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Toward a Social Capital Model of School Conflict Management: Aligning Institutional Governance with SDG 16

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To synthesize organizational conflict theory, social capital theory, and school-specific empirical findings into a conceptual framework for managing conflict within school organizations, and to map how the classical stages of the conflict process can ideally be applied within schools to convert rivalry into healthy competition rather than destructive dispute-with explicit attention to how such a framework supports quality, and strong, accountable institutions (SDG 16). **Method:** The study employs a narrative literature review drawing on the classical theoretical corpus of management, organizational conflict, and social capital theory, enriched with supplementary 2015–2026 literature from international and national academic databases, including studies conducted specifically within school settings. **Results:** The review shows that conflict in school organizations differs from conflict in other organizations in its heterogeneous set of stakeholders, its dual bureaucratic-professional authority structure, and its embeddedness in public accountability. Social capital comprising trust, networks, and norms of reciprocity is shown to mediate both the prevention and the constructive channeling of conflict, including within schools. **Novelty:** The review further reveals that Indonesia's high power distance and collectivist culture add a distinct risk of false harmony. Building on this synthesis, the article offers a novel success-failure formula (the Success Potential of Conflict Management, SPCM) and a staged framework for applying conflict management ideally within school organizations a synthesis that has not previously combined social capital theory with the conflict-process stages within the specific institutional and cultural context of Indonesian schools.

INTRODUCTION

Organizations are social spaces in which actors, leaders, staff, team members, and external stakeholders bring together interests, values, and working styles that do not always align, even as they share the same space and resources to pursue goals they interpret differently. Most organizational management scholars define this tension as conflict: a perceived incompatibility of goals, values, or resources among interdependent parties within a single system (Bercovitch, 1984; Borisoff & Victor, 1998; Rubin et al., 1994). Conflict may originate from differing views on policy, resource constraints, divergent working styles, or strained interpersonal relationships, cutting across organizational types, from corporations and bureaucracies to nonprofit institutions and schools (Bush, 2011; Hoy & Miskel, 2001; Owens & Valesky, 2011). Schools illustrate this dynamic with particular clarity: as organizations bringing together principals, teachers, staff, students, and parents, actors who differ not only in role but in the very nature of their relationship to the institution schools are especially prone to conflict that is heterogeneous in kind, and, left unmanaged, this conflict erodes collaboration and undermines the effectiveness of educational human resources (Qodir et al., 2025).

Over recent decades, organizational discourse has shifted from treating conflict as dysfunctional and something to be suppressed to an interactionist view holding that a certain degree of conflict is a prerequisite for groups to function effectively and

innovatively (Robbins & Colter, 2019). This shift reframes the leader's role: no longer merely a suppressor of conflict, but a designer of a climate capable of converting tension into renewal (Coser, 1967; Pondy et al., 1967)

Research on social capital has meanwhile expanded rapidly as a lens for understanding how networks, norms, and trust facilitate collective action (Fukuyama et al., 1995; Putnam et al., 1995, 2000; Syamsuri et al., 2023). Social capital has frequently been applied to conflict resolution at the community, village, or ethnic-group level (Lestari, 2020; Usmi, 2025; Zulkarnain et al., 2018), yet studies that synthesize social capital theory with organizational conflict management, usable within formal organizations, including schools, remain scarce; the gap is especially pronounced in schools, where social capital is more often studied in relation to teacher collaboration than to conflict management as such (Belfi et al., 2015). Most existing studies on school conflict also center on the principal as the sole agent of resolution through a particular leadership style (Djonra & Aki, 2023; Edet et al., 2017; Janah, 2025; Nasrudin, 2021; Nugroho et al., 2020; Rostini, 2023), while the collective role of all school members in building social capital receives comparatively little attention. An equally important gap concerns local cultural character: cross-cultural literature affirms that conflict-handling styles cannot be separated from a society's configuration of cultural values (Hofstede et al., 2010), yet Indonesia-specific studies remain limited.

This article is structured as a narrative literature review that aims to: (1) map organizational conflict management theory and its distinctive expression within school organizations; (2) trace the genealogy of social capital; (3) synthesize both bodies of theory into a success-failure formula; (4) elaborate how the conflict-management process can ideally be applied within schools to convert rivalry into healthy competition; and (5) uncover the character of conflict management in Indonesian schools. The urgency of this study follows from shifts in the contemporary school context, evolving curricula, growing stakeholder involvement, and mounting accountability pressure (Vinokur, 2024), under which a school's capacity to manage difference constructively becomes a critical determinant of educational quality, rather than a matter resolved through standard procedure alone.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a narrative literature review with a concept-driven, purposive selection strategy to develop a conceptual framework for school-based organizational conflict management through the lenses of social capital and organizational culture. The theoretical foundation integrates classical contributions from management, conflict theory, and social capital, notably works by Robbins & Colter, Pondy, Thomas & Kilmann, Putnam, and Nahapiet & Ghoshal. These foundational texts are complemented by contemporary empirical literature published between 2015 and 2026, retrieved via scholarly repositories using thematic search strings combining conflict management, social capital, organizational culture, and the Indonesian educational context.

The analytical process relied on thematic synthesis to identify, map, and cross-examine concepts across the three theoretical domains. The synthesis specifically evaluates how interpersonal relationships, structural networks, mutual trust, shared norms, and administrative practices shape conflict dynamics within educational settings. While non-exhaustive by design, this narrative approach effectively synthesizes classic and modern empirical insights into a coherent, school-specific theoretical framework to inform subsequent organizational analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Basic concepts: management, conflict, and organization

Organizational conflict management combines two elements: management and conflict within an organizational context. Management is generally understood as planning, organizing, actuating, monitoring, evaluating, and controlling human, financial, material, and technological resources to achieve organizational goals (Griffin & Moorhead, 2013; Robbins & Colter, 2002; Stoner et al., 1995; Terry & Rue, 1982). These four classical functions remain relevant as an analytical framework even when the object being managed is not production but the potentially conflict-prone dynamics of relationships among organizational actors.

Conflict itself generally refers to a condition of incompatibility or contention arising from limited resources that must be shared, or from differences in status, goals, values, or perspectives among interdependent parties (Borisoff & Victor, 1998). Conflict is not fixed in social relations; it depends on the underlying situation and can therefore emerge, subside, and re-emerge in different forms as context changes (Bercovitch, 1984). Its sources range from differing policy views and limited resources to divergent working styles and strained relationships (Owens & Valesky, 2011). Bush (2011) adds a leadership dimension: conflict can also arise from hierarchical structure, differences in professionalism, or external stakeholder pressure, making the leader's role central to mediating conflict and building a climate conducive to constructive resolution. This leadership dimension is especially salient in school organizations, where a principal must mediate among internal stakeholders who occupy structurally different positions, teachers, administrative staff, students, and parents, while also representing the school to external authorities and the surrounding community (Qodir et al., 2025).

Theoretical perspectives on conflict

Rubin et al. (1994) group the understanding of conflict into three principal approaches: functional, situational, and interactive. The functional approach views conflict as possessing social benefit within a system; Simmel (1955) defined conflict as an effort to resolve differing dualisms, a means of achieving unity even through confrontation, while Coser (1967) argued that conflict can catalyze new institutions and innovation, distinguishing its function from its dysfunction: conflict is not always destructive. Still, it can serve as an adaptive mechanism, though in certain circumstances it may hinder stability.

The situational approach, represented by Bercovitch (1984), holds that conflict arises as a response to particular conditions, individual factors such as personal interest, or external factors such as changes in the social or political environment, rather than something inherently attached to relationships. The interactive approach, developed by Folger (1993), introduces interdependence (one party's actions affecting another) and perception, explaining that conflict arises not only from objective differences but also when one party perceives an incompatibility (Tillett, 1993). Tidwell (1998) reinforces this by emphasizing that conflict often stems from the close interconnection between interdependent parties.

These approaches align with the traditional, human-relations, and interactionist typology in organizational-behavior literature (Robbins & Colter, 2019). The traditional view sees conflict as something to be avoided; the human-relations view accepts it as natural and unavoidable; the interactionist view, the most contemporary, holds that conflict is not merely tolerable but necessary for a group to function effectively. This shift from "conflict as pathology" to "conflict as resource" underlies the argument that

organizations, including schools, need to manage, rather than merely suppress, the conflict that occurs within them.

Contemporary organizational conflict scholarship extends this foundation by questioning whether conflict can adequately be classified as inherently functional or dysfunctional. Mikkelsen & Clegg (2018) identify three broad conceptions that have shaped organizational conflict research: conflict as a behavioral phenomenon, conflict as an instrumental means of achieving particular objectives, and conflict as a social construction contingent upon how organizational actors perceive and interpret organizational reality. This perspective is important because disagreement does not automatically become conflict. Rather, conflict becomes consequential when actors interpret differences as incompatible interests, goals, values, or expectations. Consequently, similar structural conditions may produce different conflict trajectories depending on how organizational actors understand and respond to them.

The social-construction perspective also shifts attention from whether conflict is good or bad to how conflict is constructed, experienced, and managed. Conflict may become constructive when differences are recognized as legitimate, communicated openly, and processed through organizational mechanisms that allow competing interests to be negotiated. Conversely, the same underlying differences may become destructive when they are interpreted through mistrust, unequal power relations, poor communication, or the absence of legitimate channels for expressing disagreement. Conflict management, therefore, should not be understood merely as a technical intervention applied after conflict becomes manifest. It is also a relational process through which organizational actors shape the meaning, intensity, and consequences of disagreement.

A further development in contemporary conflict scholarship concerns the importance of identifying the sources of conflict before determining how to manage it. Budd et al. (2020) argue that conflict-resolution mechanisms should connect to the underlying sources of conflict rather than be applied as universally appropriate techniques. Their framework distinguishes multiple sources and dimensions of conflict and emphasizes matching dispute-resolution approaches to the nature of the underlying problem. This perspective introduces a contingency principle into organizational conflict management: structural conflicts may require clarification of authority and procedures, resource conflicts may require changes in allocation mechanisms, while relational conflicts may require communication, trust-building, or mediation.

McCarter et al. (2020) further support the contingency argument by conceptualizing intragroup conflict as a contingent process rather than a phenomenon with uniform consequences. Their review of contemporary models of group conflict shows that the effects of conflict depend on group characteristics, the nature of relationships among members, and the context in which conflict occurs. Conflict therefore cannot be assumed to produce either positive or negative outcomes independently of organizational circumstances. Its consequences emerge through interactions among the type of conflict, the actors involved, the group's social structure, and the mechanisms through which disagreement is processed.

Taken together, these perspectives suggest that organizational conflict is best understood as a dynamic and contingent process. Incompatible interests or positions create the potential for conflict, but whether that potential develops into destructive confrontation depends on perception, interaction, organizational structure, and the availability of appropriate mechanisms for managing disagreement. This formulation moves beyond a simple functional-dysfunctional dichotomy. The same disagreement may generate innovation in one organizational context but produce factionalism or relational deterioration in another.

This contextual understanding is particularly relevant to school organizations. A disagreement between teachers concerning pedagogical methods, for example, is qualitatively different from a dispute between teachers and principals concerning workload, authority, or administrative decisions. Likewise, conflict between teachers and parents involves accountability and expectations that differ from conflict among teachers themselves. Consequently, the effectiveness of a conflict-management strategy cannot be determined independently of the type of relationship, source of disagreement, distribution of authority, and organizational culture in which the conflict occurs.

Perception and interdependence further explain why structurally similar situations can produce different outcomes. Earlier interactionist perspectives emphasized that conflict emerges within relationships of interdependence, while contemporary approaches emphasize that organizational actors actively interpret the meaning of those relationships (Mikkelsen & Clegg, 2018). In a school, for instance, an uneven distribution of responsibilities may constitute a structural condition with the potential for conflict. Still, escalation depends partly on whether teachers perceive the arrangement as legitimate, transparent, and fairly distributed. Similarly, one group may interpret a principal's decision as necessary organizational coordination, while another may see it as excessive administrative control. The conflict therefore lies not only in the decision itself but also in the meanings the actors attach to it.

This theoretical development has an important implication for the role of organizational relationships. If conflict is shaped by perception, interpretation, interdependence, and context, then the relational conditions under which organizational actors communicate become significant determinants of whether disagreement escalates or is constructively processed. Trust, communication networks, reciprocal norms, and shared understandings may provide actors with relational resources that enable disagreement to be expressed without immediately becoming interpersonal hostility. Conversely, weak relational ties and low trust may transform relatively manageable differences into persistent interpersonal or group conflict.

The relationship between conflict and social capital is therefore not necessarily unidirectional. Avgar (2010) demonstrates the importance of considering conflict and conflict-management processes in relation to organizational social capital, suggesting that conflict can affect the relational resources available within organizations while the manner in which conflict is managed can also influence those relationships. This reciprocal possibility is particularly important for school organizations, where repeated patterns of avoidance, domination, or unresolved disagreement may gradually weaken trust and relational networks. In contrast, constructive engagement with conflict may reinforce cooperation and reciprocal expectations. Social capital should therefore be understood not merely as a resource that exists independently of conflict but also as a relational condition that can be strengthened or weakened through the ways organizations manage conflict.

Accordingly, this article treats classical and contemporary conflict theories as complementary rather than competing perspectives. Classical theories explain the inherent and potentially functional character of conflict; Pondy's process theory explains how conflict develops through stages; Mikkelsen & Clegg (2018) emphasize perception and social construction; Budd et al. (2020) highlight the importance of identifying conflict sources and matching responses to them; and McCarter et al. (2020) demonstrate the contingent nature of conflict outcomes. Avgar (2010) further bridges conflict-management processes and the relational resources conceptualized through social capital theory.

Sources and types of conflict: The distinctive character of school organizations

Conflict within organizations can be distinguished by nature as functional or dysfunctional: functional conflict supports group goals and improves performance, whereas dysfunctional conflict hinders it (Robbins & Colter, 2002). This distinction matters practically because it requires leaders not only to identify whether conflict exists, but to assess the direction of its impact. In terms of source, conflict can be mapped into structural factors (hierarchy and the distribution of authority), professional factors (differing work orientations), resource factors (budget and facility constraints), and relational factors (strained interpersonal communication) (Bush, 2011; Hoy & Miskel, 2001; Owens & Valesky, 2011). By level, conflict ranges from intrapersonal and interpersonal to intragroup and intergroup, with higher levels involving more complex patterns of power and interest. Perception plays a critical role in whether a difference develops into open conflict, since conflict becomes socially real only when one party perceives an incompatibility of interests (Tillett, 1993). Meaning two objectively similar situations can escalate differently depending on how the actors involved interpret them.

Applied to school organizations, however, this general typology understates how structurally different school conflict is from conflict in most other organizations, in at least three respects. First, schools involve a markedly more heterogeneous set of actors than the typical corporate or bureaucratic organization, where conflict is largely confined to employees. In schools, conflict spans relationships that differ fundamentally in kind: teacher to teacher (professional/peer), teacher to principal (hierarchical/bureaucratic), teacher to student (developmental/pedagogical), teacher to parent (service/accountability), student-to-student (socio-emotional and developmental), and school-to-community (institutional legitimacy). Vinokur, (2024) document intragroup conflict occurring simultaneously among teachers, parents, pupils, and staff within a single school, and Mufidah's (2025) case study of school-based conflict likewise finds that disputes routinely involve students, teachers, education staff, and parents together, cutting across interpersonal, intergroup, and structural types at once, a simultaneity that most existing conflict typologies, developed primarily with corporate and bureaucratic settings in mind, do not fully capture.

Second, schools operate under a dual authority structure that most organizations do not share: a bureaucratic hierarchy running from the education office through the principal, alongside teachers' professional and pedagogical autonomy within their own classrooms (Bush, 2011; Owens & Valesky, 2011). This duality is itself a distinctive source of conflict, disputes over whether a decision belongs to administrative authority or to professional judgment and helps explain why the conflict-management strategies adopted specifically by school principals have been found, across several national contexts, to be a significant determinant of teachers' effectiveness and job satisfaction, has been found, across several national contexts, to be a significant determinant of teachers' effectiveness and job satisfaction (Djonra & Aki, 2023; Edet et al., 2017; Qodir et al., 2025). Third, because a substantial share of the parties involved are students who are minors under the school's duty of care, and because parents and the surrounding community have a more direct and continuous channel of oversight than external stakeholders typically have over a corporation, school conflict carries accountability stakes, implicating child safety and community trust that are structurally distinctive compared to typical internal personnel matters. A disagreement that in a corporate setting might remain an internal personnel matter can, in a school, implicate child safety, public trust, and community legitimacy simultaneously. This combination- heterogeneous stakeholders, dual authority, and elevated accountability is what distinguishes the sources, types, and levels of conflict as they operate in school organizations from how

they operate elsewhere. The remainder of this article treats this combination as a defining feature of school-specific conflict management, rather than a mere variation on the general organizational case.

Conflict process theory and its application in school organizations: Toward healthy competition

Pondy, (1967) developed one of the most influential frameworks in organizational-conflict study, conflict process theory viewing conflict as unfolding through stages: latent conflict (conditions with the potential to generate conflict, not yet surfaced), perceived conflict, felt conflict, manifest conflict (materialized into observable behavior), and conflict aftermath, which determines whether the next episode will be easier or harder to manage. This staged framework carries an important implication: managerial intervention is most effective at the latent and perceived stages, before conflict escalates into a manifest form that is costlier to resolve.

To handle manifest conflict once it occurs, the two-dimensional model of Thomas & Kilmann (1978; see also 2008) maps five conflict-handling styles, competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding, and accommodating, along assertiveness and cooperativeness. Rahim (2002) extended this through the Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory, conceptualizing five similar styles- integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding, and compromising validated across cultural and occupational contexts, including outside Western settings (Chakrabarty et al., 2002), both complement Deutsch's (1973) classical theory distinguishing cooperative from competitive processes, with cooperative processes tending toward constructive resolution. Recent empirical findings confirm this framework across sectors: Küçükakşit, (2025) review of 65 articles shows a shifting thematic focus over time, Nikitara et al., (2024) find accommodating and collaborative styles most effective in nursing, and Shehu-Usman et al., (2024), applying contingency theory to Nigeria's public sector, find no single style universally superior, effectiveness depends on fit with situation, structure, and culture. Generally, the process involves identifying sources and actors, diagnosing interests, selecting a fitting strategy, intervening through mediation or negotiation, and conducting post-conflict evaluation (Asiaah, 2017; Pruitt, 1986), with transformational leadership grounded in emotional intelligence often cited as a prerequisite for success (Nugroho et al., 2020). This also exposes the fragility of a single-leader model, vulnerable to breakdown when leadership changes.

Applied ideally to school organizations, each stage of Pondy's process suggests a specific, proactive practice rather than reactive firefighting, with the explicit goal of channeling rivalry into "healthy competition" instead of suppressing it or letting it curdle into destructive dispute. At the latent stage, where structural conditions such as uneven workload distribution or ambiguous boundaries between administrative authority and teachers' professional autonomy quietly accumulate, the ideal school practice is a transparent, published policy on task allocation and decision rights, reviewed regularly rather than left implicit (Qodir et al., 2025). At the perceived stage, where a teacher, student, or parent first senses unfairness, schools need accessible, non-punitive channels, open forums, and anonymous feedback mechanisms so perception surfaces early instead of being suppressed by hierarchy, consistent with findings that participatory involvement in planning correlates with greater ownership of the strategies eventually adopted (Bryson, 2011; Doran, 1981). At the felt stage, where emotional investment intensifies, targeted training in emotional intelligence and in the contingent selection of a Thomas-Kilmann or Rahim style, rather than reflexive reliance on one habitual style, equips principals and teachers to respond deliberately rather than defensively.

The manifest stage is where the distinction between healthy and destructive conflict becomes most consequential in a school setting. Academic rivalry, between students competing for rank, or teachers advocating for different pedagogical approaches is functional conflict in Robbins & Coulter's, (2019) sense: it can sharpen effort and surface better ideas, echoing Coser's, (1967) argument that conflict can catalyze innovation, provided the school channels it through transparent, consistently applied rules, clear grading criteria, open selection processes for competitions or leadership roles, and forums where competing pedagogical views are debated on evidence rather than settled by seniority. Left unchanneled, the same rivalry becomes dysfunctional: rank-seeking curdles into rumor and faction, and pedagogical disagreement hardens into personal rivalry. The difference is not the presence of competition but whether the school has designed the structural conditions, the "rules of the game" through which competition is expressed. Finally, at the aftermath stage, schools that treat each resolved dispute as an input into measurable, SMART-formulated indicators (Bryson, 2011; Doran, 1981), participation rates, recurrence rates, and satisfaction with the fairness of the process convert conflict aftermath into institutional learning rather than an unspoken residue that primes the next latent conflict.

Social capital: Genealogy and dimensions

The concept of social capital has a diverse genealogy, with three principal theorists: Bourdieu and Putnam. Bourdieu (1986) defined social capital as the aggregate of resources linked to a durable network of institutionalized relationships of mutual recognition; from his class-oriented perspective, it is a private good that strengthens an individual's position within the social structure. Syamsuri (2023), by contrast, defined it functionally: entities sharing two features- an aspect of social structure and the facilitation of actors' actions within that structure emphasizing its cooperative dimension as a complement to human capital.

Putnam (1995, 2000) extended the concept to community and public life, defining it as features of social organization, networks, norms, and trust that facilitate coordination for mutual benefit. Fukuyama (1995) emphasized trust as its core, determining economic efficiency and social stability. Nahapiet & Ghoshal (1998) formulated three dimensions now widely adopted in organizational research: structural (patterns of connectivity), cognitive (shared language, codes, narratives), and relational (trust, norms, obligations, and shared identity built through a history of interaction).

Woolcock & Narayan (2000) add a typology of ties: bonding (within homogeneous groups), bridging (across heterogeneous groups), and linking (between groups and parties holding greater authority). In an organizational context, and in a school specifically, all three are relevant simultaneously: bonding ties develop among members of the same work unit or class, bridging ties connect different units or grade levels, and linking ties tie the school to district authorities and the wider community; their combination determines a school's collective capacity to respond to and manage conflict adaptively.

Social capital as an instrument of conflict management in schools

The convergence between conflict-management theory and social capital theory lies in the premise that strong trust, networks, and norms of reciprocity lower the social transaction costs of resolving differing interests. When social capital is high, actors are more inclined to choose integrating and collaborative styles over dominating or avoiding ones (Rahim, 2002), because they believe others' interests will be fairly considered. Ak et al. (2024), studying the Turkish industrial sector, show that social capital has a positive

effect on employees' willingness to voice dissent constructively, evidence that social capital does not merely suppress conflict but opens space for disagreement to be voiced before it turns into hidden, destructive conflict.

Within school organizations, this convergence is directly observable. Belfi et al. (2015) show that school-based social capital, the quality of relationships among teachers, students, and parents, mediates the link between a school's socio-economic composition and teachers' collective efficacy, underscoring social capital's role as a structural asset rather than a by-product of goodwill. At the level of conflict resolution specifically, Mhando & Ambakisye (2025), applying social capital theory to secondary schools in Tanzania, find that the active engagement of parents, local leaders, and community organizations, built on trust and reciprocal networks, measurably strengthens a school's capacity to resolve student conflict and sustain a climate conducive to learning.

Social capital can be strengthened through mentoring between senior and new members, cross-unit discussion forums, and strengthened two-way communication between leaders and subordinates (Bryson, 2011; Putnam, 1995). Vinokur (2024) shows that holistic, socially grounded conflict-management training equips school members to handle intragroup conflict constructively while strengthening community cohesion, reinforcing that conflict management and social-capital strengthening are mutually reinforcing rather than separate agendas. Strengthening social capital is nonetheless not without challenges: differences in socio-economic and cultural background, resistance to changing entrenched relational patterns, and limited time for relational activities beyond core duties frequently obstruct its consistent building (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000), requiring sustained leadership commitment rather than a temporary program.

The five conflict-handling styles in both the Thomas-Kilmann framework and the ROCI are not a hierarchy of value; Rahim (2002) asserts that none is universally effective, and an instrument such as the ROCI is valuable chiefly for raising a leader's self-awareness of their own stylistic tendencies. Deutsch (1973) grounds these style choices psychosocially: how a party defines its goals, aligned or opposed to others', shapes trust and the outcome, where conflict management and social capital first converge; a cooperative climate is essentially a manifestation of previously built social capital.

The character of conflict and conflict management in Indonesia

The theories above largely originate in Western literature, so applying them to Indonesian organizations, including schools, must account for a distinctive configuration of cultural values. Hofstede's framework places Indonesia at high power distance (78) and low individualism (14), with moderate uncertainty avoidance (48) (Hofstede et al., 2010; Lee & Ande, 2023), a configuration confirmed by Tantawi et al., (2026), who characterize Indonesian organizational culture as high power distance, strongly collectivist, short-term oriented, and low in indulgence, less adaptive to contemporary work demands than neighboring Southeast Asian countries.

This configuration cuts two ways. On one hand, collectivism and a preference for harmony encourage deliberation-based (*musyawarah*), family-oriented resolution and third-party mediation to preserve "face," rather than confrontation (Lestari et al., 2020; Zulkarnain et al., 2018). *Musyawarah mufakat*, rooted in Pancasila values, has been shown empirically to catalyze more participatory conflict handling when integrated with models such as Thomas-Kilmann and transformational leadership (Febriana, 2025), and similar values support conflict management within Indonesia's multicultural and interfaith organizations (Nurhayati, 2023). On the other hand, high power distance carries risk: when subordinates conform to superiors' expectations to preserve stability, latent conflict is more likely to be disguised than openly managed, with surface harmony

concealing genuine tension (Cyborlink, 2026; Tantawi et al., 2026), which note that Indonesian collectivism, unlike Singapore's more consensus-oriented form, is more often used to avoid conflict than to enhance collaboration, so musyawarah risks stopping at procedural formality. In Indonesian schools specifically, this manifests as principals prioritizing administrative compliance over open relationships, and teachers trapped in unspoken role conflicts rather than voicing disagreement directly (Qodir et al., 2025).

The character of conflict in Indonesia therefore cannot be understood solely through the universal typology of conflict-handling styles; it must be read through a cultural lens positioning avoidance and accommodation as social norms structurally favored within hierarchical relations, not merely individual stylistic choices. Building healthy social capital and conflict management within Indonesian schools requires deliberately "reformulating" musyawarah from a formal procedure for legitimizing decisions into a data- and outcome-oriented problem-solving instrument (Tantawi et al., 2026), while building safe channels for members in lower power positions to voice differing opinions without risking loss of face (Ak et al., 2024).

A conflict management formula: Success and failure factors

The synthesis above can be elaborated into a conceptual formula, a heuristic, not a mathematically precise one, mapping two opposing groups of factors influencing the outcome of conflict management. The Success Potential of Conflict Management (SPCM) can be formulated as a function of the interaction among social capital, the fit between handling style and context, and leadership quality, minus the accumulation of structural and cultural failure factors:

$$\text{SPCM} = (\text{SC} + \text{SF} + \text{LQ}) - (\text{FH} + \text{AC} + \text{RD}) \quad \dots(1)$$

Where SC = social capital; SF = the fit between conflict-handling style and situational context (following Rahim (2002) and Shehu-Usman et al. (2024); LQ = leadership quality supporting openness and procedural fairness; FH = false harmony, or power-based avoidance disguising latent conflict; AC = centralization of conflict resolution in a single actor without institutional backing; and RD = relational competence deficit (low emotional intelligence, weak conflict-communication skills). The formula is propositional, intended as a framework for thought rather than a metrically measured instrument, to be operationalized in future empirical research.

Success-driving factors (high SPCM) include: strong social capital across its structural, cognitive, and relational dimensions, lowering the social cost of resolution (Ak et al., 2024; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998) a contingent fit between handling style and situation rather than rigid application of one style (Rahim, 2002; Shehu-Usman et al., (2024); Nikitara et al., 2024); leadership supporting open communication, procedural fairness, and participatory involvement in planning and evaluation (Bryson, 2011; Doran, 1981); and a cooperative goal orientation established even before conflict emerges (Deutsch, 1973), making the organizational climate a "field" conducive to constructive resolution.

Conversely, failure-driving factors (low SPCM) include: surface harmony from power-based avoidance, a risk particularly pronounced in high-power-distance cultures such as Indonesia (Tantawi et al., 2026); centralization of resolution in a single actor without institutional mechanisms, leaving capacity fragile and dependent on leadership turnover (Nugroho et al., 2020; Rostini, 2023); a deficit in relational competence, empirically correlated with less integrative style choices (Winardi et al., 2022; Vallone, 2022); and the absence of measurable success indicators, leaving social-capital strengthening a slogan without evaluation (Bryson, 2011; Doran, 1981).

This formula affirms that success is not a function of the “correct” technique alone, but the interaction among relational foundation, contextual precision, leadership capacity, and how far structural-cultural failure factors are minimized. In the Indonesian school context, the most salient implication is the need for deliberate intervention transforming false harmony into substantive harmony achieved through honest, participatory resolution rather than the suppression of conflict.

Mapping prior research: Shifting focus and gaps

Prior research on organizational conflict management falls into several strands. The first positions the leader as sole agent of resolution through a particular style: Nugroho et al. (2020) find mediation and team-formation by principals insufficient without transformational leadership; Rostini, (2023) and Janah, (2025) report that participatory and democratic styles create more harmonious environments than authoritarian ones; Nasrudin, (2021) highlight general mediation and negotiation strategies without discussing social capital specifically; and this leader-centered pattern recurs beyond Indonesia as well Djonra & Aki, (2023); Edet et al., (2017). The second strand explores social capital as an instrument of resolution largely outside formal organizations: Lestari (2020) shows social-capital values resolving conflict in a tourism-village development in Magetan; Zulkarnain et al. (2018) find institutionalized musyawarah traditions prevent recurring conflict in Bangka Belitung; Usmi (2025) emphasizes social capital and inclusive citizenship in preventing socio-ethnic conflict nationally, all three conceptualizing social capital as powerful at the community or ethnic-group level rather than within formal organizations.

The third strand, grounded in individual psychological traits, likewise leaves social capital as a collective instrument under-addressed: Winardi et al. (2022) systematic review of 29 studies finds emotional intelligence positively associated with integrating and problem-solving styles, with collectivist cultures tending toward more harmonious approaches; Vallone (2022) shows teachers’ multicultural personality traits correlate with intercultural conflict-management styles; Milton et al. (2019) examines higher-education leaders’ professional capital amid conflict in northern Syria. Several studies focus specifically on schools without centering social capital: Zohriah et al. (2023) examine strategies to prevent school violence, Zamil (2024) examines madrasah principals’ conflict-management styles, Rinjani et al. (2024) discuss conflict management within the learning process, and Mufidah (2025) documents school-based conflict spanning students, teachers, staff, and parents as a social factor shaping the educational environment. Vinokur (2024) comes closest to bridging the relational-social dimension with conflict management through a social-based learning approach. However, its emphasis remains more on individual-skills training than organization-wide social-capital institutionalization.

Recent studies begin to narrow this gap specifically within school organizations. Qodir et al. (2025), synthesizing 22 studies on conflict in Indonesian schools, confirm that collaborative approaches and transformational leadership are central. However, their review still frames the relational foundation mainly in cultural rather than structural terms. Belfi et al. (2015) instead operationalize social capital directly at the school level, and Mhando & Ambakisye (2025) apply it explicitly to student conflict resolution. Formal school organizations are thus gradually becoming sites where social capital and conflict management are studied together, even though most work still centers on the principal as the primary agent rather than on social capital as a collectively built resource.

This map confirms a consistent gap and a methodological divergence: studies addressing social capital outside formal organizations (Lestari et al., 2020; Zulkarnain et

al., 2018; Usmi, 2025) consistently employ qualitative approaches enabling deep contextual excavation, while studies linking individual psychological traits with conflict-handling styles (Winardi et al., 2022; Vallone, 2022) tend toward large-scale survey-based quantitative approaches. This suggests that research on social capital as an instrument of school conflict management could be developed through contextual qualitative case studies or larger quantitative surveys, including mixed-methods designs that combine case-study depth with statistical generalizability.

Synthesis and an integrative conceptual framework

The synthesis above yields four propositions. First, conflict within organizations, and especially schools is most productively understood through an interactionist, process-theory lens (Pondy, 1967; Robbins & Coulter, 2019): cyclical, detectable from the latent stage, and potentially functional if managed with a context-appropriate style (Thomas & Kilmann, 1978; Rahim, 2002). Second, social capital's three dimensions, structural, cognitive, relational Nahapiet & Ghoshal, (1998), function as a precondition lowering the probability that latent conflict escalates into destructive manifest conflict, while accelerating post-conflict recovery. Third, the relationship between conflict management and social capital is reciprocal: social capital facilitates constructive handling, and constructive handling, in turn, strengthens the trust and networks at social capital's core. Fourth, the potential for success or failure cannot be separated from cultural context; in Indonesia, high power distance and collectivism demand a social-capital-strengthening strategy specifically designed to transform avoidance and accommodation into substantive openness.

Based on these propositions, the integrative framework offered here positions social-capital strengthening not as a stage activated only after conflict occurs, but as a foundation built from the pre-conflict phase and continuously reinforced throughout the conflict-management cycle, planning, identification, intervention, and post-conflict evaluation. Within this framework, conflict that initially threatens stability can be transformed into motivational energy for institutional renewal, consistent with Lestari et al. (2020) findings in the non-formal domain, though not yet extensively tested empirically within formal school organizations in Indonesia's distinctive cultural context.

This framework opens avenues for further research: comparative studies measuring social capital's three dimensions in schools with differing conflict histories; longitudinal research tracing how social capital changes across the conflict-resolution-recovery cycle; empirical testing of the SPCM formula through standardized instruments; and development of measurement instruments adapted to Indonesian school culture, given that most available instruments were developed for industrial or Western contexts (Ak et al., 2024; Rahim, 2002).

Implications for organizational (school) management practice

This synthesis carries several practical implications for managers across education, corporate, and bureaucratic sectors. First, leadership needs to shift from a "firefighting" orientation toward building a climate that actively cultivates trust and communication networks from the pre-conflict phase onward, through routine, not incidental, cross-unit evaluation forums, safe anonymous feedback mechanisms, and space to raise objections without stigma (Ak et al., 2024; Bryson, 2011). For school organizations specifically, this implies that principals and leadership teams must treat relationship-building among teachers, staff, students, and parents as deliberate institutional work rather than an incidental by-product of daily interaction (Qodir et al., 2025).

Second, social-capital strengthening needs to be structurally designed and measurable rather than left to grow spontaneously, formulated using the SMART framework as adapted from Doran (1981) and Bryson (2011), with indicators such as stakeholder participation rates, frequency of cross-unit interaction, and satisfaction with the fairness of resolution processes. With measurable indicators, social-capital strengthening becomes an integral part of the planning and performance-evaluation cycle rather than a culture slogan.

Third, within the Indonesian context specifically, building openness must consciously anticipate the tendency toward false harmony born of high power distance, by institutionalizing *musyawarah* as a data- and outcome-driven process rather than a ritual of decision legitimation Tantawi et al., (2026), and by providing alternative channels, anonymous reporting or neutral third-party facilitation for members in lower power positions to voice differing views without risking loss of face.

Fourth, professional-development programs need to explicitly incorporate conflict-management literacy and relational skills, as exemplified by the social-based learning approach (Vinokur, 2024), rather than treating them as innate. Such training should equip individuals not only with negotiation or mediation techniques, but with a collective awareness that relational strength- networks of trust among staff, between staff and leadership, and between the school and external stakeholders is an organizational asset requiring deliberate cultivation.

Discussion

The findings synthesized above carry implications that extend beyond school management as a narrow administrative concern and speak directly to Sustainable Development Goal 16, particularly its emphasis on building effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels (Target 16.6) and ensuring responsive, participatory, and representative decision-making (Target 16.7). Read through this lens, the school ceases to be merely a site where conflict happens. It becomes a proximate, observable unit of institutional governance in which the conditions for peaceful, accountable dispute resolution are cultivated or eroded daily.

First, the SPCM formula developed in this review can be read as a micro-level operationalization of SDG 16's institutional-quality agenda. Where SDG 16 asks how institutions become accountable and effective at national or sub-national scale, the formula translates the same question into observable school-level variables: social capital, style-context fit, and leadership quality as drivers of institutional legitimacy, against false harmony, single-actor centralization, and relational deficits as drivers of institutional fragility. This suggests that indicators typically reserved for macro-governance assessment- participation rates, transparency of procedure, and availability of grievance channels- may usefully be adapted downward to evaluate the governance quality of individual educational institutions, rather than treated as relevant only to courts, parliaments, or bureaucracies.

Second, the analysis of false harmony in high-power-distance settings such as Indonesia complicates a straightforward reading of SDG 16.7's call for participatory decision-making. *Musyawarah* is often presented internationally as an exemplar of deliberative, consensus-based governance; this review suggests that without deliberate reformulation into a data- and outcome-oriented mechanism, *musyawarah* risks functioning as a procedural ritual that manufactures the appearance of participation while leaving underlying power asymmetries, and the conflicts they generate, unaddressed. This distinction matters for SDG 16 discourse generally: participatory mechanisms can satisfy the form of Target 16.7 while failing its substantive intent, a risk

not unique to Indonesian schools but plausibly generalizable to other high-power-distance institutional contexts pursuing SDG 16 compliance largely through procedural adoption rather than cultural reformulation.

Third, the review's finding that school conflict routinely implicates child safety, parental trust, and community legitimacy simultaneously connects institutional conflict management to SDG 16's broader concern with reducing violence and building trust in institutions (Targets 16.1 and 16.6 read together). A school that institutionalizes transparent, rule-bound channels for handling disagreement is, in effect, practicing the same trust-building logic SDG 16 prescribes for justice and governance institutions more broadly, positioning schools as an early, formative site where citizens first experience, and internalize expectations about, what accountable institutional response to grievance looks like.

Fourth, this reframing also suggests a two-way relationship worth foregrounding in future SDG-linked education research: schools are not only beneficiaries of stronger institutions (as SDG 16 is sometimes framed relative to SDG 4) but potential contributors to SDG 16 outcomes, in that the conflict-handling norms, transparency practices, and participatory habits established in schools may plausibly shape how future adults engage with, and expect accountability from, institutions later in civic and professional life. This intergenerational-institutional link remains speculative based on a narrative review alone and would benefit from the longitudinal and comparative designs proposed earlier in this article.

Finally, these points should be read with appropriate caution: a school is not a state institution, and the transaction costs, legal accountability structures, and power asymmetries that shape SDG 16 at national scale are not identical to those within a single educational organization. The value of the SDG 16 framing here is therefore heuristic rather than equivalential; it offers a vocabulary and set of evaluative targets (accountability, participation, transparency, reduced institutional violence) that can sharpen how school-level conflict management is assessed and designed, without claiming that success at the school level is sufficient, on its own, to advance SDG 16 at the systemic level.

CONCLUSION

Fundamental Finding: This review shows that organizational conflict discourse has evolved from a repressive, traditional view to an interactionist perspective that recognizes conflict's functional potential. School organizations, characterized by distinctive hierarchies, heterogeneous stakeholders, and a dual bureaucratic-professional structure, require an approach that extends beyond reliance on individual leadership styles. While social capital-trust, relational networks, and norms of reciprocity-plays a decisive role in preventing and resolving conflict, its systematic application within formal school organizations remains an unexamined research gap, particularly in specific national and cultural contexts such as Indonesia. To address this gap, this article offers four core contributions: first, a conceptualization of school organizations' distinctive institutional architecture; second, a staged mapping of the conflict process as applied to schools, from latent conditions to post-conflict aftermath; third, the Success Potential of Conflict Management (SPCM) formula, positioning social capital, conflict-style congruence, and leadership quality as catalysts for resolution against false harmony, single-actor centralization, and relational deficits as drivers of failure; and fourth, a contextual and cultural synthesis of conflict management in Indonesian schools, shaped by high power distance, strong collectivism, and a cultural preference for relational harmony. **Implication:** The framework presented here is not intended to replace

established conflict-handling typologies, but to enrich their practical application by integrating structural and cultural dimensions. Social capital is a foundational prerequisite that determines whether an integrative conflict-handling style can genuinely take root or remain hindered by low trust, fragmented communication, and cultural hesitations about addressing discomfort directly. For school leaders and policymakers, this implies that investments in conflict management cannot be separated from investments in social capital and cultural sensitivity-with direct bearing on school quality (SDG 4) and institutional accountability (SDG 16), as discussed above. **Limitation:** As a narrative rather than a systematic review, this study's literature selection was concept-driven and purposive rather than exhaustive, which may have excluded relevant studies outside the search strings used. The SPCM formula is propositional and heuristic; it has not been empirically tested or statistically validated, and its components have not yet been operationalized into measurable indicators. The synthesis also draws predominantly on secondary, published sources rather than original fieldwork, so it may not fully capture context-specific dynamics within individual Indonesian schools. **Future Research:** Future studies should prioritize: empirical testing of the SPCM formula through validated instruments adapted to Indonesian school culture, rather than instruments originally developed for industrial or Western contexts; comparative studies measuring social capital's structural, cognitive, and relational dimensions across schools with differing conflict histories; longitudinal research tracing how social capital changes across the conflict-resolution-recovery cycle; and mixed-methods designs combining qualitative case-study depth with quantitative generalizability to examine how *musyawarah* can be reformulated into a genuinely participatory, outcome-oriented mechanism within Indonesian schools.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Alif Firdaus Zamzam contributed to the conceptual framework, literature synthesis, and manuscript drafting; **Yatim Riyanto** contributed to the research design, theoretical validation, and critical revision of the manuscript; **Muhamad Sholeh** contributed to the literature search, data/reference management, and manuscript review. All listed authors have reviewed and approved the final version of this submission.

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The authors confirm that there are no conflicts of interest, either financial or personal, that may have influenced the content or outcome of this study.

ETHICAL COMPLIANCE STATEMENT

This manuscript complies with research and publication ethics. The authors affirm that the work is original, conducted with academic integrity, and free from any unethical practices, including plagiarism.

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