Unionism and Conflict Resolution in a Private School Setting

Rosalio A. Aragon, Jr.*
University of the Philippines

Abstract

This paper compares the faculty and non-academic personnel belonging to two different unions in terms of management or resolution of conflict in a private school in downtown Manila, Philippines, and in the process, explores the role of the union as a collective interest group in conflict resolution. The study found that there is a significant relationship between the union members' position in school (whether academic or non-academic) and their attitudes towards unionism and conflict resolution in school. Respondents who are part of the non-academic union are more involved with the union in solving their conflicts than their academic counterparts. The result of the study does not, however, mean that faculty unions are no longer relevant as there are studies pointing to the positive relationship between unionization and faculty governance and participation in university decision making (Cameron, 1982).

Keywords: industrial relations, educational administration, conflict resolution, school unionism

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* Atty. Aragon is Assistant Professor at the School of Labor and Industrial Relations, University of the Philippines.

Introduction

Conflict is a social phenomenon that occurs across species, time periods and cultures (De Dreu & Gelfand, 2008). Conflict is a process that begins when an individual or group perceives differences and opposition between self and another individual or group about interests and resources, beliefs, values, or practices that matter to them (De Dreu & Gelfand, 2008). It occurs when two or more people disagree over issues of organizational substance and/or experience some emotional antagonism with one another (Wood, 2013).

The university is not spared from conflict among its many constituents since it is an inherent component of academic life. Leaders spend more than 40 percent of their time managing conflict (Stanley & Algert, 2007). The sources of conflict within the university, just like any other workplace, can be due to (a) scarce resources, (b) a search for maintaining and promoting a positive view of the self, and (c) a desire to hold consensually shared and socially validated opinions and beliefs, and tasks that need to done (De Dreu & Gelfand, 2008).

The university's personnel are among its important stakeholders. The delivery of educational services for students and the public is determined by the performance of its school personnel. Since the university is the workplace of its personnel, an industrial relation system comprising of professors and non-academic personnel in a school setting is formed. They are considered as indispensable actors in the delivery of quality educational services in order to benefit the school's primary stakeholders, the students. An industrial relations system has been described in terms of actors who interact in a specified context, and who in the process formulate a complex set of rules at the workplace and work community (Dunlop, 1958). The idea and ideology of the industrial relations system is a body of common ideas that defines the role and place of each actor and the ideas that each actor holds towards the place and function of the others in the system (Dunlop, 1958).

What is more interesting is that academic and non-academic personnel form their own groups to advance their interests by forming their own unions. With the existence of unions in a school setting, the industrial relations system becomes all the more challenging.

Recent research focused mainly on the administration side of conflict management in schools. Various studies explored how school managers resolved conflicts. Stanley and Algert (2007) explored

the conflict management styles of 20 department heads across a variety of disciplines and with varying levels of experience at a research-extensive public university. Based on an analysis of conflict management styles, Stanley and Algert's study offered implications for the professional development of department heads. Another study was conducted in Punjab, India, to investigate the relationship of head teachers' conflict management styles with secondary school teachers' professional commitment. The study revealed that there is a relationship between conflict management styles with the teachers' professional commitment (Farooq, 2016).

Another study refers to conflict management and its relation to school performance in Greek schools (Saiti, 2015). There is also literature on conflict management in schools involving students. D'Oosterlinck and Broekaert (2003) explored the possibility of integrating school-based and therapeutic conflict management models, and compared two management models: a school-based conflict management program and a therapeutic conflict management program. Another study examined the effects of a state-wide conflict management initiative on students in secondary schools, and discussed the approaches used by schools to instruct students in conflict management (Tschannen-Moran, 2001).

Most research on conflict resolution in schools focused on the conflict management systems employed by the school administration. There is, however, a dearth of research on the role of employees and unions in resolving conflicts especially in Philippine schools.

It cannot be denied that unions can have a big impact on a school's operations. In a case that reached the Philippine Supreme Court, a university snubbed the rank-and-file union when the latter commenced negotiations for collective bargaining on the terms and conditions of work in the school. This arrogant refusal of the university to negotiate with the union culminated in the closure of the school (Divine Word University of Tacloban vs. Secretary of Labor and Employment et al, G.R. No. 91915 September 11, 1992). The Divine Word University case only affirms the study of Wickens (2008) that the heart of faculty unionization includes job security and tenure, promotion procedures and general due process.

Wickens (2008) explored the impact of the consequences of university unionization and labor strikes on a North American institution's administration, faculty and students. She likewise examined the neglected issue of work relationships in a unionized

academic environment. Cameron (1982) supported the contention that unionization improves faculty governance. She concluded that participation in university governance increases in unionized institutions; however, this participation on union university decision-making depends on the kind of faculty and other interest groups on campus. Kazlow and Giacquinta (1977) found that rank and tenure of professors are positively related to union support. Ponak and Thompson (1984) found that the faculty expect unionization to provide protection against unfair treatment and arbitrary administrative action of schools.

The effectiveness of university unions are affected by the leadership style of the union leaders; information and education campaigns conducted for the workers in the university; the manner by which the union fund is utilized; efforts of the union to attract more members; the manner by which the university union conducts its activities; the manner of members' participation in union activities; CBA provisions on security of tenure and the effort of the union to protect the rights of dismissed employees; the extent of the union's participation in university governance; the efforts of the union to train and develop future leaders; and number of members (Akilit, 1995). Indeed, the union developed as a means by which individuals could unite and gain the collective power to accomplish goals that could not otherwise be accomplished alone. Members believe that in union there is strength (Carrell & Heavrin, 2010).

In the Philippines, the Supreme Court ruled that faculty and non-academic personnel of universities belong to different unions because their interests are not substantially similar (University of the Philippines vs. Ferrer – Calleja, G.R. No. 96189 July 14, 1992). As a group, the faculty are distinct from non-academic employees because their work in the school is determined in terms of credit units taught and research conducted. On the other hand, non-academic personnel work on an eight-hour basis in compliance with the Labor Code of the Philippines.

This paper compares the faculty and non-academic personnel belonging to two different unions in terms of management or resolution of conflict in a private school in downtown Manila, Philippines, and in the process, explores the role of the union as a collective interest group in conflict resolution.

Methodology

The researcher studied twenty-nine (29) respondents, 15 faculty and 14 non-academic personnel, of a private university (Far Eastern University) in downtown Manila. Survey forms were distributed to answer several questions on their views on unionism and conflict resolution in the school. Chi-square was used to determine of there is a significant relationship between the kinds of employment status (whether academic or non-academic) and the employee's attitudes towards unionism and conflict resolution. The president of the non-academic union was also interviewed to validate the results of the survey. Unfortunately, the president of the faculty union could not be contacted for interview.

Findings

The survey data revealed the following demographic profile of the respondents:

Table 1. Distribution of Respondents by Background Characteristics and Position in School

	Faculty		Non-Academic		All	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Sex						
Male	8	57.1	9	60	17	58.6
Female	6	42.9	6	40	12	41.4
Civil Status						
Married	5	35.7	10	66.7	15	51.7
Single	8	57.2	4	26.7	12	41.4
Window	1	7.1	-	-	1	3.4
Others	-	-	1	6.6	1	3.4
Educational Attainment						
College	1	7.1	10	66.7	11	37.9
Masters	11	78.7	3	20.0	14	48.3
Doctorate	1	7.1	0	0.0	1	3.4
No Answer	1	7.1	2	13.3	3	10.3
Total	14	100.0	5	100.0	29	100.0

The position of the respondents and their age are described in the following table:

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of the Age of Respondents
by Position in School

Statistic	Faculty	Non-Academic	All
Mean	41.7	42.6	42.2
Median	43.0	44.0	43.0
Std. Deviation	9.5	8.5	8.8
Minimum (Youngest)	27	30	27
Maximum (Oldest)	56	57	57

Table 3 shows the distribution of respondents by union membership and position in school. The table shows a significant relationship between the kind of employee (faculty or non-academic) in relation to his/her union membership and union status (whether active or not). There are more non-academic employees who are members of a union than their faculty counterparts. Similarly, there are more non-academic employees who consider themselves active union members than the faculty.

Table 3. Distribution of Respondents by
Union Membership and Position in School

	Faculty	Non-Academic	All	Chi-square Value
Union Membership				16.102*
Yes	64.3	93.3	79.3	
No	35.7	6.7	20.7	
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	
No. of cases	14	15	29	
Active Membership				12.627*
Yes	33.3	100.0	73.9	
No	66.7	0.0	26.1	
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	
No. of cases	9	14	23	

*Significant at 0.05 alpha level

On the other hand, Table 4 revealed that there is no significant relationship between the classification of employee and their identification of conflicts or problems that they have encountered in the school. Note, however, that with respect to non-academic personnel, personal conflicts/problems was ranked first; conflict with school policies ranked second; and conflict with school authorities ranked third. Conflict with another employee was the lowest for non-academic personnel. As to faculty, conflict with another employee and school authorities tied at number 1, while personal conflicts and conflict with school policies tied at rank 2. There was no reported conflict with their unions in both cases.

Table 4. Distribution of Respondents by Conflicts/Problems
Encountered at the School and Position in School

	Faculty	Non-Academic	All	Chi-square Value
Personal conflicts/problems	7.1	33.3	20.7	4.365
Conflict/problem with another employee/s	14.3	6.7	10.3	1.340
Conflict/problem with school policies	7.1	26.7	17.2	3.161
Conflict /problem with school authorities	14.3	20.0	17.2	0.166
Conflict / problem with union	0.0	0.0	0.0	-
Other Conflicts / Problems	7.1	0.0	3.4	1.110
No. of cases	14	15	29	

Table 5 shows that there is a significant relationship between the type of employee and whether or not they approached their union to seek help with their conflicts or problems. As the table shows, no faculty ever approached their union when they had conflicts. On the other hand, majority of the non-academic personnel approached their union for help. A possible explanation as to why no faculty ever approached their union in case of conflicts was that the faculty believed that conflicts in the school can only be resolved by school authorities using hierarchical referral. Hierarchical referral makes use of the chain of command for conflict resolution (Wood, 2013). In a school setting, a faculty may explore referring the conflict to the coordinator, then to the department head, and finally to the higher school officials.

Table 5. Distribution of Respondents by Whether or Not They
Approached the Union for Help with the Problems/Conflicts
and Position in School

	Faculty	Non-Academic	All
Yes	0.0	66.7	34.5
No	64.3	13.3	37.9
No answer	35.7	20.0	27.6
No. of cases	14	15	29

Chi-square value 14.938**
**Significant at 0.01 alpha level

Are respondents satisfied with the way the union handled their conflict? Table 6 shows that there is a significant relationship between the type of employee and their degrees of satisfaction with the way their conflict was handled. The non-academic personnel was found to be very satisfied and satisfied with the way their conflicts or problems were resolved by the union. On the other hand, the faculty registered little to neutral satisfaction on the way their union handled their problems/conflicts.

Table 6. Distribution of Respondents by Their Level of Satisfaction
with the Way the Union Handled Their Problem or Conflict
and Position in School

	Faculty	**Non-Academic**	**All**
Very satisfied	0.0	60.0	31.0
Satisfied	21.4	33.3	27.6
Neutral	35.7	0.0	17.2
No answer	42.9	6.7	24.1
No. of cases	14	15	29

Chi-square value 18.058**
**Significant at 0.01 alpha level

Another question posed by researcher is about the perception of the respondents on the helpfulness of the respective unions in resolving school conflicts. Table 7 shows that the non-academic personnel think that their union was very helpful in facilitating the resolution of their conflicts, while the faculty registered low approval with their union in helping with their conflicts/problems.

Table 7. Distribution of Respondents by Their Perception if the Union is Helpful in Facilitating the Resolution of Conflicts in their School and Position in School

	Faculty	Non-Academic	All
Very helpful	7.1	80.0	44.8
Helpful	28.6	20.0	24.1
Neutral	28.6	0.0	13.8
Not very helpful	7.1	0.0	3.3
Very helpful	7.1	80.0	44.8
No answer	28.6	0.0	13.8
No. of cases	14	15	29

Chi-square value 18.438**
**Significant at 0.01 alpha level

In Table 8, it is shown that majority of the faculty approached only the school authorities concerning their conflicts/problems, while majority of the non-academic personnel approached only their union. A relatively equal number of faculty and non-academic personnel approached both their unions and the school authorities.

Table 8. Distribution of Respondents by Whether or Not They Approached the School Authorities to Resolve Their Conflicts or Problems and Position in School

	Faculty	Non-Academic	All
No, I approached the union only	0.0	53.3	27.6
Yes, I approached both the school authorities and the union	21.4	26.7	24.1
Yes, I approached the school authorities only	35.7	0.0	17.2
No answer	42.9	20.0	31.0
No. of cases	14	15	29

Chi-square value 14.125**

**Significant at 0.01 alpha level

Conclusion

The data leads the researcher to conclude that there is a significant relationship between the positions in school (whether

academic or non-academic) and their attitudes towards unionism and conflict resolution in school. Respondents who are part of the non-academic union are more involved with the union in resolving their conflicts. This conclusion—that the rank-and-file union has been very active in helping its members—is validated by the interview with the rank-and-file union president. She revealed in the interview that the union is well-organized and has a built-in mechanism to resolve conflicts. She said that the union has shop stewards as first level union officers who aim to help the members.

In the interview, the rank-and-file union president also noted that the union has been very creative in generating income for the members. The union runs an internet shop, making use of the office provided by the school. The proceeds of the small business go to the union. The union has also embarked on a program to redeem the ATM cards of members who loaned these to creditors, so that the union members will have a decent take-home pay.

Recommendation

The union has not at all lost its relevance in the school setting. Be it an academic or a non-academic union, it can be an effective interest group in helping resolve conflicts and increase the benefits of employees. This researcher is not at all daunted by the study's results that faculty unions are less involved in the resolution of conflicts than their non-academic counterpart. There are studies pointing to the positive relationship between unionization and faculty governance and participation in university decision-making (Cameron, 1982). Misconceptions about unionism in schools and unionism in general should be corrected. More awareness campaigns on unionism are encouraged. Best practices of unionism in schools are encouraged in order to serve a model for other employees.

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