

# Teacher Collaboration and Conflict Management in a Changing Society

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## Abstract

The aim of this study is to reveal the difficulties teachers face, and to clarify the characteristics of teachers' conflict management strategies. The data was collected through 818 minutes of semi-structured interviews at a public elementary school. Interviews were done with 16 teachers, and the data was qualitatively analyzed by using qualitative research method (Sato, 2008). The results of this study show that teachers' conflict management strategies have three characteristics: {maintaining motivation}, {creating a supportive environment}, and {risk avoidance}. Each of the three elements is used to deal with various difficulties while maintaining an inseparable relationship with other strategies. These strategies are primarily characterized as practical-oriented and relationship-oriented. "Practical oriented" represents when teachers attempt to pursue visible or tangible results or easy-to-visualize solutions. "Relationship-oriented" represents when teachers attempt to maintain good relationships with colleagues.

**Keywords** : conflict management, teacher collaboration, relationship-oriented, practical-oriented

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Introduction

Teaching is a problematic endeavor with intangible goals, unclear boundaries. In short, teaching is a never-ending process of investigation, experimentation, reflection, and analysis to produce a quality education (Loughran, 2006). However, the duties of teachers are becoming increasingly diverse, and teachers operate under unprecedented, diverse constraints and changing conditions. That teachers collaborate and cooperate with each other is increasingly important as a response to major social changes. Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) has been encouraging teachers to collaborate as a "team" to address the various challenges of a rapidly changing society (MEXT, 2015). Teachers face difficulties related to children's changing needs, such as increases in child poverty and in the number of children who require special need education. Teachers also encounter various systemic difficulties, such as the introduction of online classes and the use of tablet devices in the classroom.

Under these circumstances, collaboration among teachers is increasingly important; however, collaboration is not simple to achieve. This study aims to reveal how teachers manage the conflicts and difficulties in collaboration and how they maintain order in their schools.

### 1.2 Teachers' conflict management

Quality learning depends on access to quality teaching; thus, even in difficult times, teachers have an obligation to manage those difficulties and commit to students' learning to meet the demands of society and guarantee the quality of education. However, not only are teachers too busy to cope with those difficulties, but their ability to focus on their professional learning and their practices is hindered by conflicts resulting from collaboration and interactions with their

colleagues (Roblin & Margalef, 2013).

Teaching practices and conflicts are inseparable, and teachers face organizational, interpersonal, and personal levels of conflict (Chaaban & Du, 2017). These conflicts give teachers the opportunity to reflect on their practices and to consider alternative viewpoints (Achinstein, 2002). However, when they prioritize the harmony of the community, they may need to sacrifice their personal beliefs or interests, which can demoralize them and stop them from pursuing other solutions.

Teachers have three categories of coping strategies, and individual teacher choose different strategies depending on personal preference or the circumstances. The first category consists of direct-action coping strategies which focus on the elimination of the source of stress. This might be in the form of help-seeking or problem solving. The second category consists of palliative strategies which reduce stress by releasing emotions with the aid of supportive others. The third category consists of avoidance strategies that seek to withdraw from conflict situations or try to abandon individual beliefs (Sharplin, O'Neill, and Chapman, 2011; Chaaban & Du, 2017). Teachers who have more stress tend to choose avoidance strategies (Austin et al., 2005). This results in the overall deterioration of the system as the choice of negative strategy tends to perpetuate and increase the vicious cycle of escalating stress (Chan & Hui, 1995).

In addition to such personal coping strategies, the experience of the process of overcoming difficulties and the wisdom and ingenuity that facilitated it are shared among coworkers and have been established as one type of teacher behavior style or teacher culture (Kudomi, 2017). Among the various difficulties, this has functioned as a “collapse avoidance device” that prevents the system from imploding (Kudomi, 2018). As one of the key elements of this teacher culture, teachers have constructed an attitude of collegiality where they can reciprocally support each other. However, depending on the situation, this collegiality may only be utilized as a convenience. In the Japanese context, collegiality is limited to the workplace and teachers are reluctant to interact with colleagues socially (Kurebayashi, 2007). Although collegiality is limited, Japanese co-workers regard teachers' ability to give and receive support within the workplace environment as a positive thing. Collaboration with colleagues in this form has positive effects on effective educational practices and individual teachers' professional development and provides a healing function for teachers. This reaffirms that the teacher's practice is born from the interaction of different values within complicated situations every day. While collaboration with colleagues is indispensable, the reality is that such collaboration is difficult, so I will identify how teachers deal with these difficulties. In order to do so, I will first organize the difficulties and conflicts that teachers face, and then clarify the characteristics of conflict management.

## 2. Method

### 2.1 Participants & Data Collection

To fulfill the above goals, this study uses data obtained from ethnographic observation and interview surveys. The research participants were 16 staff members of the Japanese public school: Midori Elementary School (Midori-sho) in the North Kanto area. The study includes the observation of daily teaching practices from April 2018 to March 2019. This school has 10 sixth grade classes, 2 of which are special support classes. There are 228 children and 22 staff members. This limited number of teachers promotes free exchange of ideas and interaction among teachers, making it an ideal place to observe teachers' culture and cooperation. Through the observation of teachers' culture at Midori-sho it is possible to study the various factors influencing teachers' conflict management.

Ethnographic observation at Midori-sho took place one day a week (approximately 9 hours per day) from April 2018 to March 2019. Participating as a volunteer teacher, I observed teachers' daily practices including classroom lessons and extracurricular activities. I also reflected on each day with teachers after school, and shared students'

episodes and their work, discussing the points to be improved. The field notes paid special attention to the interactions among teachers, their responses to unexpected situations, and their reflective narratives. In this way, the ethnographic observation revealed data points for individual teachers which could be considered as factors in forming teacher culture, such as their daily workload, the relationship between teachers and students, and teaching practices.

Data obtained through semi-structured interviews supplemented the ethnographic observations. During summer vacation in 2018, semi-structured interviews with 16 teachers provided information about how they feel about the atmosphere of their workplace and their daily practices including the narratives of conflicts and difficulties. Participants were 13 classroom teachers and 3 managers (1 to 38 years of teaching experience). At the beginning of the interview, the participants provided written consent for the interview after being informed of the research contents and objective. A digital voice recorder took records of each interview in which the participants were asked questions about: 1) how teachers feel about their working environment, 2) how they cope with difficulties, 3) what teachers try to do to keep good relationships with their colleagues. The interviews aimed to elicit unstructured information about specific episodes and teachers' feelings rather than being a simple question-and-answer interview. This allowed teachers to talk about their own experiences including their intentions and background.

## 2. 2 Analysis

This research adopted a “qualitative research method (Sato, 2008)” to clarify how teachers cope with diverse conflicts and dilemma in a changing world. This study extracts concepts from the teachers' narratives to clarify the characteristics of their conflict management. This study adopted a code matrix method to analyze the relationship presented in several cases. This code matrix marks the case on the vertical axis and the codes on the horizontal. This arrangement allows regular patterns to emerge out of individual teacher's narratives. By organizing the characteristics of individual teachers' practice and the features of teacher culture, this matrix makes it possible to reveal both the impediment factors of teacher learning as well as the points to be improved.

## 2. 3 Procedure

The transcripts of the interviews provide teachers' narratives about their working environment and their conflict management. First, I segmented the interviews according to the content of the narrative and then I performed open coding. The coding especially focused on the teachers' perception of the working environment and the things they usually try to keep in mind during daily practices. For example, the coding for “This work is quite irregular (K, 4 years)” is [uncertainty], and “If my colleague is studying really hard it's really hard to give advice even though I feel it's necessary (A, 38 years)” is [difficulty with communication, hesitation].

Second, after open coding, I examined the relation between each code and its relevant document segment and performed focused coding which aggregates the code into more abstract conceptual categories. This focused coding referred to Kudomi's concept of “teacher culture as a collapse avoidance device” (2018) to generate conceptual codes. This stage required repeated examination of the relevant transcript sections. Kudomi (2018) explains that teacher culture is constructed through teachers' shared experiences or difficulties. He said the reason that the school system has not collapsed even with so many difficulties is due to this teacher culture and the teachers' efforts. This study aims to go beyond Kudomi's theory, which is focused on a “collapse avoidance system” to find the strategies that teachers use when dealing with their conflicts and difficulties. Thus, the analysis of the interview data focuses on teachers' daily conflicts, how they perceive difficulties, and how they deal with those difficulties. The original open coding picks out very specific points and feelings within the teachers' narratives, but in order to gain a clear picture of teachers' culture this data must be grouped together in more general manner. The focused coding stage summarized several open codes into more abstract codes, resulting in broader and more generalized categories. For example, open codes such as [too

much office work] [no time to talk with students] [no time for collaboration] [interminable work] was summarized as [busyness.]

Third, I created a code matrix where the X-axis marks the core category obtained through focused coding and the Y-axis marks the case (teacher). This matrix allows analysis of the relationship between multiple codes and cases. Based on the analysis I created a conceptual diagram representing the features of teachers' conflict management strategies. The diagram reorganizes the data into categories such as {difficulties} and concepts such as <workload>, these are supported by focused codes. In the following discussion, the category will be indicated by { }, the concept by [ ], and the focused code by < >.

### 3. Results

From the analysis, I generated 14 concepts and 5 categories from 31 codes. Chart 1 and 2 show the final categories, broken down into concepts, definitions, codes, and examples of utterances.

In an environment surrounded by {features of teaching} such as uncertainty, ambiguity, and recursion, teachers have various {difficulties} with children, parents, coworkers, and even with self. However, even among such conflicts and difficulties, teachers try to maintain motivation by holding onto a sense of responsibility and responding to expectations ({maintaining motivation}). Conversely, teachers sometimes intentionally avoid difficult situations ({risk avoidance}). Finally, teachers create a supportive environment by intentionally providing practical and mental support in order to combat the many uncertainties that exist within the profession ({creating supportive environment}). This knowledge of present and available support brings teachers a feeling of safety. The three conflict management strategies ensure that teachers protect themselves and respect others. This eventually works to deter the collapse of the system.

Preventing system collapse is a complex system of thought and action: maintaining good relationships with co-workers through {risk avoidance}, and {maintaining motivation} by keeping sense of responsibility and working to meet that responsibility. Conflict management strategies, {maintaining motivation}, {risk avoidance}, and {creating supportive environment} work in tandem to support teachers' daily practice. The following is a detailed explanation of the categories and concepts extracted from the analysis.

#### 3.1 Struggling inducing factors

I obtained 16 codes as factors that cause teachers to struggle. Focused coding then generated two categories: {features of teaching} and {difficulties} that cause conflicts.

##### **{features of teaching}**

This category, {features of teaching} contains things felt by the teachers during their daily schoolwork and is comprised of the three concepts of [context dependent], [perspective dependent], and [recursive.] The teaching profession has the characteristic that things can drastically change dependent on situation and time. These affect the values or the philosophy of <self>, the contents of the <workload>, and the reaction of the <children/parents.> In addition, the results of the practices of co-workers who have different <commitment> or different <teaching ethics> can bring difficulty due to the [perspective dependent] characteristic. Furthermore, teachers sometimes leave problems or work unsolved or unattended depending on the situations or <children.> This recursively affects <children's growth> or <own workload> later, which is perhaps a difficulty unique to teaching.

##### **{difficulties}**

This category consists of various difficulties with “[children/parents], [colleagues], [workload], and [self.] These include conflicts with colleagues or difficulties collaborating with someone who has different values (<value

difference>.) While many teachers have countless tasks (<unlimited workload>) compounded by unexpected or hard to manage difficulties. They also have to struggle to respond to a variety of expectations and needs from many different stakeholders. Kram (1985) stated that the relationships at work are situated in an organizational context. In this context, where teachers have a great responsibility for students' learning under circumstances that include a lot of complex and diverse difficulties, maintaining a good relationship with others in order to receive support when needed is indispensable. This is why teachers sometimes change the way they perform their practice, otherwise they may face another difficulty in getting help when needed. For example, teacher D who has 8 years of experience says, "I'm trying to avoid relational conflict because I'm concerned if I can't get help when I need." In addition, teachers have difficulties with [self.] This is especially apparent when teachers compare themselves with other colleagues who have more experience or a greater variety of teaching methods. For example, one younger teacher expresses her anxiety, saying "I haven't developed my own teaching method. In addition, the problem is that I don't know what I don't know (<no capability>) (O, 3 years)." Likewise, veteran teachers also express their anxieties, "When I look at other's practices, I sometimes worry if I'm doing okay (<no confidence>) (L, 34 years)." This teacher also expresses hesitation to give advice to younger teachers respecting their ways (<reserved mind>.)

Chart 1 Struggling inducing factors

category	concept	definition	code	utterance
Feature of teaching	Context dependent	The feature of teaching that the value of the practice can change in times and society.	self	"I used to not praise my children so much. But it's better to praise them, because children become happier and I also feel more comfortable in that way (A, 38 years)."
			workload	"Teaching method or evaluation measure changes year by year. I just can't catch up those rapid changing (C, 29 years)."
			children / parents	"The relationship between the children changes quickly. Relationships that were good until the last minute will be a bribe (B, 14 years)."
	Perspective dependent	The feature of teaching that the meaning of things changes depending on the situation and the time of the day.	commitment	"Depending on the person, it may happen that the problem is not regarded as a problem (D, 7 years)"
			teaching ethics	"Of course how to teach class is different depending on the teacher, but we have more difference, such as how much teachers can allow lunch leftover (E, 26 years)."
			children	"Children are different one by one. So, we have to keep thinking and trying something new for each student (F, 14 years)."
	Recursive	The feature of teaching that their own practice or decision-make recursively influence their practice after that.	children's grown up	"Sometimes I leave the problem unattached, because I'm so busy every day, but if I do this, the problem get more complicated the next time I have to deal with that problem (B, 14 years)."
			Own workload	Even if the problem is not solved, it can be done somehow but after all it will come back later (G, 11 years)."

Difficulties	Children parents	Difficulties in dealing with children and parents	Children parents	<p>“I can’t stay calm as much as I should if there are children who keep disturbing the class (B, 14 years).”</p> <p>“Sometimes I’m surprised to read some comments from parents, because they are too worried about the problem which children can or should solve by themselves. (H, 14 years).”</p>
	Colleague	Difficulties in collaboration with colleagues	Value difference	“Younger people also have their own way. So, sometime it’s hard to work with them (I, 35 years).”
			Reserved mind	“Even though I want to say something to my colleague, I can’t, because they are also trying hard (A, 38 years).”
	Workload	Difficulty in the work itself, such as working hours and division of school work	Unlimited workload	“There is no end in teaching. We have to decide what to do and when to finish. Otherwise, our work goes on endlessly (O, 1 year).”
			Uncertainty	“There is no rule in teaching, so we always have to keep asking someone especially when we are new to school (G, 11 years).”
Self	Difficulty in self, such as less confident about their own ability, lack of experience, etc.	No confidence	“Somehow I have no confidence in myself. I wonder if I am doing okay or not. While my colleagues of the same age are in charge of certain work, I am not doing anything (L, 34 years).”	
		No capability	I haven’t built my own teaching method nor have trouble to catch up my colleagues’ practices (M, 3 years).	

### 3. 2 Teachers’ conflict management strategies

In order to combat problematic features of teaching and difficulties, teachers have developed three types of coping strategies (Chart 2).

#### {maintaining motivation}

First, teachers cope with various difficulties by {maintaining motivation.} Two concepts, [obligation/responsibility] and [expectation], support their motivation to press on. <Expectation> is the principle that their work will produce positive results. For example, teachers push through their issues by maintaining the [expectation] that their hard work and dedication is beneficial for children’s personal growth and for gaining trust from colleagues (<for children>.) Teachers perceived these expectations as something that they should meet. In addition to these expectations regarding others, teachers also have expectations regarding their own <professional development.> In this case, teachers consider various difficulties to be opportunities for professional learning and chances to improve their practice. A sense of <obligation> and <responsibility> brings a sense of duty for certain groups of teachers, especially when they are being helped or they are helping others. Younger teachers tend to feel obligation: “Because I am always receiving help from the teachers around me, I must do whatever I can (K, 4 years).” On the other hand, veteran teachers also have sense of responsibility to help colleagues or to do something for the entire school. “Considering my age and teaching experience, I always feel I have to do something for my colleagues, often wonder if there isn’t something I should be doing (C, 29 years).”

**{risk avoidance}**

This category is composed of [preventing risky situations] and [protecting identity.] Teachers try to avoid risk as much as possible so that they can work in a better environment.

[Preventing risky situations] is a strategy where teachers avoid risk by establishing good relationships with <colleagues>, <parents> and children. The following is the comment of a veteran teacher working with a younger teacher who has a completely different teaching philosophy. She says, “I think I have to tell him what I feel someday, but I won't tell him today. After all, we have to work together in the same class every day. (A, 38 years)” As this narrative shows, teachers often censor themselves to maintain good relationships with colleagues. This intentionally avoiding unwanted situations or relationships is a key coping strategy to avoid the collapse of the system.

[Protecting Identity] comes in three forms: adjusting the external environment, such as <distancing oneself from risky situations>, self-directed <identity protection>, and <professional development>, which allows them to gain confidence in themselves and their ability to handle their work and environment. Teachers have a variety of difficulties due to the sometimes uncertain and ambiguous nature of their work and they have to deal with multiple unexpected events and problems simultaneously. Thus, it is important for them to manage their thoughts and feelings and to keep an eye towards the likely risks to avoid burnout. Another veteran teacher says, “It’s really important to stop overthinking and to try not to take things personally so that we can keep moving on (L, 34 years).” By separating individual competence from the difficulties in work, teachers are able to cope with a variety of problems. “Classroom management and lessons are going according to the plan. Dealing with trouble between students is above my paygrade so it’s not my responsibility to fix. I’m doing everything I need to be doing (H, 14 years).” This corresponds to the “Dualization Strategy” (Fukushima, 2018), which is a coping strategy unique to Japanese teachers. This strategy is an important counter measure for keeping their professional identities safe. Teachers are said to have both a “disturbed identity” and a “stable identity.” They try to maintain a stable professional identity by avoiding or reducing environmental risks so that the disturbed identity won’t rise to prominence. This is important to maintaining the motivation necessary to keep working and to continue professional development. By avoiding conditions where they may face severe conflicts or overwhelming problems, teachers can maintain a stable identity and thus a stable system.

**{creating supportive environment}**

This category is composed of showing [approval / respect], offering [technical support] and offering [mental support.] In order to manage difficulties, teachers show approval and respect to the practices and principles of their colleagues. Also, they intentionally provide specific advice or physical help if their colleagues need it(<technical support>.) Adding to this type of tangible support, teachers try to create a warm and friendly atmosphere (<constructing warm climate> and <respecting colleague>) by intentionally self-disclosing to or caring for others. All of these strategies create a help-seek friendly environment by offering <mental support> to their colleagues.

Chart 2 Teachers' conflict management strategies

category	concept	definition	code	utterance
Maintaining motivation	Obligation / responsibility	What is considered to be done from one's own position or situation	obligation	Because I have been helped by so many teachers, I really want to do whatever I can do for my colleagues. (K, 4 years).
			responsibility	With my teaching experience, I have another responsibility to help younger teachers be expertise (A, 38 years).
	Expectation	Expectations toward self-growth or for the sake of children and school	For children	No matter how busy I am, I want to try as much as I can for the sake of my students, because that's what we are expected (J, 28 years).
			Professional development	If I do something intentionally and can get positive outcome, then that will bring a feeling of accomplishment (D, 8 years).
Risk avoidance	Preventing risky situation	Things teachers are trying to avoid problematic conditions or conflict situations	parents	To take care of parents is also important. The priority is really high. If I show I do care about them, then they also try to understand what we say (F, 1 year).
			colleague	Even though I want to say something, if I feel he doesn't want to get advice, then I won't say anything, because I don't want to ruin the relationship (D, 8 years).
	Protecting identity	Things teachers are trying to mitigate conflict emotions or to keep in mind to survive such conditions	Distancing oneself from the situation	Try not to take things too seriously. It's really important to adjust where we are (L, 34 years).
			Professional development	If we want to be expertise, we have to set learning opportunities intentionally, otherwise we can't learn (D, 7 years).
			Identity protection	It's not my fault nor responsibility because things are too complicated. Not to take things personally is really important for us (B, 14 years).
Creating supportive environment	Approval / respect	Recognize and respect each other's practices and ideas	Respecting culture	"Even though change is needed, I try not to change soon. This is the way to show respect to them (P, 34 years)."
			Respecting colleague	"It's really natural that each teacher has different values or teaching method. So what's important is to care those differences and show respect, and create good environment (N, 11 years)."
	Technical support	Providing specific support for smooth execution of business	Technical support	"When I ask some questions, she shows me how to do, or thinks about dealing with troubles together and gives me specific advice (M, 3 years)."
			Developing environment	"For us, it's really hard to exchange ideas about students or how to teach, even though these are important. We principle allocate the time for teachers' meeting so that we can talk (K, 4 years)."
Mental support	Creating a friendlier environment where teachers can talk to each other which make it easy to help-see or consult	Mental support	"No matter how busy I am, if someone comes and talks to me, I try to stop what I do, and listen to them and show that I do care. (C, 29years)"	
		Constructing warm climate	For me, it's totally fine someone saying, 'your desk is so messy!' This kind of friendly conversation can create good atmosphere where we can talk. (N, 11 years)	

#### 4. Discussion: Teacher Collaboration and Conflict Management

The results of this study show that teachers’ conflict management strategies have three characteristics: {maintaining motivation}, {creating a supportive environment}, and {risk avoidance}. In this section, I focus on the relationship between teacher collaboration and conflict management strategies and discuss the characteristics of teachers' preferred strategies.

The triangle in Figure 1 shows the three conflict management strategies that teachers use. These three strategies, {maintaining motivation}, {creating a supportive environment}, and {risk avoidance}, are supported by teachers’ sense of responsibility and self-growth that seeks to actively maintain relationships and avoid burnout due to compounding problems. Each of the three elements is used to deal with various difficulties while maintaining an inseparable relationship with other strategies.

These strategies are primarily characterized as practical-oriented and relationship-oriented. The vertical axis: “practical oriented,” represents when teachers attempt to pursue visible or tangible results or easy-to-visualize solutions. The horizontal axis: “relationship-oriented,” represents when teachers attempt to maintain good relationships with colleagues (Figure 1). Both practical-oriented and relationship-oriented strategies are important factors in the decision-making process. Past research also suggests that seeking social support and engagement in the community can render situations less demanding and threatening and thus an important element of coping strategies (Montgomery and Rupp, 2005). The research posits that teaching, by nature, is full of uncertainty and ambiguity; thus, support from colleagues is crucial. Under these circumstances, teachers have undertaken strategies to maintain good relationships with others. Due to the indistinct characteristics inherent in the profession, wherein obtaining specific outcomes or a sense of achievement in teaching is difficult (Hasegawa, 2018), teachers often prefer tangible and visible practices to counteract the uncertain and context-dependent features of their profession.

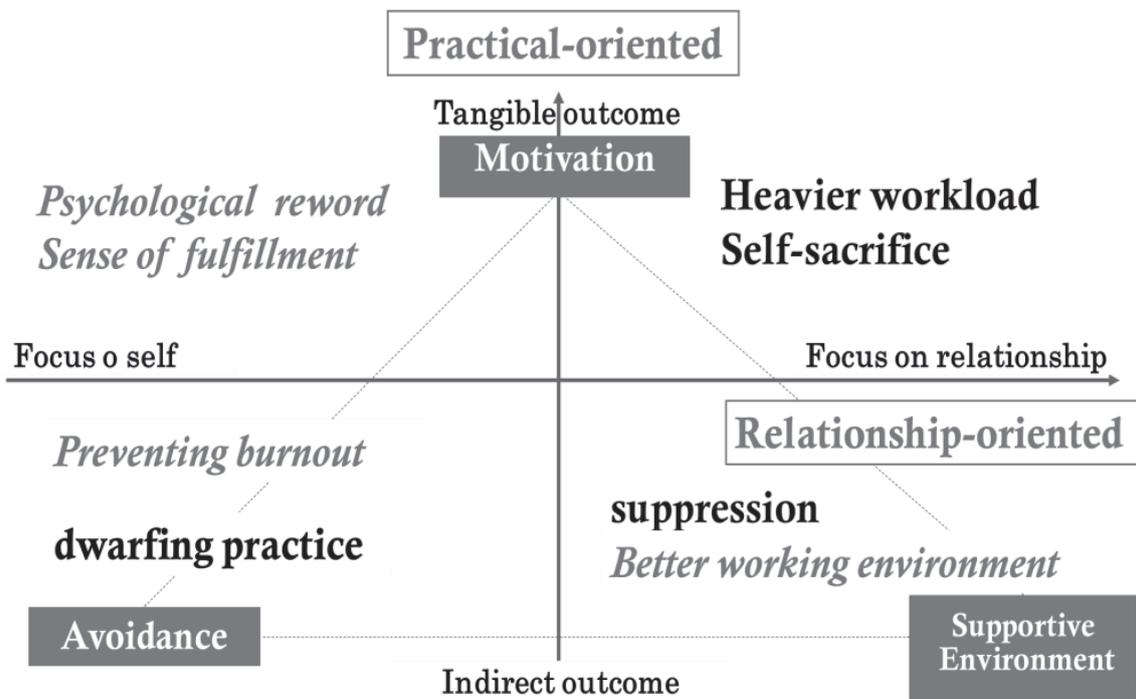


Figure 1 Teacher Collaboration and Conflict Management Strategies

This practice-oriented approach is an essential component of working with colleagues. In such complex situations, it is difficult to recognize one's growth. As such, teachers tend to focus far more on practices that produce measurable results, such as students' test results. Using the same reasoning, teachers also attempt to demonstrate their commitment to their jobs through spending extra hours engaging in work outside of school, such as classroom planning and grading (Sato, 1994). For teachers, achieving a certain level of accomplishment and showing visible dedication are important conflict management strategies. Kudomi (2018) named this phenomenon the "trust relationship procurement circuit." This circuit is a critical element in Japan, where the harmony between coworkers is prioritized over individual results. This is inextricably linked to teachers being relationship-oriented.

Relationship-oriented practices are used to justify risk avoidance in difficult situations. For example, when teachers face difficulties with their students, they may request assistance from a school counselor or school social worker or choose to distance themselves from the situation to avoid burnout. Teachers who demonstrate their dedication to their students in a visible way and who have good relationships with their colleagues show an understanding of risk avoidance. When good relationships are established, and colleagues understand these practices, they will become more understanding of risk-averse behavior.

The practice of {maintaining motivation} with practice orientation is an integral part of teachers' conflict management strategy, as it plants the seed for {creating a supportive environment} and {risk avoidance.} In other words, teacher use conflict management to attempt to increase the "understandability" of their own practice for their colleagues. Teachers tend to show their commitment tangibly because it helps create a supportive environment ({creating a supportive environment}). As such, it is important for them to increase "understandability" from others. Making visible contributions to teaching and collaborating with colleagues can work as a device to gain approval from others when needed. So long as risk-avoidant behaviors are accepted by others and function to avoid burnout, avoidance, and identity protection ({risk avoidance}), teachers will be encouraged to maintain conflict management practices.

This kind of conflict management is strongly dependent on the environment in which the teacher is placed. The variety of difficulties and challenges faced, and the uncertainty of success or failure make it essential for teachers to collaborate with others. Teachers are practice-oriented, meaning they are motivated by the visibility and results of their practice ({maintaining motivation}), and they respond to daily challenges by creating an environment that facilitates requests for assistance ({creating a supportive environment}) while at the same time moderately avoiding risks ({risk avoidance}). It is crucial for teachers to reduce their workload and to deal with problems appropriately from various perspectives. By creating an environment that encourages teachers to succeed, they can more effectively deal with the daily difficulties of their profession.

## 5. Limitation

Although this study shows the positive influences of conflict management strategies (as is shown in Figure 1 in bold letters), teachers' inclinations to reduce uncertainty or complex situations can lead to self-sacrifice, and sometimes, the suppression of their own practice. Fukushima (2018) compared the Japanese teaching culture with that of foreign countries, showing that Japanese teachers' identities are greatly influenced by their relationships with their colleagues. The results of this study show that Japanese teachers use three conflict management strategies. This is because teachers are inclined to avoid or reduce uncertainty or complicated situations. In the Japanese context, wherein teachers put great emphasis on their relationships with colleagues, these are important coping strategies for survival. However, such efforts to maintain relationships, which derive from a sense of responsibility and duty, can lead to self-sacrifice and can sometimes lead to dwarf their practice. When teachers dedicate a great deal of energy to proving their commitment and contribution

to the community, they risk entering into a cycle that will lead to endless tasks and a heavier workload. The conflict coping style characterized by such practical-oriented and relationship-oriented strategies detracts from opportunities for dialogue and deep learning that may lead to better coping when faced with complex educational problems and collaborative efforts to overcome these problems. It will be a future endeavor to examine how these issues can be overcome.

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