

An investigation of the relationship between power distribution and organizational conflict in the governor office of Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad

Ayatollah Sa'adatian*, Karamollah Danesh-fard & Rahim Ostvar

Management Department, Islamic Azad University, Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad, Iran

ABSTRACT

Keywords:

Power Distribution,
Organizational Conflict,
Management Styles, Bases
of Power, Kohgiluyeh and
Boyer-Ahmad

Correspondence:

h.karimi.esf@gmail.com

The current paper explores the relationship between power distribution and organizational conflict in the country office of Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad. It fits within the category of descriptive research. Its population consisted of all staff in the governor office of Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad and from among 180 individuals, 65 staff were selected randomly as research participants. Research instruments utilized included standardized power distribution and organizational conflict questionnaires whose reliabilities were estimated through Cronbach's alpha. Obviously, both reliability coefficients were satisfactory. The data were analyzed and described through SPSS. To describe them, descriptive statistics and to analyze them referential statistics, including Pearson's rank-order correlation coefficient and Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests were performed. In light of the results, autocratic and persuasive management styles increased organizational conflict.

©AIMI Journals

Introduction

Conflict is a feature through which an individual's intentional attempt at neutralizing the efforts of another individual leads to the latter's inability and failure to reach his purposes or meet his personal interests. It may exist within and across individuals, groups, and units of organization and is an intra- and inter-organizational reality. Some types of conflict are the

result of fundamental differences which might have roots in larger communities or business structures of organizations. Broadly speaking, though, conflict occurs as a result of interactions within an organization, and since interaction is an essential component of every organization, conflict is inevitable. Conflict is a natural phenomenon and has been an indispensable part of human life. For instance, misunderstandings, pessimism, jealousy, drought, lack of resources, overpopulation, and managerial and governmental autocracies can be the cause or outcome of conflict. Throughout history human lives have always been replete with conflict. What holy Quran mentions under light and darkness, right and wrong, good and bad, justice and tyranny, as well as stories of Jew, Paraoth, Decius, and Kahf followers are all examples of conflict.

From the perspective of human relations theorists the major cause of conflict is immaturity of informational systems. It means, due to limitations in communication channels individuals are unaware of one another's' intentions and feelings and, thus, misunderstandings and conflicts emerge. In addition, factors such as weak management and leadership and lack of cooperative or constructive management, where needed, might result in conflict.

Conflict management is not fear, prevention, or suppression of conflict. Rather, it is encountering it properly and exploiting it to better satisfy the needs, nurture talents, and bring about creativity. It is an optimistic and rational view of conflict and should, thus, be distinguished from conflict resolution which entails a pessimistic and negative interpretation encouraging individuals to avoid conflict or nip it in the bud.

No efficient organization is static; so change happens within all organizations, and managers are required to acquire conflict and change management skills, accept the key part they play in organizations, and learn how to minimize their disruptive impact and, instead, maximize their constructive effects through encouraging creativity and growth. Put differently, managers are assumed to direct change and conflict to the benefit of organization, rather than to its detriment. Moreover, conflict inherently makes one vigilant of the existing trends and instigates innovation. It shifts the status from stagnancy and dependency upon environment and either brings about solutions or does not pay off. Rather than being considered an impediment to accomplishing work, conflict should be viewed as a necessary and preliminary feature of any thoughtful undertaking. Given the importance of conflict and necessity of identification of its types and figuring out the way to deal with it, the present study aims to examine and identify the possible relationship between power distribution and

organizational conflict as well as to analyze the relationships among different management styles that are autocratic, persuasive, democratic, and consultative.

Power, the impact of which is visible in all community levels, is a major component of social structures. It continually affects people and is one of the most intricate and complex issues in social sciences. In addition, in discussions of conflict the appropriateness of will imposition is of great interest since will imposition is an essential ingredient of all power relations. Power is capability and inherent or acquired ability to influence others who are in a particular and independent situation as well as to force them move in a specific direction for the benefit and optimal attainment of the interests of power enactor. It can exist in all relationships. Sociologists believe that power is the ability to impose one's wants upon others, even in case of resistance. According to French and Raven (1959), power represents the action of bases of power and the potential influence power holders can make on others. Hatch and Cunliffe (2006) defined power as the influence of A upon B to the extent that makes B perform a task, and that if the power was not exercised through this channel, it would be implemented otherwise. Some commentators point that power is corruptive and leads to disasters. Such corruption may be due to quantity or quality of power, addiction to power, exclusively aiming at power, using it illogically or unlawfully and, also, and the very essence of power. It is also believed that experience shows that one who assumes power will abuse it sooner or later and overuses it to the extent that they face limitations. So, power inclines toward corruption and concentration, and absolute power inherently induces corruption. There are evidences that many challenges and problems related to power stem from the power holders' purposes and their utilized tools, rather than sheer seizure of power. Wrong (1968) puts power into two categories, namely potential and actual and argues that having either one does not necessarily imply utilizing it. Wrong (1968), also, notes that the difference between potential and actual power lies in the attempt to influence individuals and both types are manifested in the enactor's behavior.

Western thinkers believe that tyranny and corruption has always swept through power. Nabavi (2001), having reviewed nine approaches of Quran to power implementation, argues that the secret to this claim of the western world lies in the intention of west to remove God and religion from social reforms and individual and social lives. In absence of God and religion, morals gradually erode, and, obviously, in absence of social morals, power becomes violent. McClelland and Burnham (1976) contend that only managers who attempt to dominate the staff and exercise their power to the benefit of organization, rather than for

bragging, seeking the spotlight, or personal interests, are good managers. Detailed analyses have revealed that power is the most central concept in any organization. However, many investigations into organizations and management have considerably overlooked it or have referred to it in passing. In an attempt to shed light over the issue of power, this article investigates the possible relationship between power distribution and organizational conflict. The remainder of this paper includes the following sections. After reviewing the literature on power and conflict, a framework is postulated. Then, the article goes on to consider the results. Ultimately, discussion and implications are presented.

Power Distribution

The importance of power in organizations is seldom taken into account. Obviously, power is an essential feature of all organizations and organizational levels, and to know an organization well, one needs to perform a comprehensive analysis of power and power relations in it. Power denotes the ability to accomplish tasks and is closely associated with authority.

In another definition, proposed by Salancik and Pfeffer (1977) power is conceptualized as the ability to influence others in an effort to make them perform tasks according to the will of power holder. So, this is hidden power to influence others. The current definition has several strong points which help get a better grasp of organization. First, it puts stress on the relativity of power. Second, the phrase "according to the will of power holder" reminds us that conflict exists which is determined through utilization of power, tools, methods, approaches, and authority.

Wrong (1968) argues that power can be classified into two categories, potential and actual. However, having either one does not necessarily imply implementing it, i.e. they may manifest or remain dormant. What distinguishes the former type from the latter is the effort to influence individual(s).

Distribution of power is a critical decision in organizations. Obviously, managers cannot manage all affairs concerning the implementation of organization's strategic plans. So, they should decide about how to delegate power to lower managers or non-manager staff which implies cooperation in power. Power distribution at organizations is hierarchical such that levels at the top of the organizational pyramid enjoy the greatest amount of power and those at the bottom the lowest. Moreover, centralization of power depends on individual employees. If employees at higher ranks grant some of their power to those at lower levels,

power is decentralized and, thus, distributed at organizational level. Contrary to this, if top managers adopt an autocratic management style, power will not be distributed and will, thus, be centralized; so functional managers will be granted no power. In addition, if subordinates are not obedient to the manager and use their power to resist or increase mutual dependence, the manager's authority is threatened and he loses control of the affairs. Therefore, ability to manage and control conflict is an important skill for every manager at any organization. In fact, there is empirical evidence that approximately 20% of high and mid-level managers' time is spent on conflict management. Identification of conflict and its causes can aid managers in directing and utilizing talents and potentials within organizations. Moreover, once old governments give way to new ones, managers are changed, and implementation of new styles of management and of power distribution on the part of new managers creates new conditions which stimulate conflict. Such conflict is influenced by manager's decision-making with regard to centralization or decentralization of power.

Bases of Power

French and Raven (1959), in their seminal article, and Stoner, Freeman, and Gilbert (1995) classified power bases into five categories of reward, coercive, legitimate, referent, and expert. Reward power involves the ability of an individual to alter the actions of others for obeying his orders or adjusting to the existing conditions. Coercive power, on the other hand, emphasizes the enactor's ability to punish the influenced person for lack of adaption to the existing conditions. This is the negative aspect of reward and may range from reprimand to firing the person. Legitimate power is believed to exist when every staff member or other influenced body asserts the power of the enactor in a specific area. It also refers to a capacity to accept power. The right of the manager to determine logical work plans is an instance of legitimate top-down power, whereas that of a factory watchman to require even factory executive to prove his identification before entry is an example of legitimate bottom-up power. Ultimately, referent power can come from either an individual or a group and refers to the desire of personnel or any influenced body to identify and follow the enactor. For instance, what helps responsible and popular managers acquire referent power is their employee's overwhelming desire to follow the managers' work habits. Referent power might also be implemented by employees of the same rank. For example, charismatic colleagues may exert an influence on others in staff meetings Hatch and Cunliffe (2006).

Pourqaz and Mohammadi (2012), in an investigation of the relationship between managers' power and employees' personal-entrepreneurial traits in branches of Melli Bank in Zahedan, found that from the personnel's perspective the prominent base of power among managers is referent power. In addition, among personal-entrepreneurial characteristics sense of achievement was the most prevalent. Their data analysis also revealed that managers' reward power was significantly and directly related to staff's ambiguity tolerance, risk-taking, sense of achievement, and internal locus of control. Furthermore, there was a significant relationship between managers' legitimate and expert power and personnel's creativity and ambiguity tolerance; managers' referent power and staff's creativity and sense of achievement; and, finally, managers' coercive power and personnel's seeking independence. The findings also disclosed that managers' reward power is the best predictor of staff's personal-entrepreneurial features.

A research entitled "Bases of organizational power and their relationship with conflict management styles from the perspective of personnel in state high schools for female" was conducted by Doaee, Aminfar, and Kardani (2006). The research questions they addressed were whether reward power and the five conflict management styles, namely forgiveness, cooperation, competition, reconciliation, and prevention are associated; and whether there is a relationship between any of the bases of power according to French and Raven (1959), i.e. expert, coercive, legitimate, referent, and reward, and the five styles of conflict management. The results indicated that there was a relationship between all bases of power on the one hand and the five conflict management styles on the other. In addition, Pourian (1998) found that there is a positive relationship between using reward power on the part of school managers and organizational atmosphere.

The degree to which managers utilized the five bases of power at offices of Rafsanjan town from the standpoint of the staff was an issue of interest for Amjadi. Amjadi (2001) found that managers use referent, expert, coercive, and legitimate bases of power to a large extent whereas they utilize reward base to a medium extent. Also similarities were found in the point of view of staff with diverse ranks and work experiences.

Politis (2003) performed a research entitled "The effect of managerial power and relational trust on the skills and traits of knowledge acquisition: Evidence from the United Arab Emirates" in UAE. He drew upon the five types of power bases proposed by French and Raven (1959) and found that coercion, referent, and expert powers are important dimensions of knowledge acquisition. In fact, these bases are directly associated with knowledge

acquisition skills. The results also pointed to a negative relationship between interpersonal trust in communications and knowledge acquisition skills and attributes.

Nesler, Aguinis, Quingley, and Tedeschi (1993) conducted a study concerning bases of power which was entitled an investigation of the rate of power perception and research. They also drew on French and Raven's (1959) bases of power as well as informational and communications control bases and administered a questionnaire to 62 university students. Finally, they suggested that there is a complex relationship between power acceptance and social power. The key was the degree to which power was accepted and believed. However, when the enacted power was very strong, acceptance did not afford an effect.

Method

The present research fits within descriptive category which is used to establish the existence of a phenomenon by explicitly describing it (Seliger & Shohamy, 1989). This part of the article deals with research methodology, participants, data collection methods, reliability and validity of implemented measures, and data analysis and utilized statistical methods.

Participants

The sample of the present study was all staff of the governor office of Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad which was 180 individuals. It is calculated through sampling formula for a limited population and it is represented as follows.

$$n = \frac{N \times (Z_{\alpha/2})^2 \times (P \times (1 - P))}{(N - 1) \times \varepsilon^2 + (Z_{\alpha/2})^2 \times (P \times (1 - P))} \Rightarrow$$

$$n = \frac{180 \times (1.96)^2 \times (0.5) \times (0.5)}{(180 - 1) \times (0.08)^2 + (1.96)^2 \times (0.5) \times (0.5)} = 64.98 \approx 65$$

N represents the number of participants, i.e. 180 in this research; $Z_{\alpha/2}$, the extent of estimation with a confidence level of 95% which equals 1.96; ε , maximum acceptable error which is 0.08 here; and P, the ratio of success in the sample which equals 0.5. Finally, q is the ratio of lack of success in the sample, which is 0.5 ($1 - P = q$).

Generally speaking, sampling strategies can be divided into two groups of probability sampling and non-probability sampling. Probability sampling is a generic term used for a number of scientific procedures the most important of which are random sampling, stratified random sampling, systematic sampling, and cluster sampling. This study uses simple random sampling strategy.

Procedures

Research is disciplined inquiry and can be performed in two ways. One method is to look at what other people have said or done about a particular issue. This is called secondary or library research and is an essential form of inquiry since it would be a waste of time to ignore what other people have done in the area of interest and reinvent the wheel. The second method involves conducting one's own data-based investigation and is called primary research (Dornyei, 2011). The current study uses both methods.

The research instrument implemented in this investigation was questionnaire. It is a set of statements, not necessarily questions, based on which the respondent expresses an idea or provides a response, and the given response forms the research data. The research instrument used here was two questionnaires, namely power distribution questionnaire and organizational conflict questionnaire which were administered to all subjects at the same time.

Through questionnaires one can evaluate respondents' knowledge, interests, ideas, and beliefs and delve into their experiences, whether past or present. The questionnaires utilized in this study were organizational conflict and power distribution questionnaires the structures of which appear in Table 1. Overall 65 questionnaires were administered to the participants.

Table1
Distribution of Questions based on Variables

Target Variables	Target Indexes	Number of Questions	Total
Power Distributions	Autocratic Management	1, 3, 4, 5, 9, 14, 16, 19, 22, 23, & 26	11
	Persuasive Management	7, 10, & 17	3
	Consultative Management	8, 12, 13, 15, 20, 21, 24, & 25	8
	Cooperative Management	27-33	7
Organizational Conflict	Personal Conflict	1, 2, 6, 9, 10, 20, 22, 25, & 28	9
	Group Conflict	8, 11, 12, 15, 16, 17, 23, & 27	8
	Organizational Conflict	3, 4, 5, 13, 14, 18, 19, 21, 24, & 26	10

Reliability and validity are two major characteristics of a good measure, which is questionnaire here. Validity is a more test-dependent concept than reliability and refers to the extent to which the questionnaire measures what it is supposed to measure. There are different methods to measure validity one of which is content validity. It is examining the components of a measure and depends on the number of questions included in it. If the questions represent the specific skills or traits the researcher is seeking to measure, it has content validity. To ensure content validity, during the construction of questionnaire one

should match its content with a table of specifications which outlines the parts to be included in it (Farhady, Jafar-pour, and Birjandi, 2006). Content validity is usually examined by an expert in the area. The content validity of the questionnaires was proved by the thesis supervisor, advisor, and a number of other experts in the area.

A measure is reliable if the obtained scores highly correlate with actual scores. The correlation between these scores forms the reliability coefficient. Reliability of questionnaires in this study was measured through Cronbach's alpha. The closer the obtained percentage is to 100, the higher the reliability is. It is also imperative to mention that alpha coefficients below 60 are considered low; those above 80 are regarded high; and those at 70 are seen as satisfactory. In this research, the alpha coefficient was 0.93 for power distribution questionnaire and 0.75 for conflict questionnaire. Therefore, the questionnaires implemented had a rather high level of reliability. Alpha coefficients for all sub-components of the two questionnaires are shown below.

Table 2
Reliability of Power Distribution Components

Component	Autocratic Management	Persuasive Management	Consultative Management	Cooperative Management
Reliability	.80	.85	.64	.71

Table 3
Reliability of Conflict Components

Component	Organizational Conflict	Group Conflict	Interpersonal Conflict
Reliability	.79	.71	.85

Data Analysis

The response options were in the form of five-point Likert scale, namely very little, little, average, a lot, and very much, each of which was assigned a score from 1 to 5. SPSS was used to analyze the data and descriptive and inferential statistical tests were conducted.

Results

In sum, the results indicated that there was a significant relationship between adopting autocratic management style and organizational conflict– correlation coefficient of 0.64 and significance level of 0.000– enabling us to claim that autocratic management ended in organizational conflict in governor office. Moreover, autocratic management style was significantly associated with intergroup conflict with a coefficient alpha of 0.54 and

significance level of 0.000 which led to the claim that autocratic management gave rise to intergroup conflict in the governor office. And, autocratic management style was significantly related to interpersonal conflict and coefficient alpha of 0.47 and significance level of 0.000 enabled us to conclude that autocratic management style instigated interpersonal conflict in the governor office. In addition, a significant relationship existed between persuasive management style and organizational conflict with coefficient alpha of 0.62 and significance level of 0.002 helped us to claim that persuasive management style led to organizational conflict in the governor office. And, ultimately, there was a significant association between persuasive management style and intergroup conflict at alpha coefficient of 0.56 and significance level of 0.000; so it can be stated that persuasive management style stimulated intergroup conflict in governor office of Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad.

Discussion and Conclusion

The current paper explored the relationship between power distribution and organizational conflict in the governor office of Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad and found that there was a significant relationship between autocratic management style on the one hand, and organizational, intergroup, and interpersonal conflicts on the other. It also suggested that there was a significant association between persuasive management style on the one hand, and organizational and intergroup conflicts on the other. Future researchers may address the relationship between different bases of power and organizational conflict. Conducting a comparative analysis between organizations and governmental and private companies and also investigating the challenges and problems concerning interpersonal and intergroup conflicts in other offices, organizations, and companies in the country are suggestion for further research.

References

- Amjadi, Z. (2001). *An investigation of the rate of managers' utilization of five power bases in Rafsanjan's offices from staff's perspective* (Unpublished master's thesis). Kerman University, Iran.
- Doae, H., Aminfar, T., & Kardani, M. (2006). *Reform management in organizations*. Iran: University of Mashhad.
- Dornyei, Z. (2011). *Research methods in applied linguistics*. Oxford University Press.
- Farhady, H., Jafarpour, A., & Birjandi, P. (2006). *Testing language skills: From theory to practice*. Iran: SAMT Publications.
- French, J. R. P., Jr. & Raven, B. H. (1959). The bases of social power. In D. Cartwright (Ed.), *Studies in Social Power* (150–167). Ann Arbor, MI: Institute for Social Research.
- Hatch, M. J. & Cunliffe, A. L. (2006). *Organization theory: Modern, symbolic, and postmodern perspectives*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- McClelland, D. & Burnham, D. (1976). Power is the great motivator. *Harvard Business Review*, 25, 159–166.
- Nabavi, S. A. (2001). *Philosophy of power*. SAMT Publications.
- Nesler, M. S., Aguinis, H., Quingley, B. M., & Tedeschi, J. T. (1993). The effect of credibility on perceived power. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 23, 1407–1425.

- Politis, J. D. (2003). The effect of managerial power and relational trust on the skills and traits of knowledge acquisition: Evidence from the United Arab Emirates. *Electronic Journal on Knowledge Management*, 1(2), 147–158.
- Pourghaz, A. Mohammadi, A. (2013). *Comparing the importance of managerial and leadership behaviors from views of school principals and teachers*. Paper presented at the Third International Conference on New Trends in Education and Their Implications. Turkey: Antalya.
- Pourian, K. (1998). *The relationship between power bases and managers' conflict management styles in high schools* (Unpublished master's thesis). Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Iran.
- Salancik, G. R. & Pfeffer, J. (1977). Who gets power and how do they hold on to it: A strategic-contingency model of power. *Organizational Dynamics*, 5, 3–21.
- Seliger, H. W. & Shohamy, E. (1989). *Second language research methods*. Oxford University Press.
- Stoner, J. A. F., Freeman, R. E., & Gilbert, D. R. (1995). *Management* (6th ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Wrong, D. H. (1968). Some problems in defining social power. *American Journal of Psychology*, 73(5). 673–681.