

Stakeholders' Preference towards the Use of Conflict Management Styles in Dual Concern Theory in Post Contract Stage

Chathuri Gunarathna
University of Moratuwa, Sri Lanka
email: lakshika.gunarathna@yahoo.com

Dr. Nirodha Fernando
University of Moratuwa, Sri Lanka
email: nirodhafernando@uom.lk

Abstract

Conflicts often act as obstacles to the project success by wasting time, money and energy of the construction stakeholders; resulting numerous harmful effects to the project. Having conflicts is a natural phenomenon which is inevitable due to the unbreakable bond between the nature of the construction industry and the sources of conflicts. It is identified that the tendency of having conflicts is enormously high, especially in post contract stage of any construction project. Even though the conflict management found to be existing in the construction sector, still the construction stakeholders often have to face many unmanaged conflicts which subsequently convert into disputes, demanding expensive and time consuming dispute resolution. Therefore, the requirement of an effective conflict management should receive a prior importance. It was verified that the effective conflict management can be derived from the opinions of construction stakeholders since they are the personnel who create and experience the conflict situations. Therefore, the aim of this study was to develop a stakeholder preferred framework for effective usage of dual concern theory for conflict management in post contract stage. Case study was selected as the most suitable research approach due to the qualitative nature of the study. Twelve semi structured interviews were conducted; selecting three stakeholders representing each case. The collected data was analyzed using content analysis and conclusions were drawn and recommendations were put forward. The findings of this study proved that effective conflict management is a broad spectrum which should be fully followed from the commencement of the project till the end. Moreover, it was recognized that the main reason for increment of having conflicts is that the construction stakeholders ignore to follow the entire conflict management spectrum. Furthermore, the findings confirmed that inclusion of dual concern theory which manages conflict situations by providing consideration for both self and others at the same time yet in different degrees in the conflict management spectrum will provide more effective results. Hence, this study proposed a framework for effective conflict management with the usage of dual concern theory for post contract stage.

Keywords: Conflict, Construction Industry, Conflict Management, Dual Concern Theory, Post Contract Stage

1. Background

Construction industry is one of the largest industries in the world yet distinct from the other industries due to its inherent quality of complexity (Yousefi, Hipel, & Hegazy, 2010). The complexity of construction is successfully dealt by dividing the entire project into several sub projects, which are then let or sublet to several contractors and subcontractors (Chua & Song, 2003). It was recently evidenced that the tendency of having conflicts is extremely high due to the complexity in relations, lengthy process of construction and multidisciplinary involvement in the construction project (Jaffar, Tharim, & Shuib, 2011). Lee (2008) defined conflict as a situation where the interests and ideas of two or more individuals operating in one unit appear to be irreconcilable. Similarly, Fisher (2000) defined conflict as “an incompatibility of goals or values between two or more parties in a relationship, combined with attempts to control each other and antagonistic feelings towards each other” (p.1). Tjosvold (2006) argued that conflicts are not always destructive and they can be constructive as well if they are well managed. Further to author, neither conflicts just happen nor escalate by themselves. It is the choices which made by the people who involve in the conflict escalate conflict or lead to more constructive outcomes.

The success of a construction project is closely related to the effectiveness of the stakeholders who involve in post contract stage where the actual work of the project is accomplished (Alzahrani & Emsley, 2012). According to Kumaraswamy (1998), conflicts are arising due to the multidisciplinary involvement with different cultures, interests and diverse objectives which can be highly seen in post contract stage. The conflicts that can be seen in the pre contract period probably can be seen in the post contract stage since the design is continuously changing due to reasons such as impracticability, design errors and changes in client’s requirements (Ng & Skitmore, 2000). Therefore, it is very important to have a clear idea about the effective management of those conflicts in post contract stage as they directly provide harmful effects to the project success (Awakul & Ogunlana, 2002). Hence, an effective conflict management technique should be introduced to any construction project (Huan & Yazdanifard, 2012).

Dual concern theory is one of the most effective conflict management techniques use around the world (Lee, 2008). It argues that conflict management can be effectively done by providing a simultaneous consideration for both self and the other party who involved in the conflict, however, in different degrees (Chou & Yeh, 2007). According to Popovic and Hocenski (2009), the principle of conflict management is not making effort to eliminate conflicts yet investigating how to manage them and decrease the probability of non-productive escalation.

Thalagodapitiya (2010) and Howe (2013) emphasized that the amount of having unmanaged conflicts is significantly increasing annually and subsequently generate more and more disputes, demanding dispute resolution. According to Howe (2013), the annual cost and time consumption for dispute resolution has increased with an alarming rate. Hence, there is a strong requirement of effective conflict management during post contract stage of any construction project.

2. Literature review

2.1 Conflict management

Generally, management can be defined as “the process of dealing with or controlling things or people” (Oxford Dictionary, 2013). Therefore, conflict management can be defined as the process of dealing with or controlling conflicts. According to Verma (1998), proper conflict management includes three major steps. First step is preparing for the conflict by expecting the conflict and planning to face the conflict. Second step is facing the conflict by understanding its real nature and the third step is managing the conflict according to the plan with necessary changes. Therefore, it is very important to recognize and understand the conflict before starts the management. However, conflict management only focuses on eliminating the harm caused by the conflict so that the project can be successfully completed within allocated time and cost (Popovic & Hocenski, 2009). It never meant to eliminate the conflict as it is practically impossible (Acharya, Lee, & Im, 2006).

2.2 Conflict management in the post contract stage

In post contract stage, many professionals and parties are involved in the construction that have their own values, beliefs, interests, education and needs. Therefore, the tendency of having conflicts is more when compared to pre contract period. According to Kumaraswamy (1998), conflicts are arising because of the involvement of more stakeholders with different cultures, disciplines and diverse objectives which can be highly seen in post contract stage. Furthermore, Appelbaum, Shapiro and Elbaz (1998) mentioned that due to the globalization of the industry and advancement of technology, diverse task groups with different racial and ethnic backgrounds will need to work together. Further to author, conflicts are easily generated in such kind of environment which saturated with diversity such as the post contract stage of any construction project. Therefore, it can be said that construction industry fulfils all requirements that should be needed for creating conflict situations easily.

The ultimate result of unmanaged conflicts will be disputes which require expensive dispute resolution with immense wastage of time, money and energy. Yiu and Cheung (2005) explained that if the level of conflicts escalates continuously, it may become psychological struggles between the contracting parties and manifests as disputes and the unfortunate outcomes will be loss of productivity and increase in cost of construction. Similarly, Thalgodapitiya (2010) stated that dispute resolution with lawyers, judges/arbitrators, and jury members will bring the project cost far away from the estimated project cost, along with excessive wastage of time and lot of aggravation. It can be seen that a third party has to be involved in the process of dispute resolution and he has to be paid. In addition, considerable time have to be spent for the dispute resolution procedure so that it will consume the time allocated for construction. By the end of the dispute resolution, all related parties will be frustrated and tired. This will decrease their efficiency and willingness to work.

2.3 Dual concern theory

The dual concern theory, proposed by Pruitt and Rubin (1986), is the most often cited theory in conflict management literature (Chou & Yeh, 2007). However, according to Desivilya, Somech, and Lidgoster (2010), the conceptual foundation of dual concern theory was laid by Blake and Mouton (1964). The dual concern theory argues that conflict management can be effectively done by considering the behaviour; as a meaning of high or low concern for self, combined with high or low concern for others (Chou & Yeh, 2007). The effective usage of conflict management styles in dual concern theory means that the degree to which dual concern theory is successfully used to control and decrease conflicts in such a way that they never become a disturbance to the project success. According to Chou and Yeh, (2007), there are five conflict management styles in dual concern theory namely; problem solving style, obliging style, forcing style, avoiding style and compromising style. They are further described in table 1.

Table 1: Conflict Management Styles in Dual Concern Theory

<i>Style</i>	<i>Description</i>
<i>Problem-solving style</i>	<i>High concern for self and others. A win-win approach. This style treats the conflict as a problem that should be solved by examining alternatives.</i>
<i>Obliging style</i>	<i>High concern for others and low concern for self. A lose-win approach. This style is used when one party is more factually strong and has more experience, power and good reputation than the other party.</i>
<i>Forcing style</i>	<i>High concern for self and low concern for others. A win-lose approach. This style pushes one party's viewpoint towards the other party that the latter party have no other option to be selected.</i>
<i>Avoiding style</i>	<i>Low concern for self and others. This can be either win-win approach or lose-lose approach. This style can be used when the conflict is irrelevant to the project.</i>
<i>Compromising style</i>	<i>Moderate concern for both self and others. A partially win-win approach. This style searches solutions and bargains for solutions that bring some degree of satisfaction to all parties.</i>

Source: Cheung and Chuah (1999); Chou and Yeh, (2007); Friedman, Tidd, Currall, and Tsai, (2000); Fisher (2000); Verma (1998)

2.4 Research problem

It can be seen that conflicts in post contract stage in construction projects have a tendency to increase due to number of reasons. Even though the industry uses conflict management styles such as dual concern theory, still there is no sign of decreasing conflicts which subsequently convert into disputes. According to the aforementioned literature findings, dual concern theory is the most effective and most commonly used management style all over the world yet failed to completely manage conflict

situations in construction projects. Therefore, conflicts and disputes are increasing day by day. The failure to manage the conflicts effectively reveals the fact that the prevailing conflict management system has many weaknesses. It can be predicted that these weaknesses are either in the conflict management styles or in the stakeholders who use them. Thus, the requirement of finding out the weaknesses and put forward the remedies to overcome the weaknesses should receive a prior consideration. Furthermore, the damage caused by the unmanaged conflicts is more critical in the post contract stage of any construction project. Since conflict management is very subjective, stakeholders' preference for a particular conflict management system is very important. Therefore, the research problem of this study is "how to build a stakeholder preferred framework for effective usage of dual concern theory for conflict management in post contract stage?".

3. Research methodology

Since the study obtains qualitative characteristics, data collection was done via case study approach. The population of the study was the professionals involved in construction projects which are in post contract stage and having conflict management. A sample was taken from the aforementioned population. Since this study required the opinion of construction professionals in diverse disciplines and groups, stratified random sampling was selected. Accordingly, the population was divided into mutually exclusive sets and drew simple random samples from each set. In order to saturate data, four cases were selected. Semi structured face to face interviews were selected for the study. The interviews were carried out with three participants from each construction project; representing the client, consultant and contractor. Content analysis was used to analyze data and to understand the relationships between findings. NVIVO (version 10) was used to conduct the content analysis.

4. Data analysis and research findings

4.1 Profile of the cases

Four building projects in Sri Lankan construction industry were selected as the cases and all of them were adopting the measure and pay procurement arrangement. Case 1 and 2 were selected from private projects and case 3 and 4 were selected from the government projects. Case 1, 2 and 3 were recently completed and case 4 is nearly completed. Case study 1 is 8 storied luxury multi purposive building which was completed within 30 months, spending Rs. 0.33 Billion. Case study 2 is 14 storied super luxury hospital building which was completed within 26 months, spending Rs. 1.85 Billion. Case study 3 is 14 storied semi luxury office complex building which was completed within 30 months, spending Rs. 3.00 Billion. Case study 4 is 5 storied administrative building which is expected to be completed within 18 months, spending Rs. 0.11 Billion.

4.2 Analysis of collected data

According to the research findings, conflict management can be defined as the process of maintaining the conflict situations properly by converting it to a source of motivation, mode of taking attention

and way of upholding the concentration over the project without letting the destructive stage of conflicts to be raised. In advance, it includes a large spectrum of avoiding the circumstances of having conflicts, preparation for potential conflicts by considering past experiences, early identification of conflicts, utilize the constructive part of the conflicts, conflict management by using management techniques, dispute avoidance and maintaining a record for future use.

The findings revealed that four conflict management styles in dual concern theory are currently practicing in the Sri Lankan construction industry. From the interviews conducted with 12 respondents, it was found that 44% of conflicts are managed through negotiating while 32% of conflicts are managed via using authority. 16% of conflicts are managed using obliging style whereas 8% of conflicts were managed by avoiding them. However, the degree of succession of this prevailing system is very low with respect to the effort taken to manage the conflicts. The main reason for the above stated failure is that majority of Sri Lankan construction stakeholders do not give a specific consideration for conflict management. It was found that 66.67% of projects do not specifically consider about conflict management whereas only 33.33% of projects use proper conflict management.

Respondent 3 of case 3 explains this non-consideration by mentioning "*No. We didn't consider about conflict management separately as a concept such as risk management, value management, etc. But I think we considered about avoiding conflicts from our common sense*". Furthermore, the respondent 2 of case 1 stated that "*There was no specific thing called conflict management for which a separate staff was assigned. However, it was always there in the project*". These explanations visualize that the Sri Lankan construction stakeholders consider conflict management as an aspect which should be done by common sense. It is true that common sense is required up to some extent to carry out the conflict management. Nevertheless, there is broader identification for conflict management rather than using common sense to seal the harmful situation.

In Sri Lanka, the stakeholders recognized conflict management as a process which should be carried out to settle the conflict. However, there is no proper preparation for potential conflicts, utilization of constructive part of the conflicts and proper record keeping for future use. Nevertheless, avoiding the circumstances which create conflicts can be randomly seen in the industry. Even though the stakeholders implement a considerably broad conflict management procedure in their organizations, they do not consider about conflict management techniques and utilization of the constructive part of the conflicts, therefore do not follow the entire conflict management spectrum. Therefore, it can be concluded that Sri Lankan construction industry do not follow the entire conflict management spectrum. This will be one reason to the increment of conflicts.

Moreover, the respondents identified another probable reason for the failure in current system as in most of the conflicting situations, the parties use wrong conflict management technique with regard to the situation. Respondent 2 of case 4 clearly explained this phenomenon by stating "*Most of the time, the client use his authority to manage problems. But I don't think it's good because he should listen to the other two parties who know much about the construction*". Furthermore, the respondent 1 of case 2 confirmed the aforementioned statement quoting "*Most of the times, the Contractor agreed with us unwillingly. So I think the reason for not giving full satisfaction can be wrong technique as well characteristics of people*". By adhering to the aforementioned opinions, it can be accepted the fact

that the degree of succession of using prevailing system for conflict management in the Sri Lankan construction industry is low.

There is another reason for not maintaining a successful conflict management by using the prevailing techniques. Respondent 1 of case 2 revealed that *“The problem is that once a conflict occurs, it is very hard to manage it in a way that it will provide full satisfaction to both parties because the way of thinking about that particular conflicting situation by both parties is different. You know, it is very hard to change the other persons’ minds, especially when they are well educated”*. Therefore, rigid and cold characteristics and different attitudes of Sri Lankan stakeholders will be another reason to lessen the success. However, the reasons for having a low succession can be listed out as follows.

- The industry is not following the full conflict management spectrum
- Using wrong conflict management technique for the wrong conflict situation
- Rigid and cold characteristics and attitudes of the parties

With regard to the aforementioned opinions of the respondents, it is obvious that the degree of succession of prevailing conflict management techniques in Sri Lanka is considerably low and therefore, maintains the increment of having conflicts. Since the tendency of having conflicts is high in the post contract stage, the situation will be more critical if an efficient and effective conflict management is not performed. Therefore, it is highly required to identify a proper and effective conflict management procedure than the prevailing process.

By considering the aforementioned factors, the study proposes the most effective conflict management system that can be adopted to eliminate the prevailing weaknesses. It is demonstrated in figure 1. This framework is specifically developed for the post contract stage of Sri Lankan construction industry. According to figure 1, conflict management is a broad spectrum which identifies each and every precaution that can be taken to successfully manage the conflict. The process commenced by considering the ways of mitigating the situations where conflicts are likely to be occurred. However, despite of every effort to avoid the conflict situations, at least few conflicts will be occurred during post contract stage. These conflicts will become favourable for the construction project within a limited period of time since having conflicts will up to certain extent assist the project success. However, these conflicts should be identified at their initial stage and properly utilized. Improperly utilized or unutilized conflicts will then develop into their destructive stage demanding conflict management techniques to manage them appropriately. Proper conflict management will avoid disputes saving a valuable experience to the project team.

However, the most effective way of managing a conflict is to identify the root of the conflict and then treat the root. It can be effectively done by using the subsequent procedure shown in figure 1. Accordingly, whenever a destructive conflict occurs, identifying the conflict type and the respective sources can be done by using the given conflict types and sources in the framework. Then analyse whether it can have multiple solutions, is one party more factually strong, fair and reasonable than the other party, the authority and power gained by each party, the degree of relevancy of the conflict to the project and whether it obtains more than one of aforementioned factors. Then, both parties can identify their position with respect to the conflict with the correct conflict management style to be used.

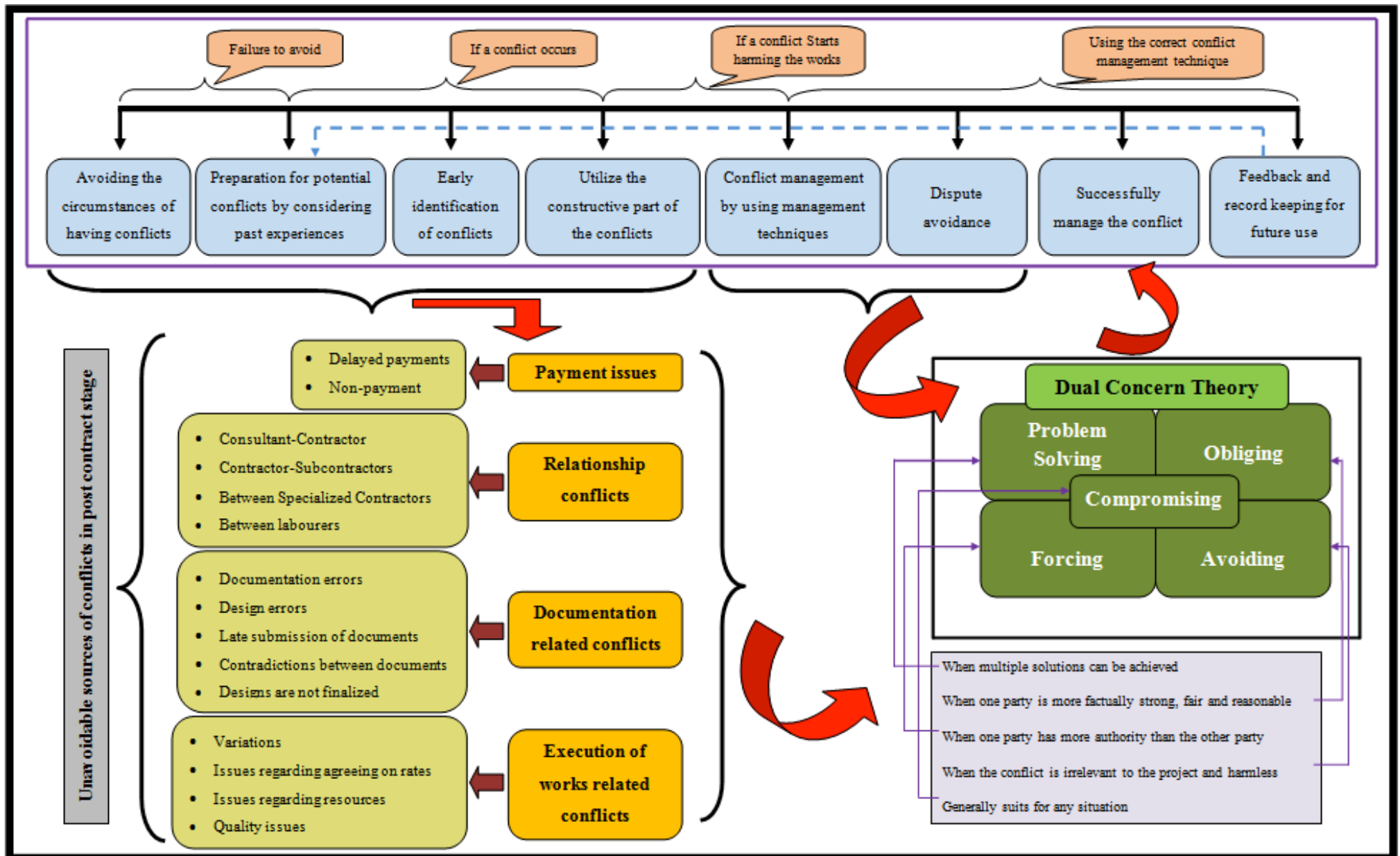


Figure 1: Framework for effective conflict management in Dual Concern Theory in post contract stage

For example, if there is a delayed payment by the client to the contractor and it has created a conflict between the parties, in such situation, as the contractor, he initially should understand his position regarding the matter. It can be understood that there is no possibility of having multiple solution for this conflict; hence, problem solving style cannot be used. Since the contractor stays below compared to the client, he is not in a position to use forcing style. This conflict cannot be avoided since it is a serious issue for the contractor by which his cash flow can be critically affected. Considering about all aforementioned factors, it can be decided that the contractor can obtain either obliging style or compromising style or combination of both styles. If the client has fair and reasonable facts to defend himself and contractor has no serious financial requirement, obliging style can be used. If the contractor is in a serious financial matter due to this conflict, the best method that can be used to manage the situation is compromising. Likewise, using proper conflict management style is very important for the effective conflict management.

5. Discussion

The research findings identified that the dual concern theory is already used by almost all the stakeholders in the construction industry; yet in a different manner. In addition, majority of the stakeholders have used it without knowing that it is a specific theory. However, according to Chou and Yeh, (2007), dual concern theory is the most commonly used conflict management theory all over the world. Nevertheless, Sri Lankan construction industry did not recognize it as a universal theory. According to the analysis, it was identified that dual concern theory is not using in Sri Lankan construction industry as what it intends to be. The stakeholders are only considering about the style; not about the spirit of the theory. According to Sorenson, Morse, and Savage (1999), the dual concern theory lies on the basis of high or low concern given to both self and others so that it is the spirit of the theory. However, Sri Lankan construction stakeholders lack the consideration given to other party. They only follow a specific conflict management style to manage the situation for sake of their respective parties not the opposing party. Moreover, dual concern theory can be successfully used only if the complete conflict management spectrum is followed. Therefore, the prevailing techniques in Sri Lankan construction industry cannot identify as following dual concern theory for effective conflict management.

The study focuses on the stakeholders' preference towards the conflict management styles in dual concern theory. The preference is considered due to the fact that successful conflict management is totally depending on the people factors. Accordingly, Dreu, Evers, Beersma, Kluwer, and Nauta (2001) stated that individual's conflict management apprehension is more stable so that it is very important to consider the preference of the individuals who related to the conflict when taking steps to manage the particular conflict. Research findings identified that the compromising and problem solving styles in dual concern theory were highly preferred by the Sri Lankan stakeholders. The main reason for the aforementioned preference, as in lined with the research findings of Verma (1998) is that both techniques provide a win-win solution, yet in different degrees. In addition, these two techniques are the only techniques which preserve the good relationship between the parties. Other than the aforementioned techniques, the remaining three techniques are considered to be strictly situational. Research findings indicate similar results of the researches conducted by both Verma

(1998) and Rahim (2002) that these techniques should be carefully used to the right conflict situation, otherwise create more harm by developing additional conflicts or increasing the remaining conflict. Therefore, it can be concluded that application of dual concern theory for Sri Lankan construction industry should be done by considering the suitability of each management style and the stakeholders' preference towards the styles.

6. Conclusion and recommendations

The magnitude of having conflicts in Sri Lankan construction industry is continuously increasing with time. It can be clearly seen that the tendency of having conflicts is high in the post contract stage. Since this increment will generate harmful consequences, it is very important to manage the conflicts. Unfortunately, even though conflicts create many harmful effects to the project, Sri Lankan construction industry has not yet given a high consideration to achieve a proper and effective conflict management procedure. Hence, the study proposed a suitable framework for effective conflict management using dual concern theory. The framework indicates the correct and appropriate method of managing a conflict by adhering to the entire conflict management spectrum.

This study recommends to establish a proper conflict management system in every construction project during its commencement. It further suggests that the stakeholders should always follow the entire conflict management spectrum without just trying to seal the conflict situation in an ad-hoc manner. According to the study, it is better to use conflict management styles in dual concern theory considering the correct situation since it thinks about both self welfare and the good will of the others. Moreover, the study proved that patience is important in conflict management in order to protect the professional relationships, therefore dual concern theory is ideal for the conflict management procedure. Finally, the study thoroughly recommends to adhere to the proposed framework in order to achieve proper conflict management.

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