

# **Managing Conflict in a South African Non-Profit Organization: An Analysis of Conflict Generating Factors and Conflict Management Styles**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*The purpose of this article is to examine the conflict generating factors in a medium-sized municipality and the conflict management styles employees apply in conflict situations. Considering the fact that transformation and affirmative action has taken place at an accelerated rate during the past decade in municipalities in South Africa, it is assumed that interpersonal conflict in these institutions could be the result of unique causes and that it affects employees in different ways. Consequently various styles are used to manage conflict. Addressing this problem of conflict dynamics in a new environment, the purpose of this paper is to examine what factors generate interpersonal conflict, and what conflict-management styles are applied in conflict situations. The findings of this exploratory study revealed that affirmative action played the most important role in conflict and that the conflict-handling styles used turned out to be a function of different variables such as age-status, gender, tenure, academic qualifications, and language.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Changes taking place in the social, political, economic and technological environments in South Africa are creating a complex and in some instance an uncertain environment in which organizations have to operate (Wiesner and Vermeulen, 1997:175). Affirmative action and transformation programmes, organisational changes, redistribution of resources and management changes, amongst others, have had a definite impact on interpersonal conflict. Such an uncertain and complex environment is the breeding ground for conflict amongst individuals or groups. It is believed that conflict amongst individuals may also be increasing in both private and public sector organizations (Havenga, 2004:2). In recent years researchers have taken a keen interest in conflict and its impact on organizations, focusing on amongst others aspects such as task and emotional conflicts (Ross and Ross, 1989); cognitive and affective conflict (Jehn, Nothcraft and Neale, 1999); cognitive and affective conflict (Amazon, 1996); resolution strategies (Van de Vliert, Euwena and Huisemans, 1994); task and relationship conflicts (Jehn, 1997); and substantive and affective conflicts (Pearson, Ensley and Amazon, 2002; Jehn, 1995).

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

From the literature survey done it became evident that the aspects researched on conflict-management rarely reflected on public sector organizations such as municipalities. Research done by previous authors concentrated on different aspects of conflict that are applicable to larger private sector business organizations or groups from tertiary education institutions, financial institutions and others (Havenga, 2006:5).

Excessive or inadequate levels of conflict hinder the effectiveness of group members which may lead to less satisfaction, increased absence and turnover rates, and eventually lower productivity. When conflict is at an optimal level, complacency and apathy should be minimized, motivation should be enhanced through the creation of a challenging and questioning environment with a vitality that makes work interesting (Robbins, Odendaal & Roodt, 2003:303).

Pelled, Eisenhardt and Xin (1999:4) and Jehn (1995:265) stress the point that two prominent elements of conflict dynamics are the ways in which an organization manages constructive (functional) and destructive (dysfunctional)

conflict. Identification of these elements can contribute to the eventual success of an organization eliminating negative conflict elements in its strategic planning and more specifically its human resources management (Havenga, 2005:123). However conflict management strategies involve recognition of types of conflict which may have negative affects and those that may have positive effects on individual and group performance. This can be achieved by minimizing affective conflicts at various levels; attain and maintain a moderate amount of substantive conflict; select and use appropriate conflict management strategies (Rahim, 2002:215).

One should be aware of conflict at various levels of an organization and especially of conflict management styles applied to interpersonal conflict (Rahim, 1986:30). Examining the amount of conflict in relation to the style followed in handling conflict is the maximization of organizational effectiveness (Weider-Hatfield, 1995:690). It has also be noted by Kim, Wang, Kondo and Kim (2007:25) that people use different conflict management styles depending on the level of authority of the party in the conflict. Specifically superiors are more likely to force their interests and employees are more likely to compromise with their peers, whereas subordinates prefer to yield their interests.

Prominent studies on conflict handling styles clearly distinguish between conflict resolution on the one hand and handling or managing conflict on the other hand (Rahim, 1992; 2002; Thomas and Killman, 1974; 1976). Rahim and Bonoma (1979:1323-1344) differentiated the conflict handling styles on two basic dimensions: concern for self and concern for others. This correlates with the classification of Thomas and Killman (1974; 1976). A combination of the two dimensions result in five specific styles of managing interpersonal conflict (Rahim, 1983:372).

### **Integrating**

This style focuses on problem solving in a collaborative fashion. Individuals using this style face conflict directly and try to find new and creative solutions to the problems by focusing on their own needs as well as that of others.

### **Obliging**

This style involves low concern for self and high concern for the other party. To find a integrative solution when both sets of concerns are too important to be compromised; when your objectives is to learn; to merge insights from people with different perspectives. Other people's needs are put before one's own interests. It is also referred to as accommodation, non-conformation, yielding or a lose-win style.

### **Avoiding**

This style involves a low concern for self as well as the other party and can also be seen as inactive, withdrawal or the ignoring style. It is indirect and unco-operative. Low extraversion or high introversion may be related to choosing an avoiding style (Antonioni, 1998:341).

### **Dominating**

This style, which involves high concern for self and low concern for the opposing party is also called the win-lose control, competing or zero-sum style. The dominating style relies on the use of position, power, aggression, verbal dominance and perseverance. It is direct and unco-operative.

### **Compromising**

According to Robbins (1996) (see Figure 1) it involves moderate concern for the self as well as for the other party. It involves give and take or sharing. Compromising individual gives up more than a dominating person, but less than an obliging individual. Moderately direct and cooperative. Compromise could be used when goals are important, but not worth the effort of potential disruption of more assertive approaches; when opponents with equal power are committed to mutually exclusive goals; to achieve temporary settlements to complex issues.

The identification of the sources of conflict is a key element in determining the strategies by which it should be resolved. Sources of conflict can also be equated with terminology or concepts such as 'causes', 'prerequisites' or 'conditions'.

Organization-conflict can be resolved if the causes thereof can be identified and solutions be found that please all the parties involved. The management or handling of the origin (causes) is the only effective way to ensure that conflict will not develop again or guided in such a way that is beneficial to both the disputants and the organization. Nelson (2001:424) clearly states that conflict is pervasive in an organization. To manage it effectively managers should understand the many sources of conflict.

Mayer (2000:8-16) sees conflict as having many roots and that there are many theories trying to explain these origins. Conflict, however, is seen arising from basic human instincts, from the competition for resources and power, from the structure of the societies and institutions that people create, and from the inevitable struggle between classes.

It is felt by Mayer (2000:8) that if one can develop a useable framework for understanding the causes of conflict a map of conflict can be created that can guide one through the conflict process. When one understands the different forces that motivate conflict behaviour one is better to create a more nuanced and selective approach to handling conflict.

Situation	Level of Conflict	Type of conflict	Unit's internal characteristics	Unit performance outcome
A	Low or more	Dysfunctional	Apathetic Stagnant No responsive To change lack of new ideas	Low
B	Optimal	Functional	Viable self-critical Innovative	High
C	High	Dysfunctional	Disruptive Chaotic Uncooperative	Low

(Robbins, 1996:24)

**Figure 1: Conflict and unit performance**

Generally the three basic forces or causes of conflict are the communication factors, the structural factors and the personal behaviour factors. Moore (1996) developed what is called the circle of conflict. (see fig. 2.). This wheel of conflict has at its centre of all conflicts, the human needs. These needs, however, do not exist in a vacuum, but are embedded in a constellation of the forces that can generate and define conflict. These other forces or sources can be categorized into: the ways people communicate; emotions; values; the structures within which interactions take place; and history.

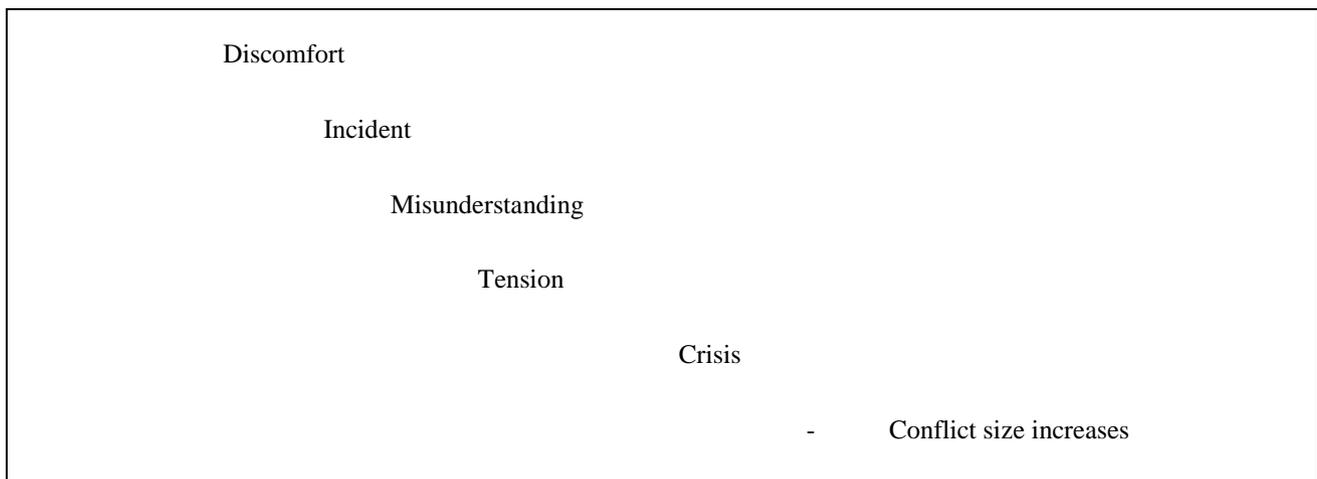
(Mayer, 2000:9)

**Figure 2: The Wheel of Conflict**

At the centre of the wheel of conflict model are the human needs that drive peoples actions, including engagement in conflict. In the literature on conflict, a distinction is often made between interests and needs. The latter is more basic and enduring, whilst interests are viewed as superficial and transitory.

Having knowledge in the different sources of conflict, and the various methods of handling-conflict alone, does not necessarily allow an effective manager/leader to deal with this through the understanding thereof unless this leader/manager clearly understand the stages of conflict through its various levels.

Lacey (2000:18) discusses the levels of conflict and categorizes it into five stages (see fig 3.).



**Figure 3: Levels of conflict**

The initial stage can be classified as the discomfort stage, which means that a feeling occurs that something is wrong. This may be the result of a small incident. As a result of this incident a misunderstanding occurs which is not clarified or brought out into the open. This eventually results in a stage of tension which inevitable may erupt into a crisis which may be dysfunctional. Although it is not discussed in any depth by Lacey it should be noted that each stage of development, emotions become stronger and intervention more difficult. The end result may be that conflict may spiral out of control. Each of these stages already necessitates a specific form of handling or management.

Adapted from: Lacey (2000:18-19)

## **PROBLEM STATEMENT AND OBJECTIVES**

It is accepted that the identification of the causes of conflict as well as the styles of handling conflict by local authorities, could be instrumental in improving the management of conflict and the establishment of effective practices in this regard (Havenga, 2005:4). Cognisance should also be taken of the role elements such as communication, emotions, cultural and supremacy aspirations. It can be contended that by doing so it may open opportunities for using generic conflict management strategies in the municipal work environment. It should be considered that the amount, intensity and positive or negative impact of the conflict at present and in future is a function of the way in which conflict is dealt with by the individual. Furthermore, considering the affirmative action and transformation programmes as well as organizational changes, scarce resources, management changes and behavioural processes within municipalities, it is believed that conflict potential may be increasing within this sector of the South African public delivery system.

No studies were found in which the sources of conflict and the conflict managing styles applied by employees in municipalities in South Africa were identified. This study addresses the research question: Assuming that conflict does exist in a municipality, what causes interpersonal conflict and what conflict management styles do employees use when experiencing interpersonal conflict.

In order to answer this question the objective of this study is to determine empirically the factors (sources) that generate conflict and what management styles are used when conflict is addressed in a local authority.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **Measuring Instrument**

Numerous conflict measuring instruments such as Blake and Mouton's (1964) two dimensional grid; Hall's (1969) CMS model; Thomas and Killmann's (1974) Conflict MODE; Dutch Test for Conflict Handling (Euwema and Van de Vliert, 1990) and the Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory - ROC II (Rahim, 1983) have been developed. Because the ROC instrument has a higher consistency coefficient (Ben, Yoav and Banai, 1992:240) and also has a better fit with data than two, three or four conflict management style orientations it was decided to use this instrument.

This measuring instrument used in the study is a conflict-evaluating questionnaire. The ROC-II measures how organizational members deal with their interpersonal conflict with superiors, sub-ordinates and peers. Five styles of managing conflict are measured with two items. This is done on a 5-point Likert scale. The lower the recorded mean, the more acceptable the respondents were to the specific handling-style. The five styles already discussed above are: integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding and compromising (Rahim, 2002:212)

The questionnaire developed from the ROC-II instrument covers four sections: biographical data; factor generating sources of conflict; conflict-handling styles used by sub-ordinates towards superiors; and conflict-management styles among employees on a horizontal level (conflict with peers). The latter two sections are standardized.

### **Sample**

The research group consisted of a stratified random sample of employees from the operational level (job level 13) up to the top level management (job level 1). The local authority from which the sample was taken is classified as a

category B municipality with a Municipal Demarcation Board Code NW 203. The sample represents the total population of the different directorates and race groups, with different educational qualifications and years of service.

Of the total population (refer to specified job levels) of 386 employees, 193 were randomly selected. This number represents 50% of the population with a percentage fault of less than 5%. A total of 143 questionnaires were sent back of which 139 were useable. This represents 72% of the sample which is adequate for the use of multivariate statistical techniques (Hair, Anderson and Tathama, 1995: 103-105).

### Biographical Data

Males made up 74, 6% of the sample. Afrikaans speaking employees were 56,1%, English 24, 5% and 19, 4% African languages. Age categories revealed that 34, 5% were younger than 35 years, 33, 4% between 36-45 years and the balance (33, 1%) older than 45years. Fifty percent of the employees had less than 10 years tenure with the municipality. Highest qualifications recorded were diplomas, certificates and degrees (43, 9%).

### Data Analysis

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS-program) was used to carry out the statistical analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the data.

The reliability of the questionnaire was determined by means of the Cronbach Alpha coefficient. Clark and Watson (1995:315) use 0,70 as a directive, whilst Bartholomew, Antonia and Marcia (2000:298) argue that between 0,80 and 0,60 is acceptable.

The overall average of the Cronbach-Alpha in this study is 0,76 which clearly falls within the range of directives. The compromising variable in both the case of superior and peer has a relative low-coefficient of 0,58 and 0,66. However it can still be considered as on the edge acceptable level of reliability (Clark and Watson, 1995) To ensure the highest possible measure of content validity, the questionnaire was referred to experts, peers and superiors for validation.

## RESULTS

### Causes of Conflict

Taking into account what could be gathered from theory and literature; ten key conflict generating factors were identified for this empirical survey. The ten causes of conflict evaluated were: affirmative action (B-1); cultural differences (B-2); racial differences (B-3); implementation of new management techniques (B-4); lack of physical resources (B-5); lack of effective personnel (B-6); rationalization/dismissal of workers (B-7); implementation of new technology (B-8); extent and content of work (B-9); and misuse of power B-10.

**Table 1: Descriptive statistics regarding causes of conflict in a local authority**

Variable	N	Mean	Median	Skewness	Kurtosis	No to small extent (%)	Moderate to large extent (%)
<b>B-1</b>	132	2,98	3,00	-0,642	-0,857	30,3	69,7
<b>B-2</b>	133	2,68	3,00	-0,179	-1,168	43,6	56,6
<b>B-3</b>	132	2,64	2,50	-0,001	-1,232	50,0	50,0
<b>B-4</b>	131	2,72	3,00	-0,304	-0,304	38,1	61,9
<b>B-5</b>	134	3,28	4,00	-1,186	-1,186	18,7	81,3
<b>B-6</b>	137	3,36	4,00	-1,333	-1,333	16,1	83,9
<b>B-7</b>	133	2,26	2,00	-0,324	-0,324	59,4	40,6
<b>B-8</b>	135	2,37	2,00	-0,223	-0,233	58,8	41,4
<b>B-9</b>	135	2,56	3,00	-0,130	-0,130	45,1	54,8
<b>B-10</b>	136	2,72	3,00	-0,301	-0,301	40,4	59,5

Analysis of the results for determining the extent to which given factors contribute to conflict in any municipality reveals in Table 1 that normality exists with regard to the skewness and kurtosis. The values are all acceptable within the 3 to -3 range for skewness and 7 to -7 range for the kurtosis.

It was determined that affirmative action (B-1), lack of physical resources (B-5), lack of effective personnel (B-6) and new management techniques (B-4) were considered to be to the largest extent factors causing conflict between employees. Misuse of power (B-10) also contributed considerably to conflict with a fifth place rank.

### Conflict Management Styles Towards Superiors

In this part of the study it was determined which different conflict management styles were predominately used among respondents and their superiors in relation to the background variables. In order to achieve this objective it had to be determined whether a significant statistical difference was present regarding each variable by means of independent sample tests and ANOVA, i.e. whether  $P(\text{sig}) \leq 0,5$  which would confirm the presence of a significant statistical difference (Howell, 1995).

By comparing the different conflict handling styles against the different variables the following analysis of results can be made (tables 2 and 3). Regarding *gender* a statistical difference ( $p=0,005$ ) within the variable *avoiding* were recorded. By looking at the group statistics of recordings it reveals that after the *avoiding* conflict-handling style was indicated as the only style where a statistical difference was found, it can be stated that the female employees ( $M=2,3578$ ) tended to apply this style more when in conflict with their superiors than the male employees ( $M=2,883$ ).

Regarding the background variable *age*, a meaningful significant statistical difference was found ( $p=0,049$ ) within the conflict handling style *compromising*. Respondents younger than 35 years had an average mean of 2,4402 in comparison with respondents 36-45 years who had a mean of 2,2557 and those above 45 years with a mean of 2,0698.

**Table 2: P-values regarding different background variables**

Variables/CHS		Gender	Age	Qualification	Language	Service years
<b>Integrating</b>	Superior	0,783	0,276	0,783	0,683	0.631
	Peer	0,832	0,570	0,399	0,495	0.028
<b>Avoiding</b>	Superior	0,005	0,948	0,120	0,420	0.303
	Peer	0,068	0,996	0,046	0,978	0.250
<b>Dominating</b>	Superior	0,780	0,340	0,246	0,005	0.918
	Peer	0,638	0,424	0,306	0,317	0.943
<b>Obliging</b>	Superior	0,567	0,175	0,004	0,000	0.408
	Peer	0,420	0,046	0,040	0,003	0,070
<b>Compromise</b>	Superior	0,806	0,049	0,598	0,570	0,048
	Peer	0,886	0,740	0,806	0,113	0,069

- CHS= conflict-handling style
- S= respondent/ superior
- P= respondent/ peer

**Table 3: Descriptive statistical mean on CHS according to different background variables**

Variable :	CHS :	Integrating	Avoiding	Dominating	Obliging	Comprom.
<b>AGE</b>						
-35					2,8007*	2,4402 <sup>0</sup>
36-45					2,5706*	2,2557 <sup>0</sup>
+ 46					2,5155*	2,0698 <sup>0</sup>
<b>GENDER</b>						
Male			2,883 <sup>0</sup>			
Female			2,358 <sup>0</sup>			
<b>LANGUAGE</b>						
Afrikaans				3,4560 <sup>0</sup>	2,7542 <sup>0</sup>	2,8879*
					2,1491 <sup>0</sup>	
Other				3,0772 <sup>0</sup>	2,4865*	

YEARS SERVICE		
1-4	2,1429*	2,4737 <sup>0</sup>
5-10	1,7690*	2,3085 <sup>0</sup>
10 +	1,7824*	2,1791 <sup>0</sup>
QUALIFICATION		
- Gr 12	2,7230*	2.5586 <sup>0</sup>
Diploma / Certificate	2,8289*	
Degree +	3,2857*	2.6532 <sup>0</sup>
		3.0476 <sup>0</sup>

- CHS = conflict-handling style
- <sup>0</sup> = respondent/superior
- \* = respondent/ peer

The highest qualification as a background variable in a municipality indicated a  $p=0,004$  thus verifying that *obliging* is the only conflict management style where a difference in the frequency with which this style is used to manage conflict, can be found. A grade qualification equal to or less than grade 12 had an  $M=2,2018$ . Respondents in possession of a certificate/ diploma recorded a  $M=2,6272$  and a university degree or higher  $M=2,7937$ .

Comparing the different conflict handling styles against the background variable home-language presented the following results.  $P=0,005$  within the variable *dominating* verified it as a conflict-handling style with a significant difference in the degree to which the style was used. This indicated that Afrikaans speaking respondents tended to be less ( $M=3.4560$ ) dominating than English (Other) speaking respondents with  $M=3.0772$ . Secondly a difference was also found within the variable *obliging* ( $p=0,000$ ). Respondents who recorded Afrikaans as their home language were less dominant in conflict situations with their superiors than those who recorded another language (English, African) as their home language ( $M=3,4560$  and  $M=3,0772$  respectively).

With regard to years in service (tenure) a significant statistical difference was recorded for the compromising style ( $p=0,048$ ). Service years 1-4 and 5-10 had means of 2,4737 and 2,3085 which indicated less *compromising* than the employees with more than 10 years service with the municipality.

### Conflict Management Styles and Peer Relations

Having established which conflict-handling styles were used by the respondents when engaging in conflict towards their superiors it was also deemed necessary to determine which styles were used in respondent to peer conflict situations.

The background variable *gender* had no p-value that was smaller or equal to 0.05 meaning that no significant statistical difference could be found in any of the variables. Both male and female employees used all the conflict handling styles on an equal basis.

Exploring the variable *age groups* a statistical difference ( $p=0,046$ ) was found with *obliging*. Respondents younger than 35 years had a  $M=2,8007$ , 36-45 years  $M=2,5706$  and older than 45 years  $M=2,5155$ . This indicates that the older a person was, the more he/she used the obliging style in managing conflict situations.

In the category *highest qualification* two significant statistical differences were found. The first was  $p=0,046$  within the *avoiding* style. The second difference  $p=0.040$  was recorded for the *obliging* style. The two conflict handling styles, when compared to the highest qualification background variable, revealed a difference with which it was used by respondents towards peers. Highest qualification grouping were  $M=2,7230$ ,  $M= 2,652$  and  $M=3,2857$  for *avoiding* and  $M=2.5586$ ,  $M=2,652$  and  $M=3,0476$  for *obliging* respectively. The more qualified a respondent was, the less avoiding and obliging they would be.

With regard to *home language* a significant statistical difference of  $p=0.003$  was found for *obliging*. Consulting the descriptive statistics, it was determined that Afrikaans speaking respondents had a  $M=2,4865$  and the other groups (English- African)  $M= 2,8879$ . The former therefore tend to be more obliging.

By comparing the different conflict handling styles against the background variable *years in service* (tenure) a significant statistical difference of  $p=0.028$  was found regarding the *integrating* style. This verifies that it is the only

conflict handling style in which a difference in the frequency with which it is used, can be found. Respondents in service for 1-4years had a M=2,149, 5-10 years M=1,790 and 11+ years, M= 1,7824, respectively.

## DISCUSSION

Comparing the difference in conflict handling styles as analyzed between respondents and superiors and peers within the municipality it can be deduced from figure 4., that all styles had a variation in the frequency with which each one is used compared to the different sections.

The style that differed the most after comparing the different sections within the local authority, was the obliging managing style. By consulting the descriptive statistics it can be reported that the obliging handling style was used to a significantly greater extent in a conflict situation between the respondent and his superior (M=2,41358) than was the situation with regard to managing conflict between the respondent and his/her peers (M=2,6628). The style that was recorded as being used to the greatest extent in both groups was the integrating style which had a M=1,8936 (respondent - superior) and M=1,82599 (respondent - peer). The style that was recorded as being used the least with either a superior or a peer was the dominating style (M=2,2934; M=3,2533).

What has become evident from the study is that female employees, tend to use the avoiding style more with their superiors than men. The older more mature employees who had been in a conflict situation with their superiors, used compromising as a tool for managing conflict to a much greater extent than those of a younger age. Using this style involves give-and-take whereby both parties give up something to make a mutually acceptable decision (Rahim, 2002:219).

<b>Factor</b>		<b>M-value</b>
Integrating	<i>S</i>	1.9487
	<i>P</i>	1.8259
Dominating	<i>S</i>	3.2924
	<i>P</i>	3.2533
Obligating	<i>S</i>	2.4135
	<i>P</i>	2.6628
Avoiding	<i>S</i>	2.7530
	<i>P</i>	2.8908
Compromising	<i>S</i>	2.2574
	<i>P</i>	2.2178

**Figure 4: Variation frequency in usage of CHS- respondent / superior and respondent / peer.**

Qualifications also seem to have an effect on the choice of conflict-handling styles. The higher the respondents were qualified in terms of education and intellectually more advanced, the less they were obliging towards their superiors. In conflict situation with peers, employees with higher qualifications were more aggressive and self-confident. Lower qualified employees made more use of the avoiding, and obliging conflict handling styles.

It appeared that there was some form of correlation between the variables *years of service* and *age*. Employees with longer years of employment in the municipality, and being older, were more compromising and obliging with their superiors. Compromising has an intermediate concern for self and others, with respondents endeavoring to find a

middle ground in a conflict situation between themselves as subordinates and their superiors (Rahim, 2002:219). Older employees were also more obliging towards peers in case of conflict. Another study (Havenga, 2005:260) revealed the opposite regarding age and conflict-handling style in cases in a profit-based organization. Here older employees were more dominating toward peers in conflict situations and more obliging as subordinates toward superiors.

The dominating style played a lesser role in the local authority (non-profit organization) on both peer and superior levels. It should be remembered that *dominating*, also referred to as *competitive* and *forcing* (Euwema, Van de Vliert and Bakker, 2003:124), is considered to be the least effective style. This style stimulates and escalates conflict, hinders conflict resolution, increases frustration and may result in more aggression and increase future conflict (Meyer, 2004:185). Van de Vliert, Euwema and Huisemans (2003:125) believe that the *dominating* style is also less effective when used by supervisors (superiors) with their subordinates.

From the statistical analysis it was also clear that employees whose home-language was Afrikaans tended to be more obliging when trying to resolve conflict situations with superiors and peers than the other language groups. The most probable clarification for this may be a more conservative environment in which they grew up and where the patriarchal system at home tended to make them more compromising and obliging.

Considering the question of causes of conflict and its effect on the employees, it was shown that affirmative action played the most important role in stimulating conflict. Cultural differences were also highly ranked. However, racial differences which were anticipated to be a prime suspect for conflict turned out to have a relative small influence. The municipality has already implemented the affirmative action and transformation programmes to a large extent. This may have given rise to “lack of physical resources” and “effective (qualified) personnel” being highly ranked as conflict generators.

Managing of interpersonal conflict calls for the identification of the conflict-handling styles used by employees, the sources of such conflict and the effect that it has on employees. This again necessitates specific types of conflict-management strategies, which in turn is a shared priority (Kreitner and Kinicki, 2001:43). When conflict arises, it has to be identified immediately and addressed accordingly in order to prevent it negatively influencing efficient and productive functioning within the municipality. The conflict generating factors should be terminated and conflict managed in such a way that all individuals or groups involved will be satisfied and the organization will not be affected negatively (Bergh, 2007:224).

Methods or procedures of conflict management in practice, as perceived by Alper (2001:633-637), Anstey (1999:51-52), Pons (2001:1-12) and Nell (2000:158), could include: negotiation, training, setting standard procedures, appointing functional specialists, mediation, following policy, arbitration, and reconciliation.

## CONCLUSION

This study was exploratory in nature with regard to establishing the sources generating of conflict and the conflict management styles used by employees in a municipality. Limitations to the study were the distribution of race, culture and language groups not being even. Due to the relative complexity of the questionnaire and the ability of all employees to complete it, the survey had to be restricted to job-levels that eliminated the lower ranks of the workforce. Studying the lower-job levels may reveal different perceptions as to causes of conflict and different conflict-handling styles being used by them in interpersonal conflict situations.

Because no studies could be found that was done to evaluate conflict dynamics and specifically conflict-handling styles in municipalities it is believed that this study contributed to the possibility of further research in various aspects of conflict management within public sector organisations. Applying studies in this regard to different cultures and races may also divulge valuable information for management and training purpose of the human resources in the public sector.

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