Conflict management and resolution: the case of Ethiopian Athletics Federation

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ABSTRACT: The purpose of this study was to examine conflict management and resolution in Ethiopian Athletics Federation. Cross sectional survey design which incorporates both quantitative and qualitative methods was the research design of the study. The target population of the study was 284 and of these a sample of 166 respondents was selected using probability proportional sampling technique. Regarding the data collection instruments, questionnaires, interviews and document analysis were employed. The data obtained through questionnaires were analyzed using statistical tools such as frequency, standard deviation, and average. The finding of the study indicated that there were different causes and sources of conflicts in the federation. Informal relations, rent seeking and misinterpretation of rules and regulations are the major causes of conflicts. The gaps were also identified in the conflict management style and the time it takes to resolve.

INTRODUCTION

Conflict is a natural phenomenon and inevitable in most organizations. It may arise in any time, situation, and place between individuals and groups in organizations. Conflict is present when two or more parties perceive that their interests are incompatible, express hostile attitudes or pursue their interest though actions that damage the other parties. Managers of the organizations are responsible to minimize such types of conflicts. The way in which managers handle conflict determines whether it is beneficial or disparaging to an organization or to employees (Deutsch, 1973).

Management and other actors have stipulated strategies that are necessary conditions to handle conflict positively than it creates damage. There are two aspects of conflict handling ways. They are conflict management and conflict resolution.

A group of organizational researchers like Watson and Haffman (1996); Wall and Calister (1995), Schimdt (1976) proclaimed that conflict is terrible damaging and destructive to organization and to employees as well. Conflict reduces the quality of group decision making, reduces creativity and innovation, mess up team success, and reduces trust among employees (Jehn, 1994; Amason, 1995).

According to Galtung (1996) conflict is defined as a phenomenon to resolve divergent dualisms, a way of achieving some kind of unity. Gove (1986) defines it as structural character, an act of striking together, fight clash, completion or mutual interference of opposing or in compatible forces, an emotional state of character sticks in decision, relentlessness uncertainty and tension resulting from incompatible inner needs on derives of compassable intensity or engagement in contest. Coser (1956) defines conflict as conflict is struggle over values and claims, scarce status, power and resources to gain objectives to neutralize injure or eliminate rivals.

As studies indicated the sources of conflict are mostly caused due to lack of effective communication and lack of trust (Rahim, 1986). The classification of conflict is of different relationship, task and process conflict and the following are some the types of conflict.

Organizational conflict

Organizational conflict refers to the condition of misunderstanding or disagreement that is

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caused by the perceived or actual opposition in the needs, interests and values among people who work together (Taher, 2015).

Types of organizational conflicts

Organizational conflicts are conflicts that occur at the intra-individual and inter conflict levels. The conflicts at intra- organizational comprise of all intra individual, inter individual, intra group and intergroup conflicts consist organizational conflicts because they all are parts of the same organization (Mikkelsen & Clegg, 2017).

Intrapersonal conflicts

Intrapersonal conflicts occur at work places, every employee experiences conflict within him- and her-self. Intrapersonal conflict, which occurs within an individual, often involves some form of goal conflict or cognitive conflict. Goal conflict exists for individuals when their behavior will result in outcomes that are mutually exclusive or have compatible elements - both positive and negative outcomes (Cannary & Messaman, 2000).

Interpersonal conflicts

Interpersonal conflicts are the other kind of organizational conflicts that the members of a given organization may not always mix well each other. It refers to any type of conflict involving two or more people as well as it occurs in interactions where there are real perceived in compatible goals, scarce resources or opposing viewpoints. Interpersonal conflict may be expressed verbally or nonverbally along a continuum ranging from a nearly imperceptible cold shoulder to a very obvious blowout (Cannary & Messaman, 2000).

Intragroup conflict

Intragroup conflict (or infighting) refers to conflict between two or more members of the same group or team. In recent years, intragroup conflict has received a large amount of attention in conflict and group dynamics (Johnson et al., 2006).

Intergroup conflict

Intergroup conflict occurs between collections of peoples such as departmental or levels of decision making in the same organization, and union and management. Competition for resources is common source of intergroup conflict and societies have developed numerous regulatory mechanisms like mediation or bargaining for dealing with intergroup conflict in less disruptive ways (Fisher, 1990).

Intra-Organizational conflict

Conflicts in organization are of two kinds. They are both intra-organizational and inter-organizational. The intra organizational consists of Horizontal conflicts, vertical conflict, and line and staff conflicts. The intra organizational conflicts occur within the organization itself.

Outcomes of conflict

Outcomes of conflict can be classified in to two groups they are functional and dysfunctional ones. One of the most common outcomes of conflict is that it upsets parties in the short run (Bergman & Volekema, 1989), conflict is when there is room form of fiction, disagreement or discord within group. Nonetheless, conflict can have both positive and negative outcomes.
The positive side, conflict can result in greater creativity or beet decisions. It includes consideration of a broader range of idea, resulting in a better, stronger idea, surfacing of assumptions that may be inaccurate, increased participation of creativity, clarification of individual view that build learning. Or it is constructive. When the result of conflict is positive, it is constructive.

The Dysfunctional outcomes of conflict another side of conflict result. It is about development of discontents, reduced group effectiveness, retarded communication, reduced group cohesiveness, infighting among overcomes group goals. It included increased stress and anxiety among individuals, which decreases productivity and satisfaction, feelings of being defeated and degraded, which lowers individuals' morals and may increase turnover, a climate of mistrust, which hinders the teamwork and cooperation necessary to get work done.

It uses differences as divisions dichotomous: wrong or right, bad or good, weak or strong. Besides, it is competitive were it is win or lose. It is powerful or powerless, focused on self-interest and scary.
Moreover, it is one way process trying to win preferred outcomes, narrow vision, resistant to

change, personality's issues, irrational and out of control with little or no personal responsibly for process, winner takes all.

Conflict management styles

There has been much research done on different types of conflict management styles, which are communication strategies that attempt to avoid, address, or resolve a conflict. Though conflict is a normal and natural part of any workplace, it can lead to absenteeism, lost productivity and mental health issues (Barbara, 2017). Within this framework, there are five management approaches: they are avoiding, accommodating, compromising, collaborating and competing.

*Avoidance***:** This refers to a situation where a group of alleging injustice or discrimination is literally ignored or denied recognition by those being accused and those who have the capacity for helping to redress the injustice done to the group. (Barbara, 2017, Almost 2006).

*Accommodation***:** This kind of conflict management requires that the parties involved accept the views of one another. Both or one is ready to give the other party/side what is needed. (Barbara, 2017; Almost 2006)).

*Compromising***:** This style aims to find an expedient, mutually acceptable solution that partially satisfies both parties in the conflict while maintaining some assertiveness and cooperativeness. (Rahim 1983; Almost 2006)).

*Collaborating***:** In conflict resolution and management, sometimes because of the differences in ideology and knowledge that usually cause a rift in business, parties integrate ideas to find a common ground of acceptance for everyone involved. Companies can always consult with employees to formulate policies and work collaboratively during the decision process on some specific issues in the organization (Rahim 1983; Almost 2006)).

*Competing***:** This style of conflict comes to be present when there is competition to win the conflict, potentially at the expense or loss of the other person. The competing styles include the use of power, which can be no coercive or coercive (Sillars, 1980).

Causes of Conflicts in organizations

Causes of Conflicts' in organization are a common occurrence, resulting from the differences in employees' personalities and values. They are poor communication, difference in personalities, and lack of resources to share equally, stress, sexual harassment. Conflicts could occur in work place or in organizations due to rationales like lack of clarity of responsibility, interpersonal relationship, scarce resources and interest sources (Thaer, 2015).

Expectations of the managerial staff

It is what management expects all employees to meet the targets that set by their superiors. The discrepancies in the understanding of the task at hand or inability on the part of the employee to achieve the set targets results in the conflicts that arise in the concerned work place.

Disruption in communication

Poor Communication is one of the main causes of conflict between employees in the workplace. This can result in a difference in communication styles or a failure to communicate. These conflicts may be in need for some information from another colleague who does not reply in a proper manner or does not provide with the needed information (Halevy et al, 2014).

Misunderstanding

Misinterpretations could cause conflict between members of a team in working together. IF not halt earlier could even lead to the creation of number of conflicts that may prove disturbing towards the overall growth of organization (Chen et al, 2012).

Conflicts of interest

This could be caused by three basic reasons. They are lack of training (persons who serve on committees and boards have lack of training in how to recognize and deal with conflict of interest situations), Powerful personalities (the power that long standing committee members in organizations accumulate) and lack of policy (there is usually an absence or lack of policy within organizations on conflict of interest (Leo, 2020).

In Ethiopia different institution based studies were conducted in relation to conflict management and resolution. Some of these

studies reported that there were work place conflicts at different levels of organizational structures. They claim that there were some occasional conflicts in between organization leaders or managers and employees. For instance, Berhanu Tuji (2014) stated that conflicting incidents were observed and managed in case of some secondary schools in Kolfe Keraniyo sub- city government schools of Addis Ababa. This study revealed that , conflict is versatile and the main causes were demographic and cultural difference among staff or employees.

To the best of researchers' knowledge, the studies conducted to understand the root causes of conflict in sports are dearth and scant. Studies conducted to examine conflict management by Abera Hailamariam (2010), Abraham Damtew (2019), Werash Debele (2014), Asmamaw Alemayehugn (2019), BamalackYideg (2013), focused on assessing conflict management in secondary schools and business organizations.

The focuses of the above studies were to assess approaches/styles used by school clubs and how business organizations manage conflicts rather than addressing the issue of conflict and the strategies in place to overcome it. Unlike the school and business organizations the nature of conflicts in sport organizations differ. As different media sources reveal frequent disputes and conflicts have been reported during and/or following the end of championships between federations and federation stakeholders. Among these federations the Ethiopian Athletics Federation is the one. The Ethiopian athletics Federation is the oldest, popular and well-established federation know with its international achievements. As anecdotal evidences revealed, it is a federation often mentioned as the place for frequent management related disputes than other federations. It was due to this reason that the federation was purposively selected for the study.

The purpose of this study was to identify the common types of conflicts between the federation (management) and stakeholders during federation run Athletics Championships. Moreover, assessing the causes of conflicts and the strategies employed to manage the conflicts by the federation (management) were the other objectives of the study.

The study tried to answer the following research questions:
1. What are the common types of conflicts between the federation and stakeholders during federation run Athletics Championships?
2. What are the major causes of conflict during Athletics Championships run under the federation's authority?
3. What are the strategies that the federation used to manage/solve conflicts?

METHODOLOGY

The research design employed in this study is Cross sectional survey design which incorporates both quantitative and qualitative methods. This research adopted a Descriptive research type because it enables to answer the basic questions specified in the problem statement. Descriptive researches are those which define the current situation instead of inferring and making judgments (Creswell, 2007). Due to the nature of the research which is to be studied at one time, it's preferred to use a Cross sectional Descriptive data collection method.

Sources of data

Both primary and secondary sources were used. The primary sources of the data were key informants from the federation such as members of the board (executive committee), employees, club leaders, coaches and referees. To select these informants and avoid personal bias, the researchers used criteria such as experiences, positions, and close relations with the federation. After designing the research instruments (questionnaire and interview) the sample size of participants were identified. Then, pilot study to assure relevance of the questionnaires was taken the first step in data collection. After the pretest those ambiguous and difficult questions to answer were corrected and removed.

After the pretest those ambiguous and difficult questions to answer were corrected and removed. Following this, the dates and times of contacts were scheduled with the respondents to distribute and collect questionnaires from the respondents. After the questionnaires were collected interview part was conducted.

In addition to the primary data sources all secondary data sources were reviewed/analysed using bylaws, competition rules, guidelines, ethical regulation, meeting minutes and yearly reports of the federation.

Primary and secondary data collection Methods

In this study the questionnaire and interview questions developed and used by Shimelis Zewdie (2016 and 2017) were adopted. Then, pilot study was made and takes place to assure relevance of the questionnaires and interviews.

Questionnaire

Standardized and modified questionnaires were prepared to the federation. The questionnaires were prepared and distributed to executive committee member (board member), federation employees, club leaders, coaches and referees.

In addition, the open-ended question attached in the questionnaire allows the participants to give extra and different views.

Interviews

Structured interview guide was used and a face to face interview was conducted with four interviewees, on average 61 minutes were spent for each person in order to obtain relevant information about conflict management and resolution experiences by having direct contact with respondents. The key informants of the interview part were mangers, board (executive) members, employees, referees, club coaches and leaders.

Sampling technique and sample size determination

During the study period there were 31 National Sport Federations and Associations in Ethiopia. Among which the Ethiopian Athletics Federation was selected through purposive sampling technique. The Ethiopian athletics Federation is the oldest, popular and well-established federation know with its international achievements. As anecdotal evidences revealed, it is a federation often mentioned as the place for frequent management related disputes than other federations. It was due to this reason that the federation was purposively selected for the study.

The federation had 11 members of executive committee, 49 employees, 44 league (higher division) club leaders, 100 coaches, and 80 referees and the total size of the population was 284. From these, 166 respondents were selected using Probability proportional sampling technique. The sample size was determined and calculated using the following formula adopted from Yamane, (1967).

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

The simplified formula to calculate the sample size used for this study was determined at 95% of confidence interval and the sample size is166 consisting of people working in and with the Federation.

To select these informants and avoid personal bias, the study used the following criteria: experiences, positions, close relations with the federation.

Interviewees were selected by using purposive sampling that had closed to the federation, experienced and experts in the area both from coaches and management.

Validity and reliability

The adapted and modified questionnaires were pilot-tested, and then the researchers have excluded some questions that cannot be answered and did not go along with the situation of Ethiopian Athletics Federation conflict management and resolution. The validity and reliability of the original questionnaires and scales were tested.

Data analysis
Quantitative Data analysis

To analyze quantitative data descriptive statistics was coding, categorizing, giving meaning, and identifying the emerging results.

Descriptive statistics (frequency and percentages) analysis was used in this study. The conflict management data analysis was carried out by entering data in to computer, using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 25. A total of 166 questionnaires were distributed to the respondents and 152 were returned and 12 of the questionnaire responses were dropped due to incompleteness.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic characteristics

The male respondents make majority of the target population with a percentage of 87.1%, while female respondents were representing 12.9%. With regard to the age distribution of the respondents, 24(17.1%) were between 36-40 years old, and 99(70.7%) were 41 years old and above.

Table 1: Year of Experience.

Year of Experience (years)	F	%
Under 5	2	1.4
6 – 10	53	37.9
11 – 15	57	40.7
16 – 20	24	17.2
Over 21	4	2.8
Total	140	100

In terms of year of experience the data in Table 1 indicates that 53(37.9%) have an experience of 6-10 years, 57(40.7%) have an experience of 11-15 years and 24 (17.1%) have an experience of 16-20years. This implies the majority of the respondents have an experience of 11-15 years which is higher experienced.

Table 2: Responsibilities of the respondents.

Responsibilities	F	%
President	-	-
Vice president	-	-
Members of the Executive Committee	1	0.7
Secretary General/Director	1	0.7
Director	1	0.7
Employees	25	17.9
Commissioner	0	0
Referee	22	15.7
Coach	51	36.4
Club/Team Leader	39	27.9
Total	140	100

In this study, out of the 140 respondents (Table 2), 51(36.4%) were coaches, 25(17.9%) were employees of the federation and 22(15.7%) were referees.

The respondents' educational qualifications ranges from certificate to PhD. Higher number of the respondent have bachelor's degree which accounted 51(36.4%); 47(33.6%) of the respondents have Diploma, 20(14.3%) have certificate, the rest 20(14.3%) and 2(1.4%) of the

respondents were graduated in master's degree and PhD respectively.

Descriptive Statistics from the questionnaire

In this part, various statistical data analysis tools such as means, standard deviations, frequency and percentages were used to analyze the collected data. The summary of descriptive statistics of all variables that were evaluated based on a 5-point Likert scale ("1" being "strongly disagreed" to "5" being "strongly agreed"). According to Zaidaton & Bagheri (2009) the overall mean (M) score between 4.21-5.00 is considered as the respondents strongly agreed (SA), if the respondents score between 3.41-4.2 means they agreed (A), the score between 2.61-3.40 is considered as the respondents are neutral (N), the respondents score between 1.81-2.60 shows that they disagreed (DA) and if the respondents score between 1-1.80 shows that they strongly disagreed (SDA). Thus, detail of the analysis is presented as follows:

The data in Chart 1 illustrates the common causes of conflicts in the federation. The responses in the chart show that poor communications, network of beneficiaries, conflict of interest, informal relations, relationship conflict and superior-subordinate relationships are the main causes of conflict.

The data in Chart 1 reveals that relationship conflicts that emanates from access to benefit are among common causes of conflicts in the federation. Moreover, how works get done in the federation is another common cause of conflicts in the federation. Rent seeking or clientelism and patron relation was common causes of conflicts in the Federation. The respondents also reported competition for position was another cause of conflicts in the federation. To some extent the findings in the current study regarding the major causes of conflict is concerned support the previous studies by Thaer (2015). A study by Thaer reported conflict due to interpersonal relationship was the one.

According to the interview responses obtained from the federation the common causes for conflict in Ethiopian Athletics Federation

management and staff, referees, clubs and coaches was decisions that come from the federation (Informant-01, May, 2021 Addis Ababa). According to the second informant (May,2021 Addis Ababa) there were problems mentioned in the federation due to client-relations, conflict of interest while there is better communication in the organization.

Chart 1: Common causes of conflict
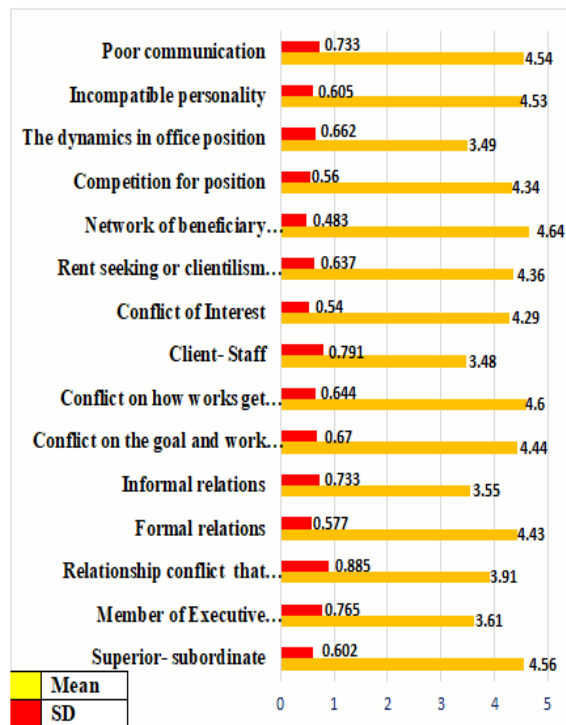
Response results from the interviews and document review complement one another and also similar to the results obtained from the closed-ended questions in the questionnaires.

The common causes of the conflicts in Ethiopian Athletics Federation between the federation (management) and staff, referees, clubs and coaches are numerous

To summarize this part of the analysis, the responses indicated that the relation between the staff and management of the federation are

largely open to cause of conflict in between the staffs and referees, coaches and other clients. In connection with this the conflicts occur could bring positive or negative results as Galtung (2008) asserts.

Table 3: Responses on types of conflicts, conflict resolution practices, frequency of conflict, and attitude towards conflict.

Type of conflict	F	%
Intragroup conflict	5	3.6
Intergroup conflict	65	46.6
Interpersonal conflict	70	50
Total	**140**	**100**
Conflict resolution practice	**F**	**%**
Arbitration	42	30
Conciliation	37	26.4
Mediation	4	2.9
Negotiation	57	40.7
Total	**140**	**100**
Frequency of conflict	**F**	**%**
Four and more times	126	90
Three times	6	4.2
Two times	4	2.9
Only one time	4	2.9
Total	**140**	**100**
Attitude towards conflict	**F**	**%**
Neutral	10	7.14
Both negative and positive	93	66.4
Positive	33	23.6
Negative	4	2.9
Total	**140**	**100**

According to the data in Table 3, 93 (66.4%) of the respondents have both positive and negative views for conflict. Interview made with staffs indicated they use conflicts occur in the federation to build large working group and solve it easily. As far as the frequency of conflict is concerned, 126 (90%) of the respondents face conflicts more times. Therefore, it can be inferred

that there were many conflicts in the federation. The interview respondents told that they may have challenges due to different hampering issues like poor communication, late reporting, biases and conflict of interests.

The study indicated that 70(50%) of the respondents believed the repetitive conflict in the federation were interpersonal conflict, 65(46.4%) were intergroup conflict. Thus, the major conflict in the federation was Interpersonal conflicts. However, differences in opinions must be discussed openly at an early stage to figure out the problem or even the solution to the confusion. Seventy five (40.7%) of the respondents believed negotiation was the most frequently employed, 37(26.4%) replied conciliation was used, and the remaining 42(30%) of the respondents agreed arbitration was the practices used to resolve conflict in the federation. Thus, among various conflict resolution methods the federation employed negotiation approach of conflict resolution method. Participant of the interview (informant 03) told they have developed to solve conflicts through communication and negotiation.


Chart 2: Conflict resolution practices

Chart 2 deals about the continuation of conflict resolution practices in the federation. The kind of conflict of interest that have been observed or found in the federation 75(53.6%) of the respondents were sure that their causes of conflict of interest is related to receiving or soliciting money, 40(28.6%) were thought the cause were related with receiving bribery, 15(10.7%) think it is due to receiving other gifts. Therefore, it can be inferred that the major cause of conflict of interest in the federation were with receiving or soliciting money and followed by receiving bribery. To the most an interview informant 03 stated that the federation has to solve the challenges which were heard from many of the staffs especially coaches.

The study showed that 74(52.9%) of the respondents believed the kinds of conflict business interest were perceived in the federation were Revealing to others confidential Price sensitive information, 27(19.3%) think employing relatives, 12(8.6%) think it were giving contracts to hotels illegally, the other 27(19.3%) thought it were accessing sponsorship for giving contracts in return for camping. Thus, the major kinds of conflict business interest perceived in the federation were revealing confidential Price sensitive information to others.

In examining the kind of conflict between the management of the federation and board it shows that favors are given to relatives and close friends followed by self–dealing or acts by board members in their own interest rather than the interest of the federation. The respondents responded that conflict of interest occur in the federation much in receiving or soliciting money 75(53.6%) in which many said it with no evidence.

The data obtained from open–ended questionnaires indicated that most of conflicts were solved by the intervention of the federation's management and to the extent,
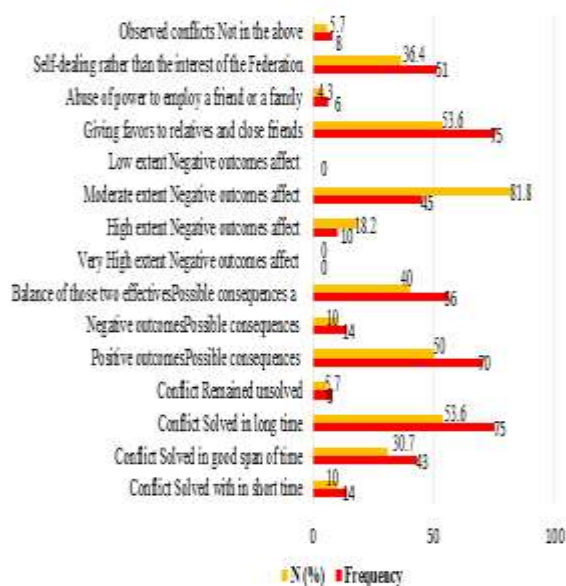
management gave focuses on it. As the researcher observed in the federation, recently with the help of reform process the federation has started to apply different ways of dispute resolution methods.

Chart 3: Conflict management strategies
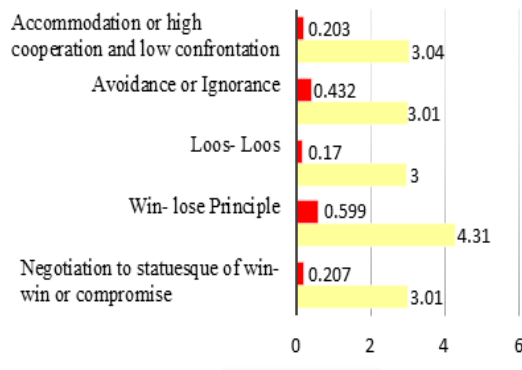
Source: Sample survey, 2021

The data obtainded from secondary sources indicated that the researcher tried to look at Conflict Management and Resolution Strategy Document in Ethiopian Athletics Federation.

As the researcher point of view Article 28 of the federation's bylaws does not provide a detailed description of the conflict resolution process, other than a summary of the resolution of the conflict. The study has found that this paves the way for misinterpretation and the wrong way to go.

The researcher have also looked at the federation's code of conduct. In the same page Article 29 under the Prohibited ActVerse 3 says, "Any form of misconduct is prohibited," and the article does not explain these practices.

The researchers had seen the code of conduct document of the federation, which alsodoes not state how to manage and resolve conflicts arising in the federation. The researcher was also able to see the code of conduct document of the federation's; this document does not provide a clear process for managing conflicts of interest between executives, employees and stakeholders.

The researchers have seen referred to of number of meeting minutes of deliberations in the federation that when any kind of conflict is encountered, it is decided by the various sub-committees at different all levels, and when appeal was there it isdirectly resolved by the executive committee. Thus, in the questionnaires, interviews and document investigations, the researchers have confirmed that the triangulation showed the federation does not have a clear conflict resolution strategy document and it needs a separate conflict and conflict of interest resolution strategy and policy document. In line of this the conflicts occur usually an absence or lack of policy within organizations on conflict of interest (Leo, 2020).

CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions have been drawn based on the basic questions of the study. Based on the major findings of the study intergroup and interpersonal conflicts were the major types of conflicts in the federation. With regard to the causes of conflicts, relationships conflicts that come from access to the benefits, informal relations, client–staff and rent seeking are the major causes of conflicts in the federation. With regard to potential sources of conflicts in the federation, misinterpretation of rules and regulations, competition for resources are some of the factors identified. This study revealed that negotiation and arbitration on a win - lose than a win – win approach were the common conflict resolution strategies used by the federations when conflicts were raised between the federation (management) and stakeholders.

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