

Conflict Management Behaviour of Agricultural Officers

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Abstract

This study analyses Conflict Management Behaviour of agricultural officers. The study revealed that coordination, empathy, decision-making ability, job experience and attitude towards the organization were significantly related with Conflict Management Behaviour. The perception of work load and span of control were negatively related with Conflict Management Behaviour. All the variables taken for the study together explained a significant about 62.04 per cent of variation in Conflict Management Behaviour. The authors suggest that training programmes need to be organized on conflict management while encouraging participatory decision making and planning.

Introduction

Conflict Management has assumed great importance because it influences human relations at work. Though people spend about one third of each day at the work place, the psychological carryover of the tension and conflict generated at the place of work continues even beyond the hours of work. They also face conflicts in social life, which implies that a major portion of the employee's life is spent in conflicts. Like any organization, the State Department of Agriculture is no exception to the existence of conflict.

For effective functioning of the department as a whole it is essential to manage conflict. In this context a study on conflict management behaviour of Agricultural Officers was designed with the objective of relational analysis of Conflict Management Behaviour with the profile characteristics of agricultural officers.

Methodology

The study was conducted with Agricultural Officers of Andhra Pradesh using ex post-facto research design. Ninety three Agricultural Officers were selected using proportionate random sampling method, from three randomly selected districts namely West Godavari, Kurnool and Ranga Reddy of Andhra Pradesh. Data were collected through a mailed questionnaire.

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Conflict Management is operationalised as the regularity or consistency of Agricultural Officers to choose a particular style to handle the conflict that occurs in their work environment. Style refers to the distinctive but adaptive behaviour of a person. It reflects the manner in which he/she behaves or will behave in an adaptive relationship in a situation.

Conflict management behaviour consists of five styles viz. avoiding style, accommodating style, competition, collaboration and compromise styles. Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory-II (ROCI-II 1983) was used with suitable modifications to measure conflict management behaviour. The inventory contained 35 items covering seven items for measuring each style of handling conflict. The reliability of the inventory was established with test - retest ($r = 0.75$) and internal consistency split half ($r = 0.70$) methods. The validity of the instrument was obtained through content validity by 30 judges (experts') opinion.

The profile of Agricultural Officers consists of personal, psychological and organizational characteristics viz.,

- (1) Age - chronological age in completed years
- (2) Educational Qualifications at the time of enquiry
- (3) Total Experience in completed years
- (4) Cadre Experience - present designation in completed years
- (5) Attitude towards the Organization - feelings towards the organization
- (6) Achievement Motivation - desire or need to secure personal excellence in a given task
- (7) Job Satisfaction - the degree to which an individual is satisfied or dissatisfied about various dimensions of the job
- (8) Perception of Work Load - the feeling towards the degree of work load in the job
- (9) Empathy - understanding of another person's feelings, needs and suffering

- (10) Self-Confidence - Extent of assurance one possesses about one's capacity and abilities
- (11) Self Esteem - overall attitude that a person maintains with regard to his own worth and importance
- (12) Decision Making Ability - conscious, mental reasoning process of choosing one among available alternatives
- (13) Coordination - the task of bringing things together in a harmonious relationship and function together to achieve common goals
- (14) Organizational Communication with Superiors - Flow of information bottom up
- (15) Communication with Colleagues
- (16) Communication with Subordinates - Flow of information from top to bottom
- (17) Span of Control - administrative jurisdiction of number of subordinates.

Results and Discussion

In order to explore the relational analysis of profile of Agricultural Officers with Conflict Management Behaviour (CMB), correlation, multiple linear regression analysis and path analysis were used.

Correlation Analysis

Perusal of Table-1 reveals that coordination and empathy were positively related with Conflict Management Behaviour, and significant at 0.01 level of probability where as decision making ability, job experience and attitude towards organization were significantly related with CMB at 0.05 level of probability.

Positive but non significantly related variables were job satisfaction, communication with subordinates, colleagues and superiors, self esteem, educational qualifications, cadre experience and achievement motivation.

The two variables namely age and self-confidence were negatively and non significantly related with Conflict Management Behaviour of Agricultural Officers.

Table 1. Correlation coefficients of Independent variables with Conflict Management Behaviour of Agricultural Officers

Sl.No.	Independent Variables	'r' value
01	Age	-0.1118
02	Educational qualifications	0.0857
03	Job experience	0.2483*
04	Cadre experience	0.0720
05	Attitude towards organization	0.2448*
06	Achievement motivation	0.0636
07	Job satisfaction	0.1830
08	Perception of work load	-0.2659*
09	Empathy	0.3151**
10	Self confidence	-0.0472
11	Self esteem	0.0882
12	Decision making ability	0.2542*
13	Coordination	0.5930**
14	Communication with superiors	0.1494
15	Communication with colleagues	0.1708
16	Communication with subordinates	0.1818
17	Span of control	-0.2365*

* Significant at 0.05% $r > 0.205$

** Significant at 0.01% $r > 0.267$

The relationship of coordination with Conflict Management Behaviour of Agricultural Officers was found positive and significant in this study. Coordination is the extent to which the various interdependent parts of the departments function according to the needs and requirement of other parts of the department. This might be due to shared expectations, absence of interdepartmental tension, and awareness of problems, which help in discussing the issues open mindedly and constructively. It helped the Agricultural Officers make progress on the task, work efficiently and strengthen their work relationship and their confidence through collaboration style of conflict handling which seeks a mutually beneficial solution by accepting a fair share of the responsibility for conflict.

Empathy was positively and significantly related with Conflict Management Behaviour of Agricultural Officers. It is basically a tendency to respond to another's emotional state with vicarious feelings resembling the emotions of others. This indicates that, greater empathy, enables the understanding of others and a strong need to participate in friendly groups for achieving the goal. Any type of conflict would be seen as stressful and threatening to the goals. Then they tend to adapt a compromise and accommodation styles of conflict management.

Decision making ability was positively and significantly related to Conflict Management Behaviour. The reason might be that Agricultural Officers discussed differences openly with superior officers by exchange of information and ideas that improved decision making. Informational stimuli have been used to enhance the consensus building process through sharing and communicating. The problem is defined and the range of alternatives is considered and emphasized for collaboration in decision making. Superiors discuss their differences openly and in a cooperative context understand and incorporate the others view point into their own thinking which is reflected in the joint decision making with subordinates and delegation of decision to subordinates.

Job experience is generally believed to have an effect on gaining of skills and thereby help in better performance. The significant positive relationship of job experience with Conflict Management Behaviour suggests that higher the experience, more the Conflict Management Behaviour. The experience gained might have helped the Agricultural Officers to adopt a more cognizant approach style. The reasons might be two; they might have acquired proper skills and understanding to perform a new assignment over a period of time which might have helped them to adopt collaboration and accommodation styles of Conflict Management Behaviour. The second reason is, they may have adjusted to situations by harmonizing their self perception with the real situation prevailing in the department which helped them to adopt compromise and avoiding style with superiors as well as subordinates.

It was found that there was positive and significant relationship of attitude towards organization with Conflict Management Behaviour of Agricultural Officers. This could be attributed to interaction of cognition (favourable and unfavourable) and action tendencies. It might be due to the trust and rapport of Agricultural Officers with subordinates that enable them to manage conflicts effectively because they had a favourable attitude towards the organization and implicitly exert their efforts to handle conflicts with superiors and subordinates using a particular style based on the situation.

Perception of work load was negatively and significantly related with Conflict Management Behaviour. It is highly discriminate among the extension personnel particularly Agricultural Officers based on their experience and mind set. It is due to the assignment of different roles and higher work load which hinders the management of the existing conflicts particularly role and goal conflict.

A negative and significant relationship was found between span of control and Conflict Management Behaviour of Agricultural Officers. It was indicated that more the span of control, the greater the difficulty in managing conflict. If possible, avoiding is the prime style adopted by Agricultural Officers to manage conflict. Educational qualification has shown positive relationship with Conflict Management Behaviour. Agricultural Officers with higher educational qualification with more knowledge and competence could help to utilize the scarce resources and could adjust their behaviour for different roles and goals and interpersonal networks. Thus they could manage the conflict which existed in the department.

Communication with superiors was positively and non significantly related with Conflict Management Behaviour. This might be due to clear communication without distortion of message and giving feedback to the superiors in time about the diffusion of innovations and adoption of new concepts like integrated pest management and farmer field schools. An accommodating style and collaboration help to manage conflicts.

Communication with colleagues was positively and non significantly related with Conflict Management Behaviour of Agricultural Officers. The reason might be that common experiences reduce communication barriers and provide common referents specially subject matter discussion in an empathetic way and help them clarify their doubts mutually from other Agricultural Officers.

Communication with subordinates was positively and non significantly related with Conflict Management Behaviour. This might be due to Agricultural Officers using avoidance and competition styles of conflict management.

Predicting the Contribution of Profile Characteristics with Conflict Management Behaviour

The results of multiple regression analysis in Table - 2 indicate that job experience, attitude towards the organization, decision making ability and coordination had significant partial regression coefficients in a positive direction, while job satisfaction had significant partial regression coefficients in a negative direction. All the variables together explained a significant, about 62.04 per cent variation in conflict management behaviour. The remaining percentage of variation

of conflict management behaviour of Agricultural Officers might be attributed to the variables which were not included in the study.

Table 2. Multiple Regression of Independent Variables with Conflict Management Behaviour of Agricultural Officers.

S.No.	Variables	b	SEb	T
1	Age	0.3968	1.2537	0.3165
2	Educational qualifications	1.0160NS	2.2478	0.4520
3	Job experience	0.7167*	0.3490	2.0534
4	Cadre	0.6546NS	1.0424	0.6280
5	Attitude towards organization	1.0370*	0.4082	2.5402
6	Achievement motivation	0.7064NS	0.668	-1.069
7	Job satisfaction	-0.7024*	0.3492	2.0116
8	Perception of work load	-0.4682	-0.1995	2.3472
9	Empathy	1.2323NS	0.8046	1.5316
10	Self confidence	1.4195NS	1.5489	-0.9164
11	Self esteem	-0.8346NS	-0.6294	1.3260
12	Decision making ability	0.4127*	-0.3772	2.5671
13	Coordination	1.1293**	0.0816	3.7401
14	Communication with superiors	0.7338NS	0.9652	0.4276
15	Communication with Subordinates	0.3055NS	0.4957	0.1152
16	Communication with Subordinates	0.3055NS	-4.3679	-0.168
17	Span of control	-0.0571NS	0.4957	0.1152

Multiple R = 0.7876 * Significant at 0.05 level of probability
 R² = 0.6204 ** Significant at 0.01 level of probability
 F(17.75) = 7.211**

Path-analysis of Independent Variables with Conflict Management Behaviour

Perusal of Table - 3 reveals that coordination, empathy, decision making ability, job experience, attitude towards the organization, communication with colleagues, job satisfaction, communication with subordinates, self esteem, educational qualifications, cadre experience and achievement motivation in that order had positive direct effects on Conflict Management Behaviour. Perception

of work load, span of control, communication with superiors, self confidence and age in that order had direct effect on Conflict Management Behaviour in a negative direction.

The positive indirect effects in Conflict Management Behaviour of Agricultural Officers were coordination, empathy, decision making ability, job experience, attitude towards the organization, job satisfaction, communication with subordinates, communication with colleagues, self esteem, educational qualification, cadre experience and achievement motivation in that order.

The variables namely perception of work load, age, span of control, communication with superiors and self confidence in that order had negative indirect effect on Conflict Management Behaviour.

The variables like age, cadre experience, perception of workload, empathy, self confidence and decision making ability were channeling their indirect effect through job experience. The variables like coordination and communication with colleagues were channeling their indirect effect through empathy.

Table 3. Path analysis of Independent variables with Conflict Management Behaviour

Sl. No.	Independent Variables	Correlation Coefficient	Direct effect	Indirect Effect	Substantial Indirect Effect Through
X1	Age	-0.1118	-0.0230(17)	-0.0888(5)	0.0326X3
X2	Educational qualifications	0.0857	0.0557(13)	0.0300(14)	0.0401X10
X3	Job experience	0.2448	0.1614(5)	0.0870(6)	0.0231X1
X4	Cadre experience	0.072	0.0468(14)	0.0252(15)	0.0523X3
X5	Attitude towards organization	0.2448	0.1592(6)	0.0857(7)	0.0224X7
X6	Achievement motivation	0.0636	0.0413(15)	0.0223(16)	0.1068X2
X7	Job satisfaction	0.183	0.1190(9)	0.0640(9)	0.0678X13
X8	Perception of work load	-0.2659	-0.1728(3)	-0.0931(3)	-0.0762X3
X9	Empathy	0.3151	0.2048(2)	0.1103(2)	0.0824X3
X10	Self confidence	-0.0472	-0.0307(16)	-0.0165(17)	0.0627X3
X11	Self esteem	0.0882	0.0573(12)	0.0309(13)	-0.2072X2

X12	Decision making ability	0.2542	0.0652(4)	0.0890(4)	0.02204X3
X13	Coordination	0.593	0.3854(1)	0.2075(1)	0.1084X3
X14	Communication with superiors	-0.1494	-0.0971(11)	-0.0523(11)	0.1104X5
X15	Communication with colleagues	0.1708	0.1334(8)	0.0374(12)	0.0562X9
X16	Communication with subordinates	0.1818	0.1182(10)	0.0636(10)	-0.0112X5
X17	Span of control	-0.2365	-0.1537(7)	-0.0828(8)	0.0345X4

(Figures in parentheses indicate the rank of the variable)

Conclusion

A substantial positive influence of job experience, attitude towards the organization, empathy, decision making ability and coordination and negative influence of perception of work load and span of control on conflict management behaviour brings out the importance of these variables. Training programmes need to be organized on aspects like decision making ability, empathy, coordination, and conflict management for effective functioning of extension personnel particularly Agricultural Officers.

Implications

The findings reveal that conflict management behaviour of a majority of agricultural officers is average. This is a cause for concern. Training programmes need to be organized on conflict management behaviour for better understanding of the situations and to choose a suitable style.

The department should promote participation of personnel in decision making and planning of the different activities which in turn would help to reduce the conflict. Training programmes may be arranged to analyse the conflict process and impart managerial skills in handling conflicts. In order to change attitudes and behaviour of extension personnel, 'T' Group sensitivity training programmes on communication process and pattern and on psychological aspects like empathy, self confidence, coordination and achievement motivation may be organized.

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