

## **Conflict Management in the MARA Education Institutions, Malaysia**

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### **Abstract**

Conflict if managed appropriately and efficiently would add important values to an organization as it act as a catalyst for change. These changes may lead to a conducive environment in workplace, foster good relationship among employees, and, over a period of time it will result in high productivity. This is important as a team, they can work hand in hand to achieve the organizational goals. Pursuant to this matter, this study attempts to investigate the views of MARA educators on conflict management and identify the processes of managing conflict in the MARA education institutions. The sample of the study was 306 respondents randomly selected from MARA educators who attended the Postgraduate Diploma in Education programme at the International Islamic University Malaysia, Gombak. They were from MRSM, KPM, KKTM, KM and IKM across the country. The data was processed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 17.0 for Windows. The responses on the questionnaire items were reported and discussed in frequency, percentage, and, mean. The findings shows that the highest score was on ‘Conflict can be thought as problem, we need to find the source and take the appropriate steps to solve it’ with mean score 4.40 of 5.00 Likert scale. The lowest was on ‘It is better to lie a bit in order to solve a conflict’ with mean score 2.51. It is believed that if the educators regardless of background can manage effectively the conflict in schools and foster healthy teacher-administrator relationship, teaching and learning can be improved towards facing the challenges in the era of globalization and realization of vision 2020.

*Keywords: Educators’ perceptions - Conflict Management -- MARA Education Institutions*

### **Introduction**

Conflict if managed appropriately and efficiently would add important values to an organization as it act as a catalyst for change. These changes may lead to a conducive environment in workplace, foster good relationship among employees, and, over a period of time it will result in high productivity. This is important as a team, they can work hand in hand to achieve the organizational goals and increase productivity to the optimum.

### **Literature Review**

Nowadays the word conflict is often heard and widely used in our daily life. The word conflict comes from Latin verb *confingere* which literally means to beat. Sociologically, conflict is defined as social process between two or more people or groups where one party tries to eliminate the other party by destroying or rendering them helpless. Conflict is present in our midst regardless of race, cultures, gender or age. It happens everywhere and to every living organism. To name a few, we have emotional conflict which occurs when there is clashing and

contradictory emotions within a person, group conflict which occur when cliques compete against each other as well as workplace conflict between management and workers.

In an organization, conflicts occur as a result of problems in communication, personal relationships or organizational structure. In communication between two parties, the meaning of the sentence as well as ambiguous and incomplete information leads to misunderstanding which eventually leads to conflict. Another reason for conflict to happen in an organization is the battle between the interests of different departments and competition to fight over resources due to limited resources. Conflict cannot be evaded even in education as schools and colleges are a part of organizations. If conflict which arises in schools and colleges are not taken care of it will affect the educators as well as the students by creating unwanted divergence in their learning environment.

Educators need to know how to manage conflict in order to create a conducive learning atmosphere and a pleasant workplace. To be able to do this, they need to know about conflict management. Conflict management refers to the long-term management of intractable conflicts. It is the label for the variety of ways by which people handle grievances by standing up for what they consider to be right and against what they consider to be wrong. As we are in the new globalization era, we can accept that conflict in organizations will not only continue to happen but will also be more challenging. It is in the best interest of the researchers to study about the perception of MARA educators in conflict management in MARA institution based on gender so that it can be of great assistance for future prospect in the field of conflict management in MARA.

### **Statement of Problem**

In general, educators have experienced their shares of problems in their schools or colleges such as insufficient resources (monetarily), lack of facilities, heavy workload, dissatisfaction on management and so on. Sometimes unmanaged conflict could cause disharmony among the educators which could lead to unproductive learning environment. Therefore, this study will attempt to investigate the conflict management in MARA especially in MRSM, KPM, KKTM, KM and IKM. For the purpose of this studies, schools will encompass all the five institution mentioned before. Through conflict management, educators have opportunity to learn about mechanisms that lead to aggressive action and those that lead to peaceful resolution. Educators play a huge role in managing and solving conflict in schools. The solution for conflict cannot happen without educators' full understanding and cooperation with the administration.

Conflict if managed appropriately and efficiently would add important values to an organization as it act as a catalyst for change. This type of changes will lead to a conducive environment in workplace whereby over a period of time it will result in high productivity. Apart from that, employees will also be able to foster good relationship among them and with the management. This is important because as a team they can work hand in hand to achieve the organizational goals.

The researchers believe that if the educators regardless of gender can manage and solve the conflict in schools, relationship with administration, teaching and learning can be improved. For this reason, the researchers are interested to study MARA educators' perception on conflict management in MARA institution namely MRSM, KPM, KKTM, KM and IKM based on gender.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The purpose of this research is to study MARA educators' perception on conflict management in MARA institution based on gender. The researches want to investigate if there exist differences in conflict management between male and female based on the following statements:

- i. To investigate the view of conflict management between male and female educators in MARA institution.
- ii. To identify the process of managing conflict between male and female educators in MARA institution.
- iii. To investigate the best practices in conflict management between male and female educators in MARA institution.

### **Research Questions**

This study attempts to answer the following research questions:

- 1) What are the views of MARA educators' on conflict management in MARA institution?
- 2) What are the processes of managing conflict used by MARA educators in MARA institution?
- 3) What are the best practices used by MARA educators' in conflict management in MARA institution?

### **Research Methodology**

The sample of the study was 306 respondents randomly selected from MARA educators who attended the Postgraduate Diploma in Education programme at the International Islamic University Malaysia, Gombak. They were from MRSM, KPM, KKTU, KM and IKM across the country. There were equal numbers of male and female respondents of 153 each.

### **Instrumentation**

The means of collecting data for this study is by using a survey questionnaire and open ended questions. Section A consists of respondents' background such as personal background information, gender, religion, highest qualification earned and school location. Section B comprises of 24 items with three dimensions related to the research questions. Section C consists of three structure questions.

The research questions were classified into three dimensions. The first dimension is the view of conflict management between male and female educators in MARA institution. The second dimension is the process of managing conflict between male and female educators in MARA institution. The last dimension is the best practices in conflict management between male and female educators in MARA institution. The researchers have measured the dimensions using 5-point Likert scale which are Strongly Disagree (SD), Disagree (D), Neutral (N), Agree (A) and Strongly Agree (SA). For the purpose of reporting analysis, the researchers have merged these five categories into three categories mainly Disagree (D), Neutral (N) and Agree (A).

### **Dimension One: The Views of Conflict**

Four items were employed to determine the conflict management for this "views of conflict" dimension. A summary of MARA educators' perception concerning the views of conflict can be observed in Table 1.

**Table 1: MARA educators' perception concerning the views of conflict  
(N = 306: Male = 153; Female = 153)**

Item	Statement	Male/ female	SD	D	N	A	SA	MEAN
1	Any conflict which occurs in an organization can be solved.	<b>M</b>	13.7% (21)	23.5% (36)	19.6% (30)	35.3% (54)	7.8% (12)	<b>4.39</b>
		<b>F</b>	-	-	7.8% (12)	45.1% (69)	47.1% (72)	
2	The best strategy in solving a conflict is to avoid the conflicting situation	<b>M</b>	-	-	3.9% (6)	49.0% (75)	47.1% (72)	<b>2.81</b>
		<b>F</b>	11.8% (18)	47.1% (72)	13.7% (21)	21.6% (33)	5.9% (9)	
3	Conflict can be thought as problem; we need to find the source and take the appropriate steps to solve it	<b>M</b>	11.8% (18)	37.3% (57)	25.5% (39)	15.7% (24)	9.8% (15)	<b>4.40</b>
		<b>F</b>	-	-	5.9% (9)	51.0% (78)	43.1% (66)	
4	Conflict can be solved if only one party has the power over the other party.	<b>M</b>	-	-	2.0% (3)	58.8% (90)	39.2% (60)	<b>2.57</b>
		<b>F</b>	9.8% (15)	54.9% (84)	25.5% (39)	5.9% (9)	3.9% (6)	

Table 1 shows, Item 1, close to 70% or 69 people both male and female with mean 4.39 agreed that any conflict which occurs in an organization can be solved. For item 2, 96.1% or 147 male educators agreed that the best strategy in solving a conflict is to avoid the conflicting situation while 58.9% or 90 female educators disagreed. In item 3 which is conflict can be thought as problem; we need to find the source and take the appropriate steps to solve it, 49.1% or 75 male educators disagreed to that statement while 94.1% or 144 female educators agreed to it. Finally for item 4, 98% or 150 male educators agreed that conflict can be solved if only one party has the power over the other party while 64.7% or 99 female educators disagreed to that statement.

### **Dimension Two: The Process of Managing Conflict Between Male and Female Educators in MARA Institution.**

Six items were employed to determine the conflict management for this “process of managing conflict between male and female educators in MARA institution dimension. A summary of MARA educators’ perception concerning the view in the process of managing conflict between male and female educators in MARA institution can be observed in Table 2.

**Table 2: The Process of Managing Conflict Between Male and Female Educators in MARA Institution (N = 306: Male = 153; Female = 153)**

Item	Statement	Male/ female	SD	D	N	A	SA	MEAN
5	Both parties in a conflicting situation have to give their cooperation	<b>M</b>	-	5.9% (9)	15.7% (24)	43.1% (66)	35.3% (54)	<b>4.26</b>
		<b>F</b>	3.9%		7.8%	52.9%	35.3%	

	in order to solve the conflict.		(6)	-	(12)	(81)	(54)	
6	A third party should give the best solution in case of conflict.	<b>M</b>	11.8% (18)	17.6% (27)	35.3% (54)	23.5% (36)	11.8% (18)	<b>3.88</b>
		<b>F</b>	2.0% (3)	3.9% (6)	29.4% (45)	52.9% (81)	11.8% (18)	
9	It is better to lie a bit in order to solve a conflict	<b>M</b>	7.8% (12)	5.9% (57)	23.5% (36)	43.1% (66)	19.6% (30)	<b>2.51</b>
		<b>F</b>	15.7% (24)	33.3% (51)	45.1% (69)	2.0% (3)	3.9% (6)	
10	In a conflicting situation, one party has to avoid the conflict	<b>M</b>	-	-	5.9% (9)	51.0% (78)	43.1% (66)	<b>3.64</b>
		<b>F</b>	2.0% (3)	7.8% (12)	27.5% (42)	47.1% (82)	15.7% (6)	
11	Solution finding process is needed in conflict management	<b>M</b>	2.0% (3)	2.0% (3)	11.8% (18)	52.9% (81)	31.4% (48)	<b>4.29</b>
		<b>F</b>	2.0% (3)	13.7% (21)	21.6% (33)	52.9% (81)	9.8% (15)	
14	An influential third party could solve the conflict between two parties.	<b>M</b>	-	2.0% (3)	15.7% (24)	64.7% (66)	17.6% (27)	<b>3.66</b>
		<b>F</b>	2.0% (3)	-	9.8% (15)	51.0% (78)	37.3% (57)	

For Item 5, both male and female educators with mean 4.26 agreed to the statement both parties in a conflicting situation have to give their cooperation in order to solve the conflict. For item 6, 35.3% or 54 male educators agreed that a third party should give the best solution in case of conflict and another 35.3% or 54 male educator stand neutral about it. 64.7% or 99 female educators agreed to the statement in item 6. In item 9, 62.7% or 96 male educators agreed that it is better to lie a bit in order to solve a conflict while 49% or 75 female educators disagreed to it and 45% remain neutral about it. The next three items which are item 10, 11 and 14 shows that more than 60% of respondent agreed to the statement regardless of gender.

### **Dimension Three: The Best Practices in Conflict Management Between Male and Female Educators in MARA Institution.**

14 items were employed to determine the conflict management for “the best practices in conflict management between male and female educators in MARA institution” dimension. A summary of MARA educators’ perception concerning the best practices in conflict management between male and female educators in MARA can be observed in Table 3.

Both male and female MARA educators have different opinion in dimension three for the best practices in conflict management. Nearly all the respondents are of opinion that conflict can be solved if there is understanding between parties and by finding alternative solution together. This statement scores the highest mean in this dimension. The second best practice is to be opened to negotiation. This is followed by both parties involve in a conflict to accept the solution peacefully. The next best practice according to MARA educators regardless of gender is to take the effort to solve the conflict at hand in order to prevent reoccurrence of the some conflict. The

fifth item according to MARA educators is to have a clear method in dealing with conflict. All these items have mean above 4. The male educators mostly agree that the more influential one is, the more effective one became in solving conflict, a king could solve a conflict between two opponents who are quarreling and by delaying the problem, one could calm down and the problem will be solved by itself. On the other hand, female educators have neutral stand to these three statements.

**Table 3: The Best Practices in Conflict Management Between Male and Female Educators in MARA Institution (N = 306: Male = 153; Female = 153)**

Item	Statement	Male/ female	SD	D	N	A	SA
7	It is better to tolerate with the opponent to make them feel better.	M	7.8% (12)	9.8% (15)	19.6% (30)	35.3% (54)	27.5% (42)
		F	11.8% (18)	25.5% (39)	31.4% (48)	25.5% (39)	5.9% (9)
8	The best way in dealing with conflict is by avoiding involvement in quarrel	M	17.6% (27)	37.3% (57)	21.6% (33)	17.6% (27)	5.9% (9)
		F	3.9% (6)	17.6% (27)	17.6% (27)	45.1% (69)	15.7% (24)
12	We need a clear method to solve a conflict	M	2.0% (3)	3.9% (6)	21.6% (33)	41.2% (63)	31.4% (48)
		F	3.9% (6)	2.0% (3)	13.7% (21)	60.8% (93)	19.6% (30)
13	In conflict management strategy compromising is the best method	M	3.9% (6)	5.9% (9)	21.6% (33)	47.1% (72)	21.6% (33)
		F	-	7.8% (12)	11.8% (18)	52.9% (81)	27.5% (42)
15	An opponent party could help in solving the conflict by being considerate	M	-	2.0% (3)	2.0% (3)	54.9% (84)	41.2% (63)
		F	-	3.9% (6)	21.6% (33)	66.7% (102)	7.8% (12)
16	There is a possibility that a conflict could reoccur if we wait and have no effort to solve the conflict.	M	-	2.0% (3)	2.0% (3)	54.9% (84)	41.2% (63)
		F	2.0% (3)	-	7.8% (12)	66.7% (102)	23.5% (36)
17	Conflict happens all the time, therefore we should not be involved with it.	M	9.8% (15)	33.3% (51)	21.6% (33)	21.6% (33)	13.7% (21)
		F	9.8% (15)	41.2% (63)	23.5% (36)	15.7% (24)	9.8% (15)
18	Conflict can be manage if interaction between groups is limited and at certain times only	M	11.8% (18)	27.5% (42)	33.3% (51)	15.7% (24)	11.8% (18)
		F	9.8% (15)	31.4% (48)	31.4% (48)	17.6% (27)	9.8% (15)
19	Conflict can be solved if there is understanding between parties and	M	-	-	5.9% (9)	45.1% (69)	49.0% (75)
		F	-	2.0% (3)	2.0% (3)	52.9% (81)	43.1% (66)

	find the alternative solution together.			(3)	(3)	(81)	(66)
20	The more influential we are, the more effective we became in solving conflict.	M	2.0% (3)	5.9% (9)	25.5% (39)	45.1% (69)	21.6% (33)
		F	11.8% (18)	17.6% (27)	37.3% (57)	19.6% (30)	13.7% (21)
21	A conflict can be solved if both parties are opened to negotiation	M	-	-	9.8% (15)	51.0% (78)	39.2% (60)
		F	-	-	2.0% (3)	47.1% (72)	51.0% (78)
22	A king could solve a conflict between two opponents who are quarreling.	M	2.0% (3)	5.9% (9)	35.3% (54)	41.2% (63)	15.7% (24)
		F	9.8% (15)	13.7% (21)	39.2% (60)	31.4% (48)	5.9% (9)
23	It is more noble if both parties could accept the solution peacefully.	M	-	2.0% (3)	5.9% (9)	45.1% (69)	47.1% (72)
		F	-	-	7.8% (12)	54.9% (84)	37.3% (57)
24	By delaying the problem, we could calm down and the problem will be solved by itself	M	5.9% (9)	23.5% (36)	25.5% (39)	25.5% (39)	19.6% (30)
		F	11.8% (18)	29.4% (45)	37.3% (57)	17.6% (27)	3.9% (6)

From the table above, both male and female respondents agreed on item 12, 13, 15, 16, 19, 21 and 23 while both disagreed on item 17 and 18. On item 20 and 24, male respondents agreed to the statements with 66.7% and 56.9% respectively while the female respondents were neutral about it at 37.3% for both statements. For item 7, 62.8% or 96 male respondents agreed to the statement while 37.3% or 57 female educators disagreed. This item has the lowest mean with 2.97. In item 8, 54.9% or 84 male respondents disagree with the statement while 60.8% or 63 female respondents agreed to the statement.

For question number one in Section C, researchers found that when there is conflict in the school or colleges, majority of the MARA educators choose the same method to resolve the conflict. The common answers used by the respondents in solving conflict were discussion, investigation of the cause of the conflict, tolerance, compromise and reconciliation counseling. In answering the next question, the respondents felt that the above methods were very helpful as it avoid uneasiness feeling among colleagues and management as well as solving the conflict and avoid reoccurrence of the same problem. All MARA educators regardless of gender agreed that religious values could be of help in managing conflict. This is because according to them, religious values play an important part in molding a person's personality and behavior. A person with good personality and behavior will portrait good values such as patience, tolerance, justice, respectful of others and honest.

The tables below show the ranking of MARA educators' perception on conflict management according to dimension. The ranking is based on mean for each item.

**Dimension One: The ranking for MARA educators perception on conflict based on gender**

In the first dimension, both gender agreed that conflict which occurs in an organization can be solved. However for the next three items the views were totally different based on gender. Most of the female educators did not consider that the best strategy in solving a conflict is to avoid the conflicting situation while the male educators consider it as the best strategy. Overall response was to agree to assume conflict as problem where there is a need to find the source and take appropriate steps to solve it. This statement scores the highest mean in this domain although the response is from the majority of female educators and minority of male educators. The male and female view on conflict can be solved if only one party has the power over the other party also differ vastly with female educators against it while male educators is in favor of it.

**Table 4: The ranking for MARA educators perception on conflict based on gender**

<b>Male Educator</b>	<b>Female Educator</b>
1. Conflict can be thought as problem; we need to find the source and take the appropriate steps to solve it	1. Any conflict which occurs in an organization can be solved
2. Any conflict which occurs in an organization can be solved	2. Conflict can be thought as problem; we need to find the source and take the appropriate steps to solve it
3. The best strategy in solving a conflict is to avoid the conflicting situation	3. The best strategy in solving a conflict is to avoid the conflicting situation
4. Conflict can be solved if only one party has the power over the other party.	4. Conflict can be solved if only one party has the power over the other party.

**Dimension Two: The ranking or MARA educators perception on the process of managing conflict based on gender**

There is no huge difference in dimension two based on gender. The processes of conflict management between male and female MARA educators are almost the same with four items out of six items being agreed by both genders. Both genders agreed that solution finding process is needed in conflict management. This statement scored the highest mean in this dimension. This is followed by cooperation by both parties in a conflicting situation. The next highest mean in the process of managing conflict is in the presence of third party to give the best solution in a conflict. This is followed by influential third party intervention to solve the conflict between two parties. The second lowest process in managing conflict is by having one party to avoid the conflict. The last option in the processes of managing conflict is to lie to solve a conflict. Most of the respondents were neutral or disagree with the statement which constitutes to the lowest mean however more than 50% of the male educators were in favor of it.

**Table 5: The ranking or MARA educators perception on the process of managing conflict based on gender**

<b>Male Educator</b>	<b>Female Educator</b>
11. Solution finding process is needed in conflict management	11. Solution finding process is needed in conflict management
5. Both parties in a conflicting situation have to give their cooperation in order to solve the conflict.	5. Both parties in a conflicting situation have to give their cooperation in order to solve the conflict.
6. A third party should give the best solution in case of conflict.	6. A third party should give the best solution in case of conflict.
14. An influential third party could solve the conflict between two parties.	10. In a conflicting situation, one party has to avoid the conflict
10. In a conflicting situation, one party has to avoid the conflict	14. An influential third party could solve the conflict between two parties.
9. It is better to lie a bit in order to solve a conflict	9. It is better to lie a bit in order to solve a conflict

**Dimension Three: The ranking for MARA educators perception on the best practices in managing conflict based on gender**

**Table 6: The ranking for MARA educators perception on the best practices in managing conflict based on gender**

<b>Male Educator</b>	<b>Female Educator</b>
19. Conflict can be solved if there is understanding between parties and find the alternative solution together.	21. A conflict can be solved if both parties are opened to negotiation
23. It is more noble if both parties could accept the solution peacefully.	19. Conflict can be solved if there is understanding between parties and find the alternative solution together.
16. There is a possibility that a conflict could reoccur if we wait and have no effort to solve the conflict.	23. It is more noble if both parties could accept the solution peacefully.
21. A conflict can be solved if both parties are opened to negotiation	16. There is a possibility that a conflict could reoccur if we wait and have no effort to solve the conflict.
12. We need a clear method to solve a conflict	13. In conflict management strategy compromising is the best method
15. An opponent party could help in solving the conflict by being considerate	12. We need a clear method to solve a conflict
13. In conflict management strategy compromising is the best method	15. An opponent party could help in solving the conflict by being considerate
20. The more influential we are, the more effective we became in solving conflict.	8. The best way in dealing with conflict is by avoiding involvement in quarrel

8. The best way in dealing with conflict is by avoiding involvement in quarrel	22. A king could solve a conflict between two opponents who are quarreling.
22. A king could solve a conflict between two opponents who are quarreling.	20. The more influential we are, the more effective we became in solving conflict.
24. By delaying the problem, we could calm down and the problem will be solved by itself	7. It is better to tolerate with the opponent to make them feel better.
7. It is better to tolerate with the opponent to make them feel better.	18. Conflict can be manage if interaction between groups is limited and at certain times only
17. Conflict happens all the time, therefore we should not be involved with it.	17. Conflict happens all the time, therefore we should not be involved with it.
18. Conflict can be manage if interaction between groups is limited and at certain times only	24. By delaying the problem, we could calm down and the problem will be solved by itself

According to the ranking for the three dimensions, MARA educators' perception for the third dimension which is the best practices in conflict management greatly differs based on gender. Through the analysis the best practices used in conflict management in the female educators' view of point is conflict can be solved if both parties are opened to negotiation while the male educators' view of point is that conflict can be solved if there is understanding between parties and be able to find the alternative solution together. The least practices that female educators' will opt to manage a conflict is by delaying the problem while in the male educators' perception the least practices they will choose in managing a conflict will be to limit the interaction between groups to a certain times only.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, through this study, the perception of MARA educators in conflict management in MARA institutions do differ according to gender in two dimensions which are, their views of conflict as well as the best practices in managing the conflict. Is it possible that conflict arise due to their different understanding of conflict and the way they handle certain problems? To answer that question we need a more detailed study. However it is suffice to say that based on result, MARA educators have different perception on conflict and the best practices one could use to manage a conflict based on gender.