

Exploring Conflict Management Strategies in Organizations: An In-Depth Case Study Approach

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Abstract

This paper discusses workplace conflict, conflict management, and organizational performance. Although previous studies have investigated conflict management, there is a need to explore the implementation of conflict management strategies in real-world settings, and to understand the patterns of conflict management strategies in different organizations. The research aims to answer four research questions, including what conflict managerial method are used in organizations, how effective they are in resolving conflicts to reach organization's objectives, what patterns can be identified in the strategies used by different organizations, and whether the conflict management strategies used are in line with existing theories of conflict management. To achieve these aims, the researcher has used in-depth case study research methods, including content analysis with 5W1H data description, pattern analysis with the Thomas-Kilmann conflict handling methods and POLC managerial methods, and a pattern-matching technique. The text summarizes the research workflow, which includes collecting cases, content analysis, pattern analysis, and summarizing case studies to determine whether the findings conform with the theory of conflict management or require other explanations. The text also provides examples of the results of the case studies analyzed, including conflict arising from poor succession planning in Apple, conflict between Tesla and its employees, and internal organizational conflict in Manchester United in their decisions to recruit new manager after Sir Alex Ferguson's retirement.

Keywords: *conflict management, human resource management, organizational behavior, case study, qualitative study*

1. Introduction

Workplace conflict is a common occurrence that can have a significant impact on the performance and productivity of an organization. Conflict management is an essential aspect of organizational management that aims to identify, prevent, and resolve conflicts. In-depth case study research methods provide a comprehensive understanding of conflict management practices in organizations.

Previous research has shown that conflict is something that occurs naturally, and it is advisable to be managed by someone who specializes in HR Management, due to its complex and unpredictable nature (Boogard, 2021) (McCorkle & Reese, 2018). Gilham (2000) explained about meaning about case study and the characteristics of this methods, while Kilmann & Thomas (1975) defined 5 ways of conflict resolutions/conflict management, included with the deep understandings about these conflict resolution ways. After an analysis based on the Thomas-Kilmann model, POLC management techniques were carried out

regarding how the Thomas-Kilmann model was realized by management/leaders according to each case. The POLC technique has previously been explained by University of Minnesota Library (2010).

Although previous studies have investigated conflict management, there is a need to explore the effectiveness of conflict management strategies in real-world settings. Furthermore, there is a need to understand the patterns of conflict management strategies in different organizations.

The aim of this research is to provide a comprehensive understanding of conflict management strategies used in organizations to resolve workplace conflicts. The research will also identify the steps of these strategies to deal with the conflict. Furthermore, the research aims to identify patterns in the conflict management strategies used by different organizations and determine if these strategies are in line with existing theories of conflict management.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. In-depth Case Study Research Methods

In this paper, researcher use in-depth case study as research methods. According to Gillham (2000), case study research investigates a specific research question and seeks a variety of evidence from the case setting to provide answers. He applied that multiple sources of evidence, each with their own unique characteristics, are necessary for a comprehensive understanding of the research question. A fundamental characteristic of case study research is that there are no prior theoretical notions, as the data and context from cases are needed to be understood first before any theories/ summaries can be developed.

An in-depth study was carried out by describing 5W1H, analyzing management steps in dealing with conflicts with Thomas-Kilmann Model, POLC Managerial Methods, and finding the patterns of the cases being studied (Kilmann & Thomas, 1975) (University of Minnesota Libraries, 2010) (Almutairi, Gardner, & McCarthy, 2014).

2.2. Pattern-Matching Technique

This study tries to find patterns, with the aim of being able to confirm the compatibility between cases and theory (Almutairi, Gardner, & McCarthy, 2014), as illustrated in Figure 1.

2.3. Data Sources & Data Collections

Researcher collect cases using news articles from reputable internet sources, such as Forbes, The Washington Post, The Guardian, NBC, Manchester Evening News (Jacobs, 2021) (Watson, 2022) (MBFC News, 2023). Researcher search for articles that specifically discuss organizational/ workplace conflict management, using keywords such as "conflict management," "organizational conflict," and "team conflict". Researchers read and analyze each article, identifying key themes, arguments, and evidence related to the research questions.

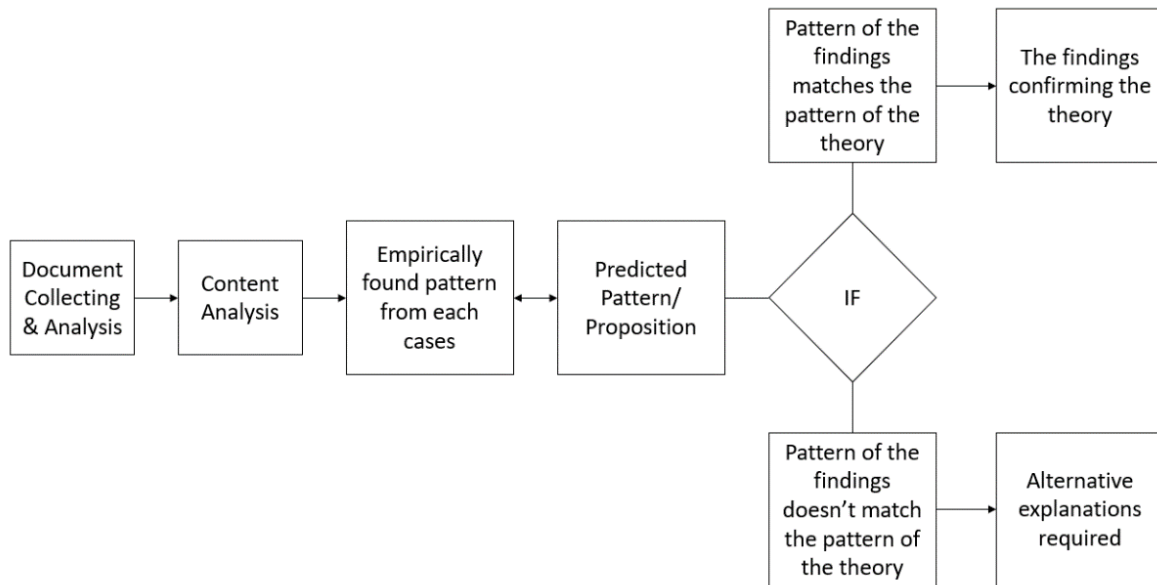


Figure 1. Illustration of the pattern matching process, adapted from Almutairi, Gardner, & McCarthy (2014)

2.4. Research Workflows

Research workflows are run in the following steps, as illustrated in Fig. 3:

1. Cases collecting, gathering information/ cases from multiple sources, to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research topics.
2. Content Analysis with 5W1H data description, as a technique used in case study research to gather detailed information about a specific event, situation, or phenomenon related to research topics. Activities in this part are asking six open-ended questions: who, what, when, where, why, and how. These questions are designed to provide a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the case being studied. The "who" question seeks to identify the people involved in the case, while the "what" question focuses on the actions, behaviors, or events that occurred. The "when" question seeks to establish the time frame of the case, and the "where" question identifies the location. The "why" question aims to uncover the underlying reasons or motivations behind the case, while the "how" question looks at the processes, mechanisms, or methods involved.
3. Pattern Analysis with 2 steps include:
 - a. Identify conflict resolutions with Thomas-Kilmann conflict handling methods.
 - b. Breakdown conflict management steps with POLC managerial methods.

Summarize the case studies that is analyzed the methods above, to conclude whether the results of the analysis and case findings have been confirmed in accordance with the theory of conflict management, or do they still require other explanations because the results of the analysis are difficult to find conformity with ground theory (Figure 2).

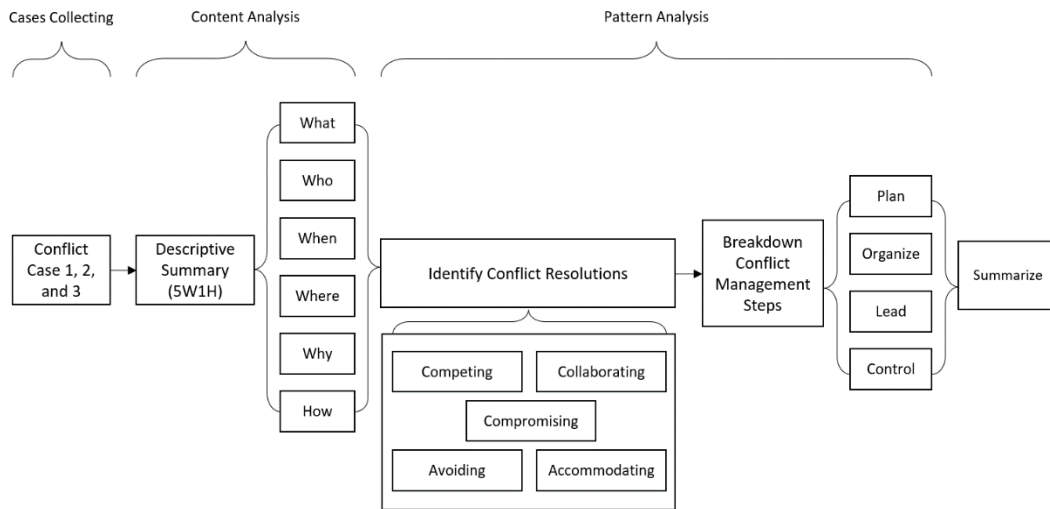


Figure 2. Research Workflows

3. Results and discussion

3.1. The Nature of Conflict in the Workplace

Conflict can be managed to various contexts, including interpersonal relationships, workplaces, and society as a whole. Interpersonal conflict (including conflict in the workplace) is a struggle between a small number of interdependent people that arises from perceived interference with goal achievement (McCorkle & Reese, 2018). McCorkle & Reese explained that conflict occurs when one person perceives that another person is blocking an important goal, and conflict can be expressed through nonverbal communication, and one person may be aware of the conflict while the other is not.

Conflict management in the workplace is the HR role that cannot be easily substituted by non-specialist HR practitioners due to its unpredictability (Roper & Higgins, 2020). According to recent studies, 80% of remote workers and 85% of employees in all types of workplaces have experienced conflict. While it is inevitable, becoming better at resolving disputes can make a significant difference to an organization's success, even in intimidating situations (Boogard, 2021).

3.2. Conflict Management/ Conflict Resolutions

Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI), was developed in 1975 by Kenneth W. Thomas and Ralph H. Kilmann to help individuals and teams identify their preferred approach to resolving conflicts.

The model (Figure 3) identifies five primary conflict-handling modes (Kilmann & Thomas, 1975):

- **Competing:** In this mode, an individual seeks to satisfy their own concerns at the expense of the other party's concerns. It can be useful when quick, decisive action is necessary, but it can also lead to negative outcomes when overused.
- **Collaborating:** This mode involves working with the other party to find a mutually beneficial solution that satisfies both parties' concerns. It can be effective when both parties have important concerns that must be addressed.

- **Compromising:** In this mode, both parties give up something to reach a mutually acceptable solution. It can be useful when time is limited and a quick resolution is necessary, but it may not be the best option when both parties have deeply held values or principles.
- **Avoiding:** This mode involves avoiding or postponing the conflict. It can be useful when the conflict is minor or when emotions are running high, but it may not be effective for resolving complex or long-standing conflicts.
- **Accommodating:** This mode involves sacrificing one's own concerns to satisfy the other party's concerns. It can be useful when the issue at hand is not very important, or when preserving a relationship is more important than the outcome of the conflict.

According to the model, individuals and teams have a natural inclination toward one or more of these conflict-handling modes. By understanding their preferred approach, individuals can more effectively manage conflicts and work collaboratively with others. The TKI instrument is widely used in organizational settings to help individuals and teams identify their preferred conflict-handling styles and develop strategies to improve their ability to manage conflicts).

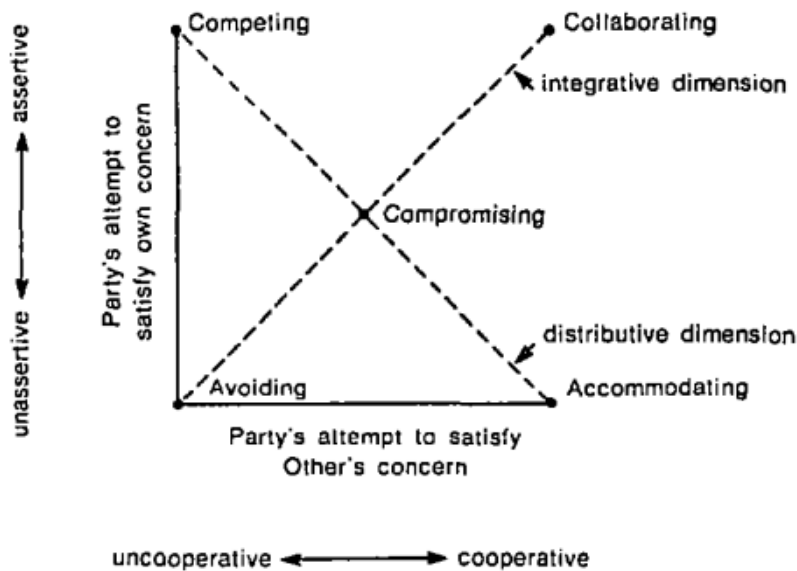


Figure 3. Five conflict-handling modes (Kilman & Thomas, 1975)

3.3. POLC Managerial Methods

There are several managerial methods that can be used in the conflict resolution process, including POACE – Planning, Organizing, Actuating, Controlling, Evaluating (Susanto, 2022), POCCC – Planning, Organizing, Command, Coordinate, Control (Nwanakezie & Ogon, 2021), and POLC – Planning, Organizing, Leading, Controlling (University of Minnesota Libraries, 2010). This study will analyze organizational/company policies in dealing with conflict by looking at the steps taken by the company from the POLC point of view.

University of Minnesota Libraries explained Planning involves setting goals and objectives, while Organizing involves arranging resources to achieve those goals, Leading involves motivating and directing employees, and Controlling involves monitoring progress and making necessary adjustments.

3.4. Case 1: Conflict arised from the moment of the resignation of Steve Jobs as CEO and the appointment of Tim Cook as his successor (Moran & Cohn, 2011) (Ferracone, 2011)

The text discusses conflicts arising from poor succession planning in Apple. While this organization invests significant resources and efforts in leadership selection and development decisions, Apple struggles with succession planning due to a lack of an accurate assessment process informed that includes essential leadership attributes. Conflict arises when this organization face the challenge of finding suitable replacements for iconic leader like Steve Jobs, leading to setbacks and embarrassment. Effective succession planning requires setting the right tone at the top and focusing on the essential attributes of leadership success. Conflict resolution involves developing a process that includes accurate leadership assessment to identify rising stars' strengths and match them with the requirements of a given position, leading to a steady pipeline of talent that is ready to step into key leadership positions whenever and wherever the need arises.

Table 1. 5W1H of Case 1

Item	Descriptions
What	Resignation of Steve Jobs as CEO and appointment of Tim Cook as his successor
When	August 24, 2011
Where	Apple Inc.
Who	Apple, Steve Jobs, Tim Cook, John Sculley
Why	Steve Jobs' health concerns and Apple's succession planning process
How	Jobs resigned from his CEO position and assumed the chairmanship, while Cook became the new CEO. The transition was seen as a potential source of conflict and tension, but investors took the news in stride. The article analyzed Apple's history of CEO turnover and plotted the company's market capitalization, notable events, and occupants of top jobs. It ultimately concluded that Apple had done a good job of succession planning, but acknowledged that there may have been some challenges and concerns along the way.

3.4.1. Conflict Resolutions

The conflict resolution that may be appropriate for the Apple situation described above could be moderate-to-high assertiveness and moderate-to-high cooperation. This model considers the level of assertiveness and cooperation needed to resolve a conflict, and suggests that the best approach depends on the situation. In the case of Apple, the company may need to balance its need for assertiveness (to protect its intellectual property and maintain market dominance) with a need for cooperation (to maintain positive relationships with suppliers and avoid negative publicity). By using this model, Apple can carefully assess the situation and choose a conflict resolution strategy that meets both its goals and the goals of the other party involved in the conflict.

Table 2. POLC Steps of Case 1

Item	Descriptions
Plan	The parties involved in the conflict need identify the issues causing the conflict and agree on a common goal. The goal here would be to have a smooth transition of leadership from Jobs to Cook, with the company's interests at the

	forefront. Both parties need to acknowledge their concerns and priorities, and brainstorm solutions that would work for both parties.
Organize	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The parties would need to come up with a plan to implement the agreed-upon solution. This would include setting up a timeline and assigning roles and responsibilities. They would need to ensure that the transition is communicated clearly to all stakeholders, including employees, customers, and investors. • To ensure that the conflict is managed assertively and cooperatively, it's important to prioritize effective communication, active listening, and collaboration throughout the POACE process. This may involve using techniques like active listening, reframing, and compromise to ensure that everyone's needs are heard and addressed.
Lead	The parties would need to take action and execute the plan. This would include communicating effectively and openly with each other and all stakeholders. They would need to remain assertive in their communication while being respectful and cooperative towards each other.
Control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The parties would need to monitor the progress of the transition and make any necessary adjustments. They would need to address any issues that arise promptly and work together to find solutions. • The parties would also evaluate the success of the transition and identify any areas for improvement. They would need to communicate their feedback to each other constructively and work together to find ways to improve the process in the future.

3.5. Case 2: Conflict between Tesla and their employees and government during pandemic (Siddiqui, 2020)

Tesla has fired three more workers who chose to stay at home rather than risk exposure to Covid-19 while working at the company's Fremont factory. The company had said workers could remain home if they had concerns about working during the pandemic. However, three employees who took leave have been fired, days after other workers received termination letters. The workers said they thought CEO Elon Musk's order to stay at home without pay stood.

Table 3. 5W1H of Case 2

Item	Descriptions
What	Values profits over employees during pandemic restrictions
When	2020
Where	Tesla's Fremont factory; Alameda County, USA
Who	Tesla CEO Elon Musk, President Trump, Alameda County's government, Employees
Why	Musk defied lockdown orders and called workers back to the factory, which resulted in government intervention and controversy over employee safety.
How	Tesla continued to operate with the approval from President Trump, leading to some workers contracting the coronavirus and subsequent termination of some employees who stayed home.

3.5.1. Conflict Resolutions

Tesla took a competitive approach by defying the lockdown order and calling workers back to the factory, which ultimately led to a conflict with Alameda County’s government officials and with some employees who stayed home.

Table 4. POLC Steps of Case 2

Item	Descriptions
Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tesla had planned to call workers back to work in factories, which were supposed to be working from home during the pandemic. • Tesla had planned to gain support from President Trump, to have allowance to reopen the factory.
Organize	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The company sent an email to employees, spelling out a new provision. “If an employee does not want to come to work out of concern that they might expose an at-risk member of their household, HR will provide the employee with a document the employee can sign and submit to confirm their situation and receive Unpaid Leave until May 31.” • Organizing the realizations of the plan to negotiate to President Trump.
Lead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negotiating with President Trump, and Alameda County’s government for allowance to reopen the factory. • In May, Musk defiantly reopened the factory, winning the support of President Trump. Alameda County officials finally agreed to allow Tesla to fully reopen May 18. • By the end of June, Tesla told the workers who stayed at home that they had abandoned their jobs and fired them.
Control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After fired some employees, Tesla has come under fire for its treatment of workers as the pandemic has stretched on. Tesla and Alameda County officials did not respond to requests for comment. • Tesla as being known for its demanding work culture, with long hours and high expectations, which may result in high turnover rates, keeping their reputations with this company’s policy. • Tesla managed to get support from President Trump.

3.6. Case 3: Manchester United’s struggles after Sir Alex Ferguson’s retirement (Flintham, 2022) (Sharma, 2020) (Ronay, 2021)

There are indications that there may be conflict within Manchester United's organization that is affecting the club's struggles after Sir Alex Ferguson’s retirement. Former coach Rene Meulenstein has suggested that the club has lost its identity since Sir Alex Ferguson's departure, and that moving away from his approach has contributed to the club's downfall. The organizational conflict in this case is the tension between the traditional approach of Sir Alex Ferguson and the need for Manchester United to evolve and adapt to changing times. There is also conflict between the club's eagerness to chop and change managers when things do not go right straightaway and the need for stability and patience to implement a new style of football. While it is difficult to say for certain how much these factors are contributing to the club's struggles, it is clear that there are issues that need to be addressed in order for the club to return to its former success.

Table 5. 5W1H of Case 3

Item	Descriptions
What	Organizational conflict in Manchester United after the departure/ retirement of Sir Alex Ferguson
When	Since Sir Alex Ferguson’s retirement in 2013
Where	Manchester United
Who	Manchester United organization, Sir Alex Ferguson, Rene Meulenstein, Steve McClaren, Walter Smith
Why	Tension between the traditional approach of Sir Alex Ferguson and the need for Manchester United to evolve and adapt to changing times, conflict between the club's eagerness to chop and change managers when things do not go right straightaway and the need for stability and patience to implement a new style of football.
How	The conflict is affecting the club's struggles to return to its former success.

3.6.1 Conflict Resolutions

It seems that a collaborative or accommodative strategy would be most effective in this case, as they involve working together and taking into pointing the views and needs of all stakeholders (high in cooperative mode). A compromise strategy (moderate in cooperative and assertiveness) may also be effective if both parties are willing to make concessions.

Table 6. POLC Steps of Case 3

Item	Descriptions
Plan	Identifying the root cause of the conflict and assess its impact on the team's performance: the conflict is between the traditional approach of Sir Alex Ferguson and the need for Manchester United to evolve and adapt to changing times, as well as the conflict between the club's eagerness to chop and change managers when things do not go right straightaway and the need for stability and patience to implement a new style of football. Establishing clear goals and objectives for resolving the conflict. Developing a plan that includes the steps to be taken, the resources needed, and a timeline for resolving the conflict. Assigning responsibilities and establish competencies for the successful resolution of the conflict.
Organize (predicted)	Establish a cross-functional team to manage the conflict resolution process. Ensure that the team is composed of individuals with the appropriate skills and expertise to effectively manage the conflict. Provide the team with the necessary resources to successfully manage the conflict.
Lead (predicted)	Foster a collaborative environment where all parties can express their concerns and work together to find a solution. Encourage active listening and open communication to ensure that all parties understand each other's perspectives. Empower the team to make decisions and take actions that will lead to a successful resolution of the conflict.

Control (predicted)	<p>Monitor the progress of the conflict resolution process to ensure that it is on track.</p> <p>Address any issues that arise in a timely manner.</p> <p>Establish metrics for measuring the success of the conflict resolution process.</p> <p>Make adjustments to the plan as needed to ensure that the conflict is effectively resolved.</p>
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4. Conclusions and Suggestions

4.1. Conclusions

This research aims to explore the conflict management strategies used in organizations to resolve workplace conflicts, understand the effectiveness of these strategies in improving organizational performance, identify patterns in the conflict management strategies used by different organizations, and determine if these strategies are in line with existing theories of conflict management. In order to achieve these aims, the researcher has used in-depth case study research methods, including content analysis with 5W1H data description, pattern analysis with the Thomas-Kilmann conflict handling methods and POLC managerial methods, and a pattern-matching technique.

The results of case 1 study analyzed shows that the conflict arose from poor succession planning in Apple, leading to setbacks and embarrassment. The conflict resolution that may be appropriate for the Apple situation could be moderate-to-high assertiveness and moderate-to-high cooperation. Effective succession planning requires setting the right tone at the top and focusing on the essential attributes of leadership success.

The results of case 2 study analyzed shows that Tesla faced a conflict with their employees and local government officials during the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite allowing workers to stay home if they had concerns about working during the pandemic, Tesla fired three and more employees who took leave. This action led to a conflict with Alameda County's government officials and with some employees who stayed home. Tesla's competitive approach of defying the lockdown order and calling workers back to the factory escalated the conflict.

The results of case 3 study in Manchester United analyzed shows there is a conflict between the club's traditional approach and the need to evolve and adapt to changing times after the retirement of Sir Alex Ferguson. There is also conflict between the club's eagerness to change managers and the need for stability to implement a new style of football. Former coach Rene Meulenstein has suggested that the club has lost its identity since Sir Alex Ferguson's departure. Collaborative or accommodative strategies that take into account the views and needs of all stakeholders could be effective in addressing these conflicts, along with a compromise strategy if both parties are willing to make concessions.

From the three case studies above, it can be concluded that the conflict approach with a pattern according to the Thomas-Kilmann Model was found to be applicable to each case. In addition, conflicts that occur in each case study can also be described and managed using the 5W1H descriptive model and POLC managerial methods. Conflicts that occur in the 3 cases above also are unpredictable and have high complexity, so that their handling requires competence, experience, wisdom, and expertise in the field of conflict management.

4.2. Suggestions

Here are some research suggestions for future studies:

- Impact of Succession Planning on Organizational Performance: to look into the connection between organizational performance and succession planning tactics.
- Conflict Management in Times of Crisis: Consider how organizations handle disputes when faced with emergencies like the COVID-19 epidemic, and maybe next pandemic/disaster that might be happened in the future.
- Conflict Resolution and Change Management: Examine the function of conflict resolution techniques in guiding organizational change.
- Stakeholder Participation on Conflict Management: Examine the effect of stakeholder participation on conflict resolution in organizations.
- Conflict Management in Sports Organizations: Examine the tactics used to resolve conflicts in sports organizations and how they affect the effectiveness and cohesiveness of teams.
- Conflict Management Training and Development: Assess the success of training efforts and programs designed to improve conflict management capabilities in organizations.
- Management of Cross-Cultural Conflict: Examine the difficulties and methods involved in handling conflicts in multinational or multicultural organizations.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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