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The Relationship between Professional Ethics and Conflict Management of Female Principals of High Schools in Karaj City of Iran

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ABSTRACT

Since many behaviours and decisions of the employees in today organizations are affected by principals' ethics, one of the subjects considered in educational administration literature is professional ethics. The present study was conducted with the aim of investigating the relationship between professional ethics and conflict management in high schools in Karaj city of Iran. Statistical population of the study included all the teacehers working in four districs of Karaj amounting to 2105, out of which a sample size of 322 persons was selected thorugh random stratified sampling bsed on Morgan's table. The instruments used in this study were Bahagir's (2011) professional ethics questionnaire and Stephen Robbins's (2011) conflict management questionnaire; data collection method has been survey method and the validity of the questionnaires was approved of by the experts and the Cronbach's alpha for the questionnaires was 0.794. The results revealed that there is a relationship between components of professional ethics including individualist ethics, utilitarian ethics, deontological ethics, justice-based ethics and rights-based ethics, and conflict management. Therefore, it is concluded that the more the principals follow codes of professional ethics, the better they can manage conflict.

KEYWORDS: professional ethics, individualist ethics, utilitarian ethics, deontological ethics, justice-based ethics and rights-based ethics, conflict management

INTRODUCTION

Educational organizations and above them education department, are considered to be among the most important social organizations in all countries, because almost all people of a country during their life deal with this organization and use its services. Principals are considered to be basic elements of education department. It is because most part of costs and budgets of education department is directed to the school and the way the principal treats teachers and student (IzadiYazdanAbadi, 2000, p. 24). An organization's growth is dependent on how it faces the conflicts. Absence of conflict cannot provide the best conditions, so it is not intended to reduce or prevent conflicts. The important matter is that how principals react when a conflict occurs. Conflict causes the organization not to be able to grow, so principals should experience conflict and when they face it, they should manage it in the best manner to be able to make decisions in order to lead their organizations towards growth and progress.Can principal's professional ethics be effective in better management of conflict? This is important because whether a conflict is destructive or constructive is highly dependent on the way it is controlled and managed. Decision making method during conflict can be constructive or destructive; constructive method during conflict help us to see the situation from different angles, but the negative method during conflicts can lead us to destruction. Ethics which we should define it as value-philosophical do's and don'ts and the specific criteria for assessing if a person's behaviour towards him/herself, others and society is right or wrong, is one of the issues which has been considered by scientists and management experts during last two decades and many books and papers have been written in this respect. This intellectual evolution appeared first in business and industrial management and in recent years, it has been considered in educational administration as well (Mirkamali, 2009, p. 20). Educational mangers deal with ethics and success in many ways; daily decisions of managers such as division of labor, organization, teaching, using technology, scoring, judging about individuals' behaviour, rewarding and punishing positively or negatively affects the thoughts, personality and current and future behaviour of the students. Proper and equal opportunities for using education, bringing up students to be sociable and fostering the spirit of thinking and researching among people is closely correlated with society's improvement (Jebel Ameli, 2002). Conflict is literally defined as to oppose and to disagree with one another (Dehkhoda). The intensity of conflict in the amount of difference is in the

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viewpoints, thoughts and opinions about tasks which is performed among employees. The intensity means the degree of costs and participation; the intensity of conflict will be low if groups are better organized and have proper structure (Dahrendorf, 2006). Educational institutes have the appropriate context for provoking conflict; conflict in educational institutes and universities is inevitable since academic freedom and unbridled thinking is encouraged. Conflict can occur between students and faculty members, faculty members and faculty members, faculty members and administrators, principals and teachers and teachers and students. Difference may be in goals and/or resource allocation plans, misinterpretation and/or inconsistent plans with organizational regulations, formal or informal contract violation, struggle for power, personal disputes, etc. and cause conflict (Sirajud Din, 2011). Conflict is considered one of the main problems in educational institutes and if it is well managed it can be employed as an important tool in development of the organization (Cetin et al., 2011). In spite of the different image of the conflict exists in the minds, it is difficult to manage conflict (Algert& Watson, 2002).

Conflict in the role of educational manager: school management faces lack of conflict management. Most of the principals have handled conflict in a trial and error approach, because there is no specific way for resolving conflicts. In many schools, student' involvement in decision making is not possible and employees rarely use discussion as strategy for finding solutions (Olu&Abosedi, 2003). Behrangi (1999) said conflicts usually exist in any organization, but these conflicts may be felt by the educational organization's principal more than anyone. Some examples of these conflicts are as follows: 1) conflict between two or more roles which a manager should assume at the same time; 2) conflict between people's and different groups' various expectations of the manager's role. The manger faces a conflict amid these expectations and in fact, this conflict is between people's and groups' expectations of the manager's role and the conflict is not in the manager's thought. 3) Conflict between various expectations of the group's members of a manager's role. The manager stays where the path of differences in expectations between members of a certain group intersect. 4) Conflict between interest and duty i.e. conflict between expectation of your role and material, spiritual and welfare personal needs which are met by assuming this role.

Causes of conflict: Alvani et al. (2011) said the causes of structural conflicts are interdependence of duty, unilateral dependence, too much horizontal division of the units, low formality, dependence on common resources, difference in evaluation criteria and payment systems, joint decision making,heterogeneity of the members, inconsistency of the organizational position with individuals' status, dissatisfaction with the role and distorting communications. Rezaeeian (2011) believedthe causes of conflict in organizations are at two structural and individual levels; structural level includes the causes: specialism, dependence on each other, common resources, different goals, hierarchy of authorities, large difference in jobs prestige, ambiguity in responsibility and accountability, and individual level includes skills and abilities, personality, perceptions, values, do's and don'ts, feelings, communication barriers and cultural differences.

Definitions of ethics and professional ethics

Professional ethics is a new branch of ethics which tries to answer ethical issues of various professions and there are standards of behaviour expected (Hartog, 2006). Codes of behaviour which should be followed in certain profession are recognized as professional ethics. And these specific codes link those who are involved in these professions around the world (Kucuradi, 2009). Each one of professions needs professional values and generates its own professional ethics (Demirtaş&Ersözlü, 2007). Professional ethics is arranged and safeguarded by the members of a certain profession.It instructs members ofthe profession; forces them to adopt certain behaviors;restricts their personal tendencies; excludes incompetentand unprincipled members from the profession; regulatesintra-profession competition and aims to safeguard service ideals.In thiscontext, professional ethics can be considered as thegeneral principles and rules concerning what are right orwrong, or what is fair or unfair in professional actions,either in or outside of the workplace ((Demirtaş and Güneş, 2002).

Ethics management: in Barnard's opinion, the most important issue is the employed method by the executives is paying attention to individual's motives in the path of organization's goals. Barnard defends manipulation of employees' demands and organization's goals and defines responsibility as a code of ethics as the power to perform certain ethical code which is related to controlling individual's behavior against opposite tendencies or motivations. Barnard shows the responsibility which executives have in relation to ethics as follows: first: leaders should maintain codes of ethics and they themselves should highly adhere to them, second: leaders should have a high capacity for responsibilities; executives face a higher level of ethical sophistications and need resistance to immediate motivations, desires, and inconsistentinterests; third: leaders should be able to formulate codes of ethics for others, for example, executives often try to establish an ethical basis for resolving ethical disputes (Schwartz, 2004).

Ethical systems and theories

Utilitarian ethics: in a utilitarianism perspective, the individual opts for an action which brings the most joy and happiness for the most number of people and seeks what is best for the community. Utilitarianism adopts two separate ethical approaches: one emphasizes following the rules and the other emphasizes the aspects of an action. The theory of utilitarianism sees the principles as the instrumental value they have to shape certain measures. In this theory, the result of an action, specifies its ethics and breaking the rules is allowed if it brings more joy. Utilitarianists need to know the results before acting in order to bring the maximum joy to the most number of people and this is hardly possible (Duska, 2003).

Individualist ethics (Individual-oriented): inner conscience and feeling of guilt is the guide to what is right and wrong. In Buber's opinion, the individual presents standards for making decision about what is to be done. Buber did not agree with Mill in that the end justifies the means. Buber believed that if the individual uses non-spiritual means, there would be no spiritual results (Ledbetter, 2005). Individual ethics have priority over any other ethics in one sense, because ethics is much beyond the people's jobs. People should be ethical in their jobs, but in ethics they do not essentially need any job or title. Firms and organizations should be ethical, but that is the outcome of people's ethical concerns (Gharamaleki, 2006), p. 100).

Deontological ethics (Duty-based): deontologism is a normative subject, and includes duties which exist in a certain profession in a specific social situation. Thus, deontologism is a science which addresses a set of professional activities' norms under the signs of ethics and honesty. Professional deontologism is the systematic description and elaboration of ideals and norms which has to lead professional activities (Carreira et al., 2008). Someone who is considered a deontologist makes the right and fair choice to do something without paying attention to its consequences for him/her or others. Ethical value of an action depends on whether its motivation has been on duty or not. Deontological theory asks an important question about business life: Is it the ethical decision making that its goal of decision making is to be of benefit to you and/or is it the ethical decision making that the motivation for making decision is to being appropriate? Kant believed that the latter in ethical decision making and if your motivation is not ethical, your action will not be ethical (Duska, 2003).

Justice-based ethics: seeing ethical problems from this standpoint may raise questions related to rule of law and abstract concepts such as justice, rights and equity. These may be included, but certainly, they are not limited to issues related to justice and equity, fairness of rules, regulations and policy. It is that whether principles and laws are absolute and if an exception is made, they are under what conditions; and defending the rights of people is against the highest good of the society (Katherine et al., 2004). Ethical and spiritual values are related to good and bad values of justice. Values are defined by an opposite bipolar scale and can be faced as mental criteria of the individual and/or as a characteristic of the object, human or current situation. Ethics is related to general principles of good and bad, while ethical principles are related to patterns of real act of duty. Ethics is a system of norms, principles and values, which are regulated with respect to interrelationships between people or people and society; many authors have defined ethics as a study of ethics judgment and believe it as a reflection of ethical behaviours (Carreira et al., 2008).

Rights-based ethics: Bahagir (2011) stated that rights-based approach of ethics emphasizes that human has freedoms and rights which cannot be denied by anybody's decision. Therefore, the decision which is ethically right, maintains the rights of people resulting from it in the best way. Managers should not interfere in other's basic rights for making ethical decisions. The function of rights system is as a reward mechanism for promoting ethical behavior in society and creating incentives through laws, regulations and punishment. The rights system should clearly state the increase of society's expectations for corrective behavior in part of business, and those who have endangered their profession and their firm against this reality as well as the economic development and technological changes and the ground in which these value and changes should be interpreted; thus, rights system should be flexible enough to quickly response to these changes, while it has to have enough strength to guard these basic values (Georgois, 2004).

The relationship between professional ethics and conflict management

Managers act in a certain way in some case for some reasons and do not act in that way for other reasons: this is an ethical problem. Decision making under such conditions is making attempt to resolve right conflicts against right in which there is no definite and obvious choice of action. Such a decision making includes conflicts between individual and society, short-term and long-term, truth and loyalty, and justice and mercy. Management assesses different goals and looks for a solution which guards the organization in the best possible way (Rohde, 2006). Conflict never is removed from the organization, although it can be constructive in many cases, but if justice and equity is not adhered to in the organization, conflict can be harmful and destructive. Regardless of the consequences and outcomes, conflict can lead to much emotional costs. Even after a long time after resolving the conflict, these emotional effects would remain. The individual or group who sees him/her/itself a loser may become a competing

opposite side or blame him/her/itself forever for missing that opportunity. If justice is well considered, these emotional effects after conflict can decrease or eliminated (Broumand et al., 2010).

Therefore, given the important role that professional ethics plays in principals' decision makings in dealing with conflict, this study aims to show the relationship between professional ethics and conflict management among principals of high schools in Karaj city.

Given what was presented in related literature it can be inferred that there is a relationship between professional ethics and conflict management, which is presented in the following figure i.e. the conceptual model of the study:

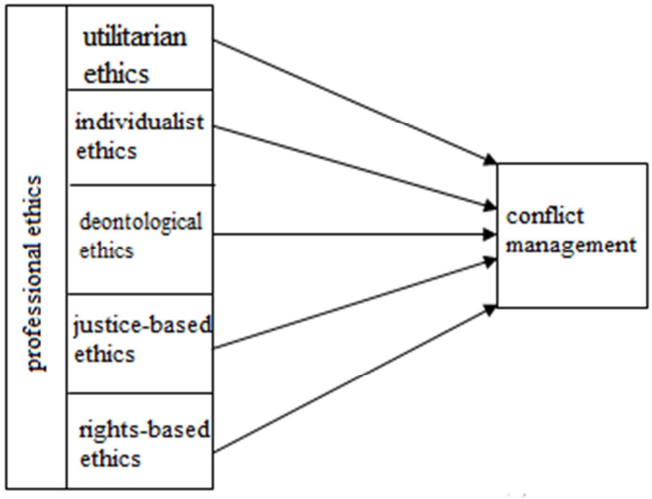

Figure 1. Conceptua model of the study

METHODOLOGY

The present study is applied and quantitative in terms of purpose and the type of the data. besides, it is a survey research in terms of data collection method and it is descriptive-correlational in terms of data analysis.
The statistical population of the study included female teachers of state-run high schools in Karaj city amounting to 2105 in four districs of Karaj. In order to determine the sample size, Morgan's table was used, based on which 322 teachers were selected; random stratified sampling was also used with respet to the dispersion of the schools in Karaj and the sample size. The instruments used in this study for measuring the criterion and predictor variables were Bahagir's (2011) professional ethics questionnaire containing 34 questions and Stephen Robbins's (2011) conflict management questionnaire; the validity of the questionnaires was approved of by the experts and their reliability was 0.794 based on Cronbach's alpha. Questions were closed-ended in Likert scale; the peofessional ethics and conflict management questionnaires' answers were *totally agreed, agreed, no idea, disagreed, and totally disagreed*. The questions were designed in such a way that the principals were measured from the teachers' viewpoint. After collecting the questionnaires, each answer was scored from 1 to 5. In order to analyze the data, the descriptive and inferential statistics were used. In order to describe the data, frequency distribution tables, percentage, cumulative percentage, mean, mode, median, standard deviation and diagram were employed and for inferential statistics, Kolmogorov–Smirnov test, Pearson's correlation coefficient and stepwise regression as well as variance analysis were used. For the aforementioned analyses, SPSS software was used.

RESULTS

Table 1. Description of study variables

Rights-based ethics	Justice-based ethics	Deontological ethics	Individualist behavior	Utilitarian ethics	Conflict management	Professional ethics	Variable
25.79	25.33	23.30	22.67	27.85	87.23	127.93	**maen**

Based on above table, mean for professional ethics is 127.93, for conflict management is 87.23, for utilitarian ethics is 27.85, for individualist ethics is 22.67, for deontological ethics is 23.30, for rights-based ethics is 25.33 and for justice-based ethics is 25.79.

Table 2. Significance level and correlation coefficient between professional ethics and its components and conflict management

Rights-based ethics	Justice-based ethics	Deontological ethics	Individualist behavior	Utilitarian ethics	Professional ethics		
0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	Conflict management	**Significance level**
0.547	0.567	0.673	0.629	0.494	0.682	conflict management	**Correlation coefficient**

The above table shows that the relationship between professional ethics and conflict management with correlation coefficient of r=0.682 at the level of sig. =0.000 is significant and the direction of the relationship is positive and direct. Besides, as it is seen, the relationship between utilitarian ethics and conflict management with the correlation coefficient of r=0.494 at the level of sig. =0.000 is significant and the direction of the relationship is positive and direct. Regarding the relationship between individualist ethics and conflict management, as it is seen, the correlation coefficient r=0.629 at the level of sig. =0.000 is significant and the direction of the relationship is positive and direct. In the relationship between deontological ethics and conflict management, as it is seen, the correlation coefficient r=0.673 at the level of sig. =0.000 is significant and the direction of the relationship is positive and direct. The relationship between justice-based ethics and conflict management with the correlation coefficient r=0.567 at the level of sig. =0.000 is significant and the direction of the relationship is positive and direct. The relationship between rights-based ethics and conflict management with the coefficient r=0.547 at the level of sig. =0.000 is significant and the direction of the relationship is positive and direct.

DISCUSSION

Based on the presented data in the table for sample size of the study, the indexes related to adopting professional ethics were assessed with the mean of 127.93 and the degree of correlation coefficient between professional ethics and conflict management with the coefficient of 0.68 has been significant. It is concluded that adopting professional ethics by principals is an effective factor in successful management of conflict in schools. Schafer (2009) found that certain dimensions of understanding ethical conditions is considerably related to organizational-professional conflict and the effect of organizational commitment; and there is a strong negative relationship between organizational-professional conflict and organizational commitment. The results of present study are consistent with Schafer's.

Besides, indexes related to adopting utilitarian ethics were assessed with the mean of 27.85 and the degree of correlation coefficient of 0.49 has been significant. It is concluded that adopting utilitarian ethics by principals is an effective factor in successful management of conflict in schools.Bahagir (2011) concluded in his study that there is a significant relationship between principals' utilitarian ethics and teachers' organizational commitment. Thus, the present results are consistent with Bahagir's.

Indexes related to adopting individualist ethics were assessed with the mean of 22.67 and the degree of correlation coefficient of 0.62 has been significant. It is concluded that adopting individualist ethics by principals is an effective factor in successful management of conflict in schools.Molana (2008) stated that principals who are morally less evolved and are unethical, are more likely to do unlawful and immoral acts and vice versa; it is to be seen that how strong and firm is the individual's moral conscious. Thus, the results of the present study are consistent with the Molana's.

Indexes related to adopting deontological ethics were assessed with the mean of 23.30 and the degree of correlation coefficient of 0.67 has been significant. It is concluded that adopting deontological ethics by principals is an effective factor in successful management of conflict in schools.Niroumand (1999) demonstrated that there is a direct relationship between principals' deontological leadership style and following educational-administrative regulations by teachers. Therefore, he results of the present study are consistent with the Niroumand's.

Indexes related to adopting justice-based ethics were assessed with the mean of 25.33 and the degree of correlation coefficient of 0.56 has been significant. It is concluded that adopting justice-based ethics by principals is an effective factor in successful management of conflict in schools.Broumand et al. (2010) found that conflictisnever removed from the organization, although it can be constructive in many cases, but if justice and equity is not

adhered to in the organization, conflict can be harmful and destructive. Besides, in Demirtaş's study, the highest recordedcodes of ethics were justice and honesty followed by professional competence and impartiality. Therefore, he results of the present study are consistent with theDemirtaş's and Boroumand's.

Furthermore, indexes related to adopting rights-based ethics were assessed with the mean of 28.79 and the degree of correlation coefficient of 0.54 has been significant. It is concluded that adopting rights-based ethics by principals is an effective factor in successful management of conflict in schools.Mola (2001) concluded that when teachers and principals are vested with more authority in dealing with daily matters of educational settings and resolving educational problems, they will develop creativity and initiative in dealing with various situations. Therefore, the results of the present study are consistent with the Mola's.

Findings

As a general conclusion, it can be inferred given the positive assessment carried out of the five components of professional ethics through reviewing the related literature regarding the relationship between professional ethics and conflict management, and since the conflict management has been evaluated as successful in schools in Karaj city, the relationship between professional ethics and conflict management in schools in Karaj city is confirmed, and we can largely be sure that adhering to these ethical principals in conflict management is effective and we can predict schools' success.

Making a decision with respect to the common benefit it has for all the employees is one of the factors of success of decision making based on conflict management. In schools where principals pay attention to principles of school teachers'profit at the time of conflict, teachers have peace of mind in that their principals act in their favour and do not trample their interests underfoot; teachers will be confident that the final decision made by the principal in dealing with the conflict will be in favour of each and every one of the teachers and overall favour of the school in such a way that it will entail the best results.

A principal who refers to his conscience and personal principles well aware of in his/her decision makings to see if his/her decision is ethical, will better manage the conflict and the teachers will be sure that their principal is virtuous and will not do anything against his/her personal ethical principles, because his/her adherence to being good is very important to him/her than violating the principles he/she believes in.

In schools where principals act based on duty and regulations, during decision makings related to conflict in school, school teachers are aware that their principal acts lawfully and know the principal make a decision even one which may be wrong in their opinionbut one which is according to the principals and rules and the principal is well aware of them and strictly adheres to them and will not act against them, and whatever the result of the principal's decision in dealing with the conflict, it is according to the principles and rules which are adhered to by the principal.

The principal who considers justice and fairness or equity causes the teachers to have the impression that at the time of conflict that their principal acts fairly and deals with the teachers equally and with justice, and they trust in principal's decision.

In a school where the principal gives teachers rights such as freedom of expression, individual freedom, right to counsel and right to be independent in their tasks, when a conflict occurs between teachers he/she can better manages it, as he gives some rights to teachers and the principal will not ignore such rights while making decisions. Besides, the principal gives all the teachers an opportunity to express their opinion and defend themselves.

Altogether, in such schools there is a peaceful atmosphere in which the principal and teachers largely cooperate to achieve school's goals and make progress. When there is a difference in the way teachers think, principals who adhere to principles of professional ethics can lead these differences and oppositions in the right path towards the school's progress.

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