). Solving problems based on presenting and evaluating empirical data is important in decision making which eventually leads to actions. As regards identity, the emphasis of the people in low context cultures is on the 'I-identity', not on the 'we-identity' (Avruch, 1988). As far as communication is concerned, people in the low context cultures are typically straightforward, concise and efficient in expressing what actions are expected (Avruch, 1998; Hall, 1976). In the same vein, communicators in low context cultures usually strive for using precise words and intend them to be taken as literal as possible.

In the Philippines, Jocano (1999) argues that Filipinos value culture so much in organizational management. He posits that the family constitutes the core unit of the Filipino social system and the central concern of every Filipino is the welfare of the family since it is the only secure place in this fragile world of social realities. He further suggests that the family is the source of economic, social and

psychological supports for all its members. Hence it can be inferred that such Filipino culture valuing the family has implicit and explicit implication to organizational management.

From a holistic standpoint, however, it can be argued that in reality it would be too simplistic to use the dichotomy of high and low context culture in describing organizational cultures. Put succinctly, any culture may have the characteristics of both cultural contexts with a pre-dominance of one context over the other. As such, the negotiation approach to be employed in any cultural context should take into consideration the possible interplay and presence of the dynamics of both the high context and low context cultures.

From the foregoing analysis, the next part of this paper shall dwell on a brief discussion on negotiation and an analysis of different dispute system designs based on the comparison of conflict management models.

Negotiation

Negotiation has been defined as a social process in which two or more parties interact in search of an acceptable position with regard to their differences and concerning the same issue of conflict (Breslin and Rubin, 1993; Pfetch, 2007; HBES, 2003; Lewicki, Barry and Sanders, 2007; Raifa, 2000). In general, negotiation can be distributive or integrative. Distributive negotiation is considered as a zero-sum or win-lose type of negotiation where the gain by one side is the loss or at the expense of the other side (HBES, 2003; Lewicki et al., 2007). By contrast, integrative negotiation is perceived as a win-win or collaborative type of negotiation where the parties usually cooperate to achieve maximum benefits by integrating interests into an agreement (HBES 2003; Lewicki et al., 2007).

More often than not, the foregoing types of negotiation are intertwined with the basic strategies that can be used in negotiation, to wit: accommodating (lose to win); avoiding (lose-lose); competitive (win-lose); collaborative (win-win); and, compromise (split the difference). Each strategy generally applies to a particular context and has its corresponding strengths and

weaknesses, hence, none of these strategies can be considered as the best way of addressing any dispute through the process of negotiation (Lewicki et al., 2007).

Another way of addressing disputes through the process of negotiation is by exploring the nature of the processes used in the conflict resolution, that is, whether any of the following is significantly applied: power-based approach, rights-based approach and interest-based approach. Figure 1 below provides various perspectives of conflict management system designs culled from Ury, Brett and Goldberg (1993), Costantino and Merchant (1996), Hall (1969), Rowe (1997), Slaikeu and Hasson (1998), and Lynch (1998).

Experts	Ury, Brett & Goldberg	Costantino & Merchant; Hall	Rowe	Slaikeu & Hasson	Lynch
Types of process	Power-based, rights-based and interests-based processes.	Power-based, rights-based and interests-based processes giving more emphasis on the most appropriate process depending on the nature of the dispute.	Power-based and interests-based processes with emphasis on conflict prevention.	Power-based, rights-based, interests-based and avoidance as means of addressing conflict. It has an emphasis on conflict prevention.	Interests-based and rights-based as the initial processes in addressing dispute. Power-based process is seen as necessary in certain disputes. Focuses on conflict prevention.

Figure 1: Comparative Presentation of Dispute System Design

Figure 1 above identified several conflict management system designs. What seems to be common among the abovesited designs is the use of three main processes of negotiation – the power-based, the rights-based and the interests-based dispute systems (Costantino and Merchant 1996; Ury et al., 1993; Lewicki et

al., 2007). The power-based dispute system is generally characterized by the use of extreme and sometimes harsh measures such as violent rallies and demonstrations and other similar harmful activities as means of resolving the dispute. Power-based system is a process in which someone is coerced to do something she or he would otherwise not do. Notably, all dispute systems identified in Figure 1 suggest the use of a power-based process as a means of last resort in addressing a dispute.

The rights-based system is a process in which a third party imposes a decision on disputants on the basis of their rights, as defined by laws, contracts, rules or regulations (Ury et al., 1993; Costantino and Merchant, 1996). Litigations and grievance processes are considered as typical examples of rights-based system used in resolving a conflict. All conflict management models above have indicated that the rights-based process can be used as a means of addressing a dispute although it is not considered as the primary approach. More importantly, the use of interests-based dispute system as the primary means of addressing a dispute is common among the models identified above. Comparably, interests-based system is a process in which parties retain control of and develop their own solutions (Ury et al., 1993; Costantino and Merchant, 1996). By and large, interests-based dispute system constitutes the use of facilitation and mediation as approaches in resolving a dispute.

In general, it can be inferred from the preceding presentation that there are certain factors to consider in designing a conflict management system for any organization. These factors include the perspective of using the systems approach in organizational analysis; the high context and low context cultures; and the whole gamut of negotiation processes relevant to conflict management system designs to choose from, making the appropriate conflict management system the main challenge on the part of any organization. However, as can be inferred from the dispute system designs presented above, a pro-active conflict management model should always clarify issues, interests, foster creativity, and help to develop a more constructive and harmonious working relationships (SPIDR, 1999). Conflict management system design should provide an innovative and effective avenue for an organization and its employees to develop the necessary tools and

skills to realize their goals which may involve substantial gains in productivity, cost savings and interpersonal and workplace morale – as shown in the framework below.

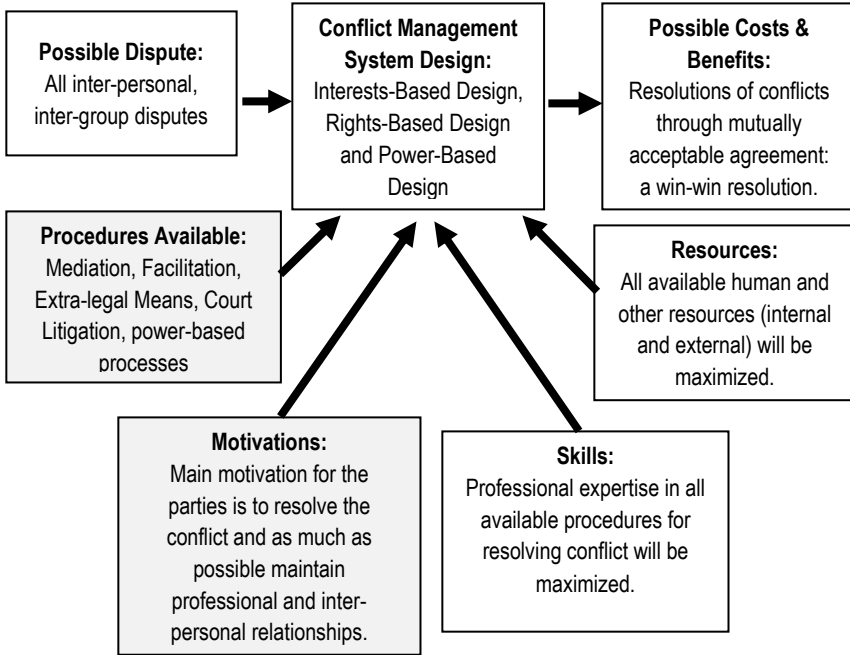


Figure 2. Conflict Management System Design

The illustration above highlights three negotiation approaches – interests-based system, rights-based system and power-based system based on the six principles proposed by Ury et al (1993) and Costantino and Merchant (1996): 1) focusing on interests and not on positions; 2) providing loop-backs or making procedures available that allow the parties to return to a lower-cost method such as mediation; 3) providing low-cost rights and power backups – offering low-cost alternative such as arbitration if interest-based procedures fail; 4) preventing unnecessary conflict and heading off future disputes through a built-in consultation before and after the dispute resolution; 5) arranging the dispute system design procedures from low-to-high cost sequence – encouraging interests-based before the rights-based design; and, 6) providing the motivation, skills and resources necessary in ensuring that any of the dispute system design procedures are supported and used (Ury

et al., 1993; Costantino & Merchant, 1996). By following these practical principles, it can be inferred that HEIs may use the abovementioned dispute systems according to the following priorities – using interests-based processes first followed by the rights-based processes and lastly, the power-based processes, if necessary.

Finally, Hall (196) provided another perspective in conflict resolution by determining the conflict management styles of the disputing parties. In particular, he presented five (5) possible styles in managing conflict to wit: controller (power-based); compromiser (interest-based and rights-based); collaborator (interest-based); accommodator (interest-based) and avoider (interest-based and rights-based). A controller is both assertive and uncooperative – an individual pursues his or her own concerns at the other person's expense. A compromiser is intermediate in both assertiveness and cooperativeness in that his or her object is to find some expedient, mutually acceptable solution that partially satisfies both parties. Hall insists that a collaborator is both assertive and cooperative. Collaborating involves an attempt to work with the other person to find some solution that fully satisfies the concerns of both persons. An accommodator is unassertive and cooperative – the opposite of competing. When accommodating, an individual neglects his or her own concerns to satisfy the concerns of the other person; there is an element of self-sacrifice in this mode. Also, an avoider is unassertive and uncooperative – the individual does not immediately pursue his own concerns or those of the other person.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative research method, relying in particular, on frequency distribution, measures of central tendency and percentages. Purposive sampling helped select the research respondents who answered an international standard questionnaire on conflict management style developed by Hall (1969) entitled "Conflict Management Survey: A Survey of One's Characteristic Reaction to and Handling of Conflict between Himself and Others" (see Appendix).

Research Design

This study is anchored on the various literature in conflict management system design, systems approach in organizational analysis, culture and conflict and negotiation (with particular emphasis on alternative dispute resolutions or ADR). In addition, it uses the survey instrument developed by Hall (1969) in determining the conflict management styles of respondents in addressing interpersonal conflict.

As such, this study focuses on how the respondents respond and/or resolve interpersonal conflicts. The results of the survey instrument shall be presented and interpreted on the basis of a matrix showing the interrelationships between and among the conflict management styles from the aforesaid instrument.

Research Participants/Respondents

Table 1 below shows the number and distribution of student-respondents from the four Faculties of the College of Teacher Education (CTD). Purposive sampling was used to determine the respondents and each of them was required to fill out the research Consent Form before participating as research respondents. All respondents fall within the age bracket of 18-20 years old.

Table 1. Frequency Distribution of the Respondents

Faculty	Year Level	
	3 rd Year	4 th Year
FBeSS	120	120
FES	120	120
FSTM	120	120
FAL	120	120
TOTAL	480	480

Data Collection Process

Upon the selection of 3rd and 4th year classes from the four Faculties under the College of Teacher Development (CTD), the researchers administered the Conflict Management Style Survey (Hall, 1969) to respondents. The Informed Consent form was first accomplished by the students before answering the survey.

Once the researchers were able to secure answers to the survey from at least 120 students for each of the four Faculties, responses were then tabulated and summarized. Tabulation and interpretation were based on Hall's (1969) conflict management style survey instrument.

Statistical Treatment

The tabulation of the data was done through the scoring system, which involved writing the number of points assigned for each of the five responses for the 12 situations in the suitable columns on the scoring form. Each of the 12 items identifies situations that are likely to be encountered by the respondents in their personal lives.

The table above shows the 'scoring form' based on the Conflict Management Style Survey Form developed by Hall (1969). The survey form identifies 12 situations the respondents are likely to encounter in their personal and professional lives. Respondents based their answers on the five possible behavioral responses or attitudes and they have allocated 10 points between them to indicate their typical behavior, with the highest number of points indicating their strongest choice. The response is answered with from zero to 10 points, as long as all five responses for a given situation add up to 10 points.

The results are then summarized and presented to show the scores received by each of the five conflict management styles. It would also show the ranking of the five styles from highest to lowest scores.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section presents results and discussion of the conflict management styles of the 3rd and 4th year students from the four Faculties under the College of Teacher Education (CTD) during the 1st Semester of Academic Year 2013-2014.

Third Year Students

Table 2. Conflict Management Style Survey Results of Third Year Students

Faculty	Response A Controller	Response B Compromiser	Response C Collaborator	Response D Accommodator	Response E Avoider	TOTAL
FBeSS	25	30	37	22	6	120
FES	22	29	38	20	11	120
FSTM	25	28	33	22	12	120
FAL	25	28	34	22	11	120
TOTAL	97	115	142	86	40	480
Mean	24.25	28.75	35.5	21.5	10	

Table 2 above presents the results of the Survey on Conflict Management Style of the 480 student-respondents from the four Faculties. It can be gleaned from the results that the dominant conflict management style of third year students from the four Faculties is that of 'collaborator' with 142 students (and a mean of 35.5) rating it as their first preference of response to any conflict situation. As mentioned earlier by Hall (1969), a collaborator is both assertive and cooperative. Collaborating involves an attempt to work with the other person to find some solution that fully satisfies the concerns of both persons. It means digging into an issue to identify the underlying concerns of the two individuals to find an alternative that meets both sets of concerns. Collaborating between two persons might take the form of exploring a disagreement to learn from each other's insights, concluding to resolve some condition that would otherwise have them competing for resources, or confronting and trying to find a creative solution to an interpersonal problem.

The next highest conflict management style of third year students is that of a 'compromiser' with a score of 115 (and a mean of 28.75). A compromiser is intermediate in both assertiveness and

cooperativeness. The object is to find some expedient, mutually acceptable solution that partially satisfies both parties – falling on a middle ground between competing and accommodating, compromising gives up more than competing but less than accommodating. Likewise, it addresses an issue more directly than avoiding, but doesn't explore it in as much depth as collaborating. Compromising might mean splitting the difference, exchanging concessions, or seeking a quick middle-ground position.

Controller as a conflict management style receives the third highest rating from the 3rd year students with a score of 97 out of 480. A controller is both assertive and uncooperative – an individual pursues his or her own concerns at the other person's expense. This is a power-oriented mode, in which one uses whatever power seems appropriate to win one's own position – one's ability to argue, one's rank, economic sanctions. Competing might mean “standing up for your rights,” defending a position which you believe is correct, or simply trying to win.

The 4th conflict management style preference of the 3rd year students is that of accommodator, both unassertive and cooperative – the opposite of competing. When accommodating, an individual neglects his or her own concerns to satisfy the other person's concerns; there is an element of self-sacrifice in this mode. Accommodating might take the form of selfless generosity or charity, obeying another person's order when one would prefer not to, or yielding to another's point.

Receiving the lowest score among the conflict management style is that of an avoider (with a score of 40 and a mean of 10). An avoider is unassertive and uncooperative – the individual does not immediately pursue his own concerns or those of the other person in that he or she does not address the conflict. Avoiding might take the form of diplomatically sidestepping an issue, postponing an issue until a better time or simply withdrawing from a threatening situation.

Fourth Year Students

Table 3 below sums up the responses of 4th year students. The data

show that out of 480 respondents, 132 chose 'collaborator' as their first preferred conflict management style followed by 'controller' then that of 'compromiser.' The 2nd and 3rd preferences for 4th year students are different from those of the 3rd year students where 'compromiser' comes second and 'controller' as third preference. On the other hand, fourth year students have similarly chosen 'accommodator' and 'avoider' as their 4th and 5th preferences, like their 3rd year counterpart.

Table 3. Conflict Management Survey Results of Fourth Year Student

Faculty	Response A Controller	Response B Compromiser	Response C Collaborator	Response D Accommodator	Response E Avoider	TOTAL
FBeSS	30	24	36	19	11	120
FES	29	25	32	22	12	120
FSTM	25	27	30	23	15	120
FAL	23	27	34	24	12	120
TOTAL	107	103	132	88	50	480
Mean	26.75	25.75	33.0	22.0	12.5	

Combined Results for 3rd and 4th Year Students

The combined results of the conflict management style survey of third and fourth year students are presented below in Table 5. The results clearly indicate the corresponding scores, percentages and mean received by each of the five conflict management styles as follows: collaborator, 274 or 28.54% and a mean of 68.5; compromiser, 218 or 22.70% and a mean of 54.5; controller, 204 or 21.25% and a mean of 51.0; accommodator, 174 or 18.13% and a mean of 43.5; and, avoider, 90 or 9.38% and a mean of 22.5.

It can be inferred from the results that the dominant conflict management styles of all respondents can be ranked as follows: 1) collaborator; 2) compromiser; 3) controller; 4) accommodator; and, 5) avoider. Notably, the same ranking can also be inferred with the results drawn from the four Faculties (FBeSS, FES, FSTM and FAL).

Students from the Faculty of Behavioral and Social Sciences (FBeSS), Faculty of Education Sciences (FES), Faculty of Science, Technology and Mathematics (FSTM), and Faculty of Arts and Literature (FAL) also yielded results similar to [in their respective Faculties with that of] the overall results.

Table 4: Combined Results of Third and Fourth Year Students

Faculty	Response A Controller	Response B Compromiser	Response C Collaborator	Response D Accommodator	Response E Avoider	TOTAL
FBeSS	55	54	73	41	17	240
FES	51	54	70	42	23	240
FSTM	50	55	63	45	27	240
FAL	48	55	68	46	23	240
TOTAL	204	218	274	174	90	960
Mean	51.0	54.5	68.5	43.5	22.5	
%	21.25%	22.70%	28.54%	18.13%	9.38%	100%

Analysis

The above cited results are consistent with Hall's (1969) perspective on conflict management styles commonly used by individuals in resolving inter-personal conflicts. This is presented in the illustration below.

In it a collaborator appears to have both high goal orientation as well as high relationship orientation. It can be inferred then that the respondents of this research may have considered both concerns for their personal goals along with their relationships as important factors in resolving inter-personal conflicts. Equally, it can be inferred that the respondents are both assertive and cooperative in dealing with conflicts.

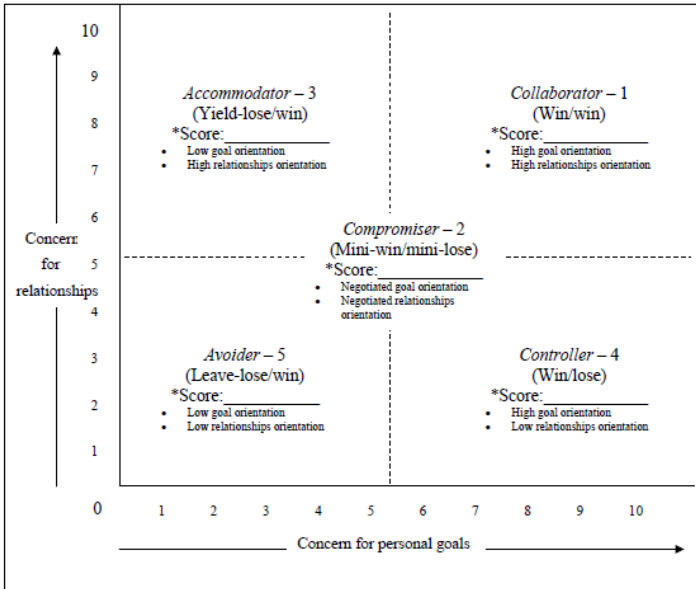


Figure 3. The Interrelationship between and among the Conflict Management Styles

By contrast, the respondents have chosen 'avoidance' as the last resort in addressing conflicts. This is a manifestation that the respondents would want to resolve the conflicts rather than avoiding such. The respondents then do not want to choose being unassertive and uncooperative in addressing conflicts. However, it is notable that those who chose to use avoidance as an option in dealing with conflicts may have considered it as a form of diplomatically sidestepping an issue, postponing an issue until a better time or simply withdrawing from a threatening situation.

Compromising yielded the second highest score, mean and percentage among the respondents which means that they may have considered the importance of a negotiated goal and relationship orientation. It may imply that the respondents both emphasize assertiveness and cooperativeness in dealing with conflicts, that is, finding some expedient, mutually acceptable solution to partially satisfy both parties. Also, the respondents may have wanted to address an issue more directly than avoiding, but do not really want to explore it in as much depth as collaborating.

Controlling received the third option from the respondents as a means of addressing conflicts. It can be said that the respondents would have a high goal orientation while having a low relationship orientation. Interestingly, the respondents have considered this conflict style which is both assertive and uncooperative where an individual pursues his or her own concerns at the other person's expense. This is a power-oriented mode, in which one uses whatever power seems appropriate to win one's own position – one's ability to argue, one's rank, economic sanctions. It is likely possible that the respondents opted for controlling as a means of "standing up for their rights," defending a position that they believe is correct, or simply trying to win.

Significantly, the respondents have chosen accommodating as their fourth conflict management style to suggest that they have considered more of their concerns for relationships rather than personal goals. In the same vein, it can be inferred that the respondents have considered being unassertive but cooperative in dealing with conflicts. Moreover, they are willing to neglect their own concerns to satisfy the concerns of others, since accommodating might also take the form of selfless generosity or charity, obeying another person's order when one would prefer not to, or yielding to another's point.

In sum, it can be surmised that the respondents consider addressing interpersonal conflicts with the use of not just one conflict management style. Rather, the respondents are open to the idea of combining the five styles presented in this research depending on the nature of the conflict situation they may get into. This finding is evidenced by the results indicating that there is a significant number of respondents who have chosen all conflict management styles in resolving interpersonal conflicts.

Similarly, the respondents are open to the use of the various alternative dispute resolution (ADR) approaches such as those of the power-oriented approach (controlling); rights-based approach (controlling, collaborating and avoiding); and, interests-based approach (collaborating, compromising, accommodating and avoiding).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Purposely, this study sought to determine the conflict management style of selected 3rd and 4th year students from the four Faculties of the College of Teacher Development (CTD). Based on the foregoing results and discussions, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. The dominant conflict management style of 3rd and 4th year students from the four Faculties of the College of Teacher Development (CTD) is that of 'collaborator.'
2. The students are open to other conflict management styles in responding to conflicts. These styles include: compromiser, controller, accommodator, and avoider.

Given the foregoing conclusions, the following recommendations are hereby offered:

1. The Philippine Normal University (PNU) may need to develop a conflict management system that considers the possibility of taking into consideration the various conflict management styles that students use in resolving interpersonal conflicts as revealed in this study.
2. While this research did not focus on determining the kind and nature of conflicts that students face at school, it is recommended that future research consider doing a correlation between such conflicts and the conflict management styles, as developed by Hall (1969).

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