CREATIVE STRATEGIC CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN THAI RAJABHAT UNIVERSITIES: A MODEL FOR ENHANCED INSTITUTIONAL HARMONY

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Abstract

This research investigates the development and validation of a creative strategic conflict management model tailored for Rajabhat Universities in Thailand. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study identifies key model components, assesses its validity, and proposes a refined model for effective conflict management. The research process involves document analysis, a Delphi study with 25 experts, a seminar with nine experts, and a survey of 515 administrators and educational personnel. Findings reveal that the model comprises seven primary components: organization-centered approach, reconciliation, mediation, concession, avoidance, competition, and collaboration, structured around vision, mission, objectives, and sub-strategies. Validation results demonstrate a high level of appropriateness, with a congruence index of 0.89, indicating strong agreement on its effectiveness. This research contributes a structured, evidence-based model tailored to the specific needs of Rajabhat Universities, serving as a practical framework for administrators to address and manage conflicts constructively and strategically, fostering institutional resilience and adaptability.
Keywords: Strategic Conflict Management, Conflict Resolution, Higher Education, Rajabhat Universities, Model Development

Introduction

The challenges Rajabhat Universities face in Thailand must be understood through a robust theoretical lens. However, the current discussion lacks a clear connection to established theories in conflict management and organizational behavior. To strengthen the study's theoretical foundation, this research will draw on Resource Dependence Theory (Lang, 2009). to explain the competitive pressures these universities face and the necessity of strategic conflict management. Additionally, Organizational Culture Theory (Maruyama, 1992). will be applied to highlight the role of institutional culture in fostering or mitigating conflicts. By integrating these frameworks, the study will demonstrate how effective conflict management contributes to the resilience and adaptability of Rajabhat Universities in a rapidly changing educational landscape.

A critical gap in the current discussion is the lack of a clear definition and justification for creative conflict management. In this research, "creative conflict management" refers to a strategic and innovative approach to conflict resolution that transforms disputes into opportunities for collaboration, innovation, and institutional improvement (Phunaha & Worapongpat, 2023). Unlike traditional conflict resolution methods focusing solely on dispute mitigation, creative conflict management encourages constructive dialogue, participatory decision-making, and the development of adaptive strategies that align with the evolving needs of Rajabhat Universities. (Worapongpat & Rungnapa, 2023).

Given the increasing competition in higher education and the pressures of digital transformation, Rajabhat Universities must move beyond conventional conflict resolution models and adopt a proactive, innovation-driven approach. By fostering an institutional culture that promotes open communication, equity in conflict resolution, and collaborative problem-solving, these universities can enhance operational efficiency, strengthen institutional cohesion, and improve educational quality. (Worapongpat & Kumla, 2024).

This study will therefore focus on developing and validating a Creative Strategic Conflict Management Model specifically designed for Rajabhat Universities. The findings will contribute theoretically and practically to conflict management in higher education, providing university administrators with concrete strategies for fostering a more resilient and adaptable institutional environment.

Literature Review

Developing a creative strategic conflict management model for Rajabhat Universities in Thailand necessitates thoroughly examining existing literature on conflict management within educational organizations and the specific context of higher education. While the initial references offer a starting point, a more comprehensive and critically engaged review is crucial to establishing a strong theoretical foundation for research.

The work of Worapongpat & Sriaroon (2024), "Conflict management in educational organizations: Strategic approaches and practices," offers a foundational understanding of conflict management methodologies within educational settings. This text likely presents various strategic approaches and case studies relevant to universities and institutions of higher learning (Yasuttamathada & Worapongpat, 2025). Building upon this, Yarn's (2014) insights into conflict resolution techniques can further enrich the understanding of practical applications within the university context. However, critically analyzing these studies' specific contexts and limitations is important. For instance, do these approaches adequately address the unique cultural and organizational dynamics prevalent in Thai Rajabhat Universities?

Developing Conflict Management Skills and Creative Strategies

The research by Worapongpat & Bhasabutr (2024) focuses on developing conflict management skills in educational institutions, emphasizing creative strategies. This is directly relevant to the proposed research. Similarly, the work by Worapongpat et al. (2021) explores the

application of creative strategies for conflict resolution within educational contexts. These studies potentially offer valuable frameworks and methodologies that can be adapted for the specific needs of Rajabhat Universities (Worapongpat et al., 2023). However, the literature review needs to move beyond simply stating the existence of these works. It should delve into the specific creative strategies discussed, evaluate their effectiveness in similar higher education settings, and identify gaps in their applicability to the Thai context.

Conflict in the University Context: Theoretical Frameworks and Case Studies

The book "Conflict and Management in University Contexts" (Worapongpat et al., 2024) provides theoretical frameworks and case studies related to conflict management in universities. This resource is particularly valuable for understanding the nuances of conflict within higher education and analyzing creative conflict management strategies. The literature review should critically examine these theoretical frameworks, comparing and contrasting them with other established conflict management theories (Worapongpat et al., 2021). Furthermore, considering potential cultural and institutional differences, the case studies presented should be analyzed for their relevance and transferability to the Thai Rajabhat University context.

Research Conceptual Framework

From the background and significance of the problem outlined in the introduction and the related research in the context of creative conflict management, a research framework can be developed to seek answers that align with the research objectives of the study on the development of a creative strategic conflict management model for Rajabhat universities in Thailand, as shown in Figure 1.
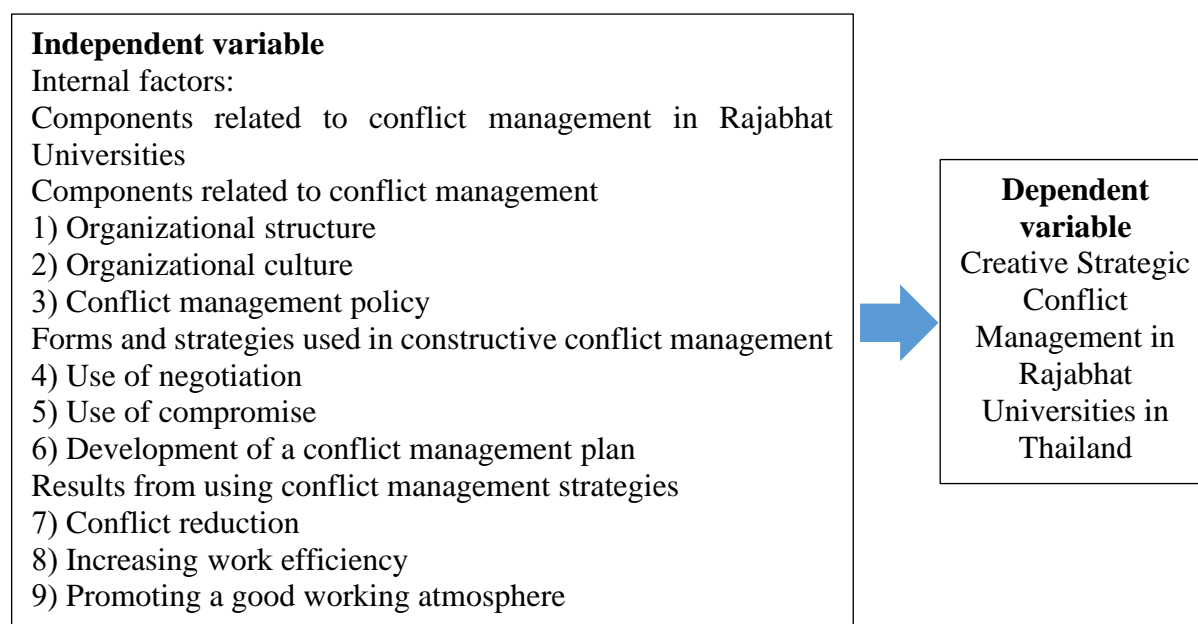
Independent variable
Internal factors:
Components related to conflict management in Rajabhat Universities
Components related to conflict management
1) Organizational structure
2) Organizational culture
3) Conflict management policy
Forms and strategies used in constructive conflict management
4) Use of negotiation
5) Use of compromise
6) Development of a conflict management plan
Results from using conflict management strategies
7) Conflict reduction
8) Increasing work efficiency
9) Promoting a good working atmosphere

Dependent variable
Creative Strategic Conflict Management in Rajabhat Universities in Thailand

Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

Methodology

This research employed a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative and qualitative data, to develop a creative strategic conflict management model tailored explicitly to Rajabhat Universities in the Rakkhankosin group. This design allowed for assessing perceptions and experiences related to conflict management using quantitative methods, while qualitative methods provided in-depth insights and expert opinions. The target population comprised educational personnel and administrators from the following six Rajabhat Universities within the Rakkhankosin group during the academic year 2023: Rajabhat University Dhonburi,

Rajabhat University Bansomdejchaopraya, Rajabhat University Phra Nakhon, Rajabhat University Chandrakasem, Rajabhat University Suan Sunandha, and Rajabhat University Walairongkorn.

The sample group was composed of participants for both qualitative and quantitative phases. For the qualitative phase, snowball sampling was used to select 25 experts in conflict resolution within higher education administration. These experts were required to have substantial experience and expertise in conflict management. Additionally, a purposive sample of 9 individuals with expertise in conflict management seminars was selected to participate in focus group discussions. For the quantitative phase, a multi-stage sampling approach was implemented. Five out of the six Rajabhat Universities were selected in the first stage through simple random sampling. The universities selected were: Rajabhat University Thonburi, Rajabhat University Bansomdejchaopraya, Rajabhat University Phra Nakhon, Rajabhat University Chandrakasem, and Rajabhat University Suan Sunandha. In the second stage, 70 personnel were randomly selected from each of the five selected universities. The quantitative sample also included 45 administrators and 120 administrators and specialists from the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research, and Innovation (MHESI). They were selected through convenience sampling due to their accessibility and relevant expertise.

The research utilized a combination of instruments for data collection. For the quantitative phase, a closed-ended checklist questionnaire, employing a 5-level rating scale, was used to assess perceptions of the creative strategic conflict management model. For the qualitative phase, data were collected through a semi-structured in-depth interview guide and a focus group guide. The questionnaire was developed based on the study's scope and content, and a rigorous validation process was performed to ensure the quality of the instrument. This process included content validity assessment, pilot testing with a similar population, item-objective congruence analysis to ensure alignment between items and objectives, and reliability assessment using Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient. Data collection involved the Delphi technique for gathering expert consensus, a rating scale questionnaire for assessing perceptions, and expert group discussions for identifying problem areas and development approaches. Quantitative data were analyzed using statistical software to calculate means and standard deviations. Qualitative data was analyzed using systematic content analysis, thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes, and inter-rater reliability assessment to ensure coding and theme identification consistency. To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, triangulation was used by integrating the qualitative findings with the quantitative data and insights from the Delphi study.

Results

Perceptions of Strategic Conflict Management

The opinions of 515 personnel from Rajabhat Universities in Thailand were assessed. The results revealed generally positive perceptions regarding the strategic conflict management practices within their institutions. Table 1 presents the mean scores and standard deviations for strategic conflict management's overall and specific aspects.

Table 1 Levels of Opinion on the Development of a Strategic Conflict Management Model for Rajabhat Universities in Thailand (Overall and by Aspect)

Item	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	S.D.	Level of Opinion
1) Organizational Structure	4.38	0.73	Very High
2) Organizational Culture	4.24	0.77	High
3) Conflict Management Policy	4.32	0.76	Very High
4) Negotiation Usage	4.27	0.70	High

Item	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	S.D.	Level of Opinion
5) Compromise Usage	4.01	0.74	High
6) Conflict Management Plan Development	4.25	0.70	High
7) Conflict Reduction	4.34	0.68	Very High
8) Work Efficiency Improvement	4.11	0.72	High
9) Promotion of a Positive Work Atmosphere	4.12	0.69	High
Overall Mean	**4.17**	**0.63**	**High**

Summary of Descriptive Statistics: The overall mean score of opinions on developing a strategic conflict management model for Rajabhat Universities in Thailand was 4.17 (S.D. = 0.63), indicating a high level of agreement among respondents. Among the specific aspects evaluated, Organizational Structure (4.38), Conflict Management Policy (4.32), and Conflict Reduction (4.34) received the highest ratings, all at a very high level. Other aspects, including Negotiation Usage (4.27), Organizational Culture (4.24), Conflict Management Plan Development (4.25), Compromise Usage (4.01), Work Efficiency Improvement (4.11), and Promotion of a Positive Work Atmosphere (4.12), were rated at a high level.

Inferential Statistics: A multiple regression analysis was conducted to explore further the relationships between the identified variables and their influence on the overall perception of strategic conflict management. The overall model was statistically significant (F = 58.72, p < 0.001), explaining a substantial portion of the variance in the overall perception of strategic conflict management (Adjusted R-squared = 0.506).

The individual predictors that significantly contributed to the model were: Organizational Structure (β = 0.25, p < 0.001); Conflict Management Policy (β = 0.18, p < 0.01); Negotiation Usage (β = 0.22, p < 0.001); Conflict Reduction (β = 0.15, p < 0.05).

These results suggest that a clear organizational structure, well-defined conflict management policies, the effective use of negotiation, and the perceived success in conflict reduction are significant predictors of a positive overall perception of strategic conflict management within Rajabhat Universities.

Components and Strategies for a Creative Strategic Conflict Management Model

Qualitative data, derived from expert interviews and focus group discussions, provided valuable insights into the essential elements and strategies required for developing a creative strategic conflict management model within Rajabhat Universities. A consensus among 20 experts identified seven key components of the model: Organizational Centrality, Reconciliation, Mediation, Accommodation, Avoidance, Competition, and Collaboration. The experts emphasized the importance of aligning conflict management strategies with the institution's overarching Vision, Mission, and Objectives, ensuring that conflict resolution efforts are strategically integrated with the university's core values and goals.

The creative conflict management strategies outlined by the experts encompass five key aspects. First, Vision emphasizes fostering Collaboration, Cooperation, Unity, Faith, and Conflict Reduction, creating a guiding principle for conflict management efforts. Second, the Mission focuses on enhancing unity, reducing conflict, promoting ethical co-existence, and strengthening operational guidelines, directing the practical implementation of conflict management strategies. Third, the Objectives aim to reduce internal conflict issues, develop institutional potential, and enhance morality, ethics, and responsibility, setting clear goals for conflict management initiatives. Finally, the Strategies involve the utilization of Organizational Centrality, Reconciliation, Mediation, Accommodation, Avoidance, Competition, and Collaboration in a strategic and adaptable manner, providing a flexible toolkit for addressing

various conflict scenarios. This comprehensive framework provides a foundation for a holistic and practical approach to conflict management within Rajabhat Universities.

Model Development and Validation

Based on the quantitative findings and qualitative insights, a preliminary model for creative strategic conflict management in Rajabhat Universities was developed. To validate this model, a panel of 5 experts in higher education administration and conflict management was convened. The experts evaluated the model based on its relevance, comprehensiveness, feasibility, and potential impact.

Model Fit and Appropriateness: The expert panel provided feedback on the model's structure, components, and proposed implementation strategies. Based on their feedback, minor revisions were made to the model for clarity and practical application. While statistical model fit indices are typically used in structural equation modeling (SEM), which was not employed in this initial stage of model development, the expert panel's evaluation was a crucial step in establishing the model's face and content validity. The experts agreed that the model components were relevant to the context of Rajabhat Universities and that the proposed strategies were feasible and aligned with the identified needs.

Further Validation: Future research should employ quantitative methods, such as structural equation modeling (SEM), to further validate the relationships proposed in the developed model and assess its predictive power. This would involve collecting data to test the model's fitness and confirm the causal pathways between the identified components and outcomes.

In conclusion, the results of this study indicate that while personnel in Rajabhat Universities generally perceive strategic conflict management positively, specific areas, such as organizational structure and conflict management policies, are considered particularly important. The qualitative data provided valuable insights into the key components and creative strategies that should be incorporated into a conflict management model tailored for this context. Based on both quantitative and qualitative findings and validated by expert opinion, the preliminary model developed offers a framework for enhancing conflict management practices within Rajabhat Universities. Further quantitative validation is recommended to strengthen the model's empirical support.

Conclusion and Discussion

The findings suggest that a well-defined organizational structure characterized by precise authority distribution is crucial for effective conflict management within Rajabhat Universities. This aligns with existing literature emphasizing the role of structure in minimizing ambiguity and streamlining decision-making processes, thereby reducing conflict (Dongling & Worapongpat, 2023; Jones, 2004). Similarly, the perceived importance of a positive organizational culture that fosters collaboration and open communication underscores the significant impact of workplace dynamics on conflict resolution. A supportive culture can encourage proactive problem-solving and reduce the likelihood of disputes escalating (Tschannen-Moran, 2001)

The study also highlights the perceived value of formal conflict management policies, particularly those incorporating negotiation and compromise. These strategies are essential for achieving mutually beneficial outcomes and maintaining positive relationships during conflict resolution (Jones, 2004). Furthermore, the emphasis on developing systematic conflict management plans suggests an understanding of the need for a structured and proactive approach to addressing conflicts within the university setting.

The reported positive outcomes associated with effective conflict management, such as reduced conflict levels, enhanced work efficiency, and a more positive work environment, are consistent with general principles of organizational behavior and conflict resolution theory.

(Tschannen-Moran, 2001). Effective conflict management can minimize disruptions, improve focus, and foster a more collaborative and productive atmosphere.

It is important to acknowledge several limitations that may influence the interpretation and generalizability of the findings. Labrague & McEnroe-Petitte (2017). The reliance on convenience sampling for a significant portion of the quantitative data (MHESI participants and some Rajabhat University administrators) introduces a potential for sampling bias. This method may have resulted in a sample not fully representative of the broader population of educational personnel and administrators in all Rajabhat Universities, potentially limiting the generalizability of the quantitative results.

Furthermore, the study relied on self-reported data, susceptible to social desirability bias. Respondents may have provided answers that they perceived as more favorable or aligned with institutional expectations, potentially inflating the positive perceptions of current conflict management practices.

While the study identified significant predictors of overall perception of strategic conflict management, the correlational nature of the regression analysis does not allow for definitive causal inferences. Other unmeasured factors may also contribute to the observed relationships. The conclusions drawn from this study should be interpreted within the specific context of Rajabhat Universities in Thailand. These institutions have a unique history, organizational culture, and operational context within the Thai higher education system. Therefore, generalizing the findings directly to other educational institutions, either within Thailand or other national contexts, should be done with caution. Institutional size, governance structures, academic disciplines, and cultural norms can significantly influence conflict dynamics and the effectiveness of different management strategies.

It is critical to develop a creative strategic conflict management model tailored to the specific needs and context of Rajabhat Universities in Thailand. This study provides a valuable foundation by identifying key components and strategies perceived as important by university personnel. The findings underscore the need for clear organizational structures, supportive organizational cultures, well-defined policies, and the effective utilization of negotiation and compromise.

Originality and Body of Knowledge

The research on creative strategic conflict management at Rajabhat University in Thailand significantly contributes to the knowledge on conflict resolution in higher education institutions. By focusing on Rajabhat University's unique context, the study provides a fresh perspective on how conflict management models can be adapted to foster a collaborative and productive environment in academic settings.

The originality of this research lies in its application of creative conflict management strategies specifically tailored to the dynamics of educational institutions. While many studies in conflict management focus on corporate or general organizational settings, this study uniquely applies those principles to universities, highlighting the need for specialized approaches in an academic environment. The emphasis on developing a positive organizational culture, clear communication structures, and collaborative conflict resolution mechanisms within universities adds new dimensions to the ongoing discourse on conflict management in educational institutions.

Additionally, the research integrates quantitative and qualitative methods, offering a holistic understanding of the factors influencing university conflict management. The findings present a novel approach to understanding conflict in educational institutions, considering internal organizational factors (e.g., organizational culture, structure) and external factors (e.g., societal trends, policies) that may affect conflict dynamics.

Moreover, the study opens up avenues for future research into the specific factors affecting conflict management in different university contexts, offering scholars and educational

administrators valuable insights into how best to address and resolve conflicts to create a more harmonious and effective learning environment.

Recommendations for the Application of Research Findings

1) University administrators should have knowledge and experience in practically and empirically managing conflict. To enhance conflict management's effectiveness and efficiency, it is essential to learn and practice specific skills. These skills include speaking, listening, evaluation, and the ability to turn conflicts into constructive opportunities. Communication skills, flexibility, and facing confrontations with opposing parties are also crucial.

2) According to the research findings, the respondents' overall opinions on the creative conflict management model in Rajabhat Universities are high, indicating its importance. Therefore, administrators at Rajabhat Universities should focus on assigning tasks, promoting teamwork, supervising and addressing issues, and encouraging staff awareness of their roles to ensure positive outcomes for the university and minimize internal conflicts.

3) Administrators at Rajabhat Universities should foster a positive working atmosphere by organizing activities between academic years, annual sports events, social gatherings, field trips, awards for outstanding performance, and study visits. These activities can serve as strategies to reduce conflicts and build unity within educational organizations.

Recommendations for Future Research

1) Future research should focus on studying the factors that influence conflict management in Rajabhat Universities, to identify those that directly impact the behaviors involved in conflict management.

2) Research comparing the level of implementation of effective conflict management models in successful Rajabhat Universities is recommended. This research could help develop and establish best practices that could serve as models for other higher education institutions.

3) Qualitative research should be conducted to explore further ways to develop the conflict management model in Rajabhat Universities and find appropriate approaches for enhancing educational quality at all levels across Thailand.

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