

Forces Come in Pairs: Conflict Mediation as Science and Art in Philippine Schools Overseas (PSO's)

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Abstract

Advocating mediation as a powerful noncoercive, nonviolent, and nonbinding form of conflict intervention, school administrators and corporate managers are bound to mediate conflict before it escalates to formal litigation in court. Guided by the principle of bracketing or reductions to come up with themes through reading and rereading of texts and member-checking procedures, this phenomenological paper has surfaced triad powers of conflict mediation as exercised by 10 select school administrators of Philippine Schools Overseas in the Middle East particularly in The United Arab Emirates, The Sultanate of Oman and The State of Qatar. These include power productive compassion, power of pro-active disposition and power of progressive decision which enabled them to mediate conflict at their peak state of reflective equilibrium. Amass of ways to resolving conflicts is placed on records but these triad powers on conflict mediation provide portal to probing that conflict mediation is both a science and an art the extent to which school leaders must exercise equilibrium between mind and heart to avoid biased decision, to strengthen working relationship, and to achieve work productivity at the work place.

Keywords: Conflict mediation, Filipino Administrators, Philippine School Overseas Power of productive compassion, Power of proactive disposition, Power of progressive decision, Middle East

1. Introduction

Mediating conflict is a profound move in the dynamics of interpersonal interactions and disagreements aimed at helping adversaries reach a settlement (Maley, 1995, Bercovitch & Regan, 2003; Dixon, 1996; Bercovitch & Diehl, 2004) and shorten the duration of a conflict (Regan & Aydin, 2006). By and large, mediation is a powerful noncoercive, nonviolent, and ultimately nonbinding form of intervention where disputants seek assistance or accept offer of help from an individual, group, state or organization to resolve differences without resorting to physical violence or invoking the authority of the law (Felstiner & Williams 1978, Regan & Aydin, 2006; Bercovitch & Derouen, 2004). While experts in the field have contextually designed mediation forms including conflict handling strategies such as integrating, accommodating, compromising, forcing and avoiding (Al-Ajmi, 2007; Song, Dyer, & Thieme 2006) and mediation styles of conciliation, consultation, facilitation pure mediation, power mediation, arbitration, peacekeeping (Fisher, 2007) their meaningful effects are subject to situations wherein some authorities in conflict management have opposed. There is evidence that mediation is not truly effective when there is high level of hostility between disputants (Bercovitch, 1989; Hiltrop, 1989; Pruitt, McGillicuddy, Welton, & Fry, 1989). The mediator is distrusted (Hiltrop, 1989), lacks resources (Carevale, Lim, & McLaughlin, 1989), disputants are uncommitted to mediation (Carevale, Lim, & McLaughlin, 1989), the issues involved general principles (Bercovitch, 1989; Pruitt et al., 1989), disputants have unequal power (Bercovitch, 1989), and there is significant psychopathology in disputants' relationship and psycho-therapy rather than mediation is required (Kressel & Pruitt, 1989). Relatively speaking, full mediation changes in the mediating variables where some of the effects can be explained by the mediator but not all.

Although defining what "mediation" is sounds like a hollow philosophical exercise (Moffitt, 2009), it is interesting to note that learning institutions such as schools, colleges and universities favor mediation as a form of peaceful third-party intervention to steer parties toward agreement through communication and diagnosis, and reward them a degree of control over the context of conflict and its process (Bercovitch & Derouen, 2004). This qualitative paper argues that success of conflict mediation process depends on the ability of the mediator to exercise his power ensuring him that the extent of his authority is basically grounded on *Ethos*-trust 'SQ', *Pathos* - empathy 'EQ', *Logos*- logic 'IQ' philosophy of influence Covey (2004). Covey (2004) for his part, magnifies that conscience is the moral law within. It is the overlapping of moral law and behavior. It is the voice of God's calling to his children. Others may not believe this belief but recognize that there is innate sense of fairness and justice, innate of right or wrong and what is kind and unkind, what contributes and what detracts, what beautifies and what destroys, what is true and what is false. Mediation is essentially a discursive context and power manifests itself not only in terms of who can make the other party bend further to his will but in what instances can be told and can be heard. It is less obvious that mediators understand the operation of these discursive forms of power in mediation (Astor, 2007). In line with this context, the environment of Philippine Schools Overseas is not devoid of conflict-prone zone due to its unique system of operation. Conflict mediation is thus always a favorable mood of resolving disputes rather than

elevating cases in a more formal litigating court. Conflict mediation offers a meaningful and peaceable atmosphere that may regulate the heightened emotion of disputants.

Cognizant of the magnificent value of conflict mediation and in other human organizations, Bercovitch and Derouen , (2004) articulated that mediation nurtures diplomacy and restores communication between hostile parties, or helps them settle their conflict amicably which holds enduring success in social, institutional and political organizations. The essence of the *lebenswelt* of the experiences surfaced in this study can expectedly transcend school administrators' thinking and moral frame from being conflict-driven individuals to mediation-laden managers who value schools as social networks for education and development where the principle of coexistence in human organizations reigns.

2. Research Method

Design

Qualitative in orientation, this study made use of phenomenological design. This design, according to Giorgi (1985), starts by describing a situation experienced in daily life. It comes from a position prior to reflexive thought called prereflexive thought, which consists of a 'return to the very things' of intentionality of consciousness. This intention is turned towards the world that it neither includes nor possesses, but it is always turned (Martins 1992).

Study Locus and sample

Ten school administrators representing Philippine School Overseas in three different countries in the Middle East, namely: United Arab Emirates, Sultanate of Oman and State of Qatar. The respondents of this research study. Five of whom were school principals and the other five were members of the school board of trustees. Three schools in Abu Dhabi, U.A.E. are managed by three school principals, all Doctors of Education. One of them has managed and supervised the school for fifteen years. Two school principals who are all masters degree holders have been serving the school in Dubai, U.A.E. and in Sharjah, U.A.E. All of them have served their respective schools for more than 5 years. Said schools are also managed by the governing school board of trustees who have served their respective schools as chairmen for more than 2 years. One has already served the school for sixteen years nine of which were all chairmanships.

Instrumentation

Data needed in this study were gathered using a 2-part instrument. The first part called was the *robotfoto* (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002) sought for respondents' demographic file, namely: gender, number of years serving the school, work affiliation and profession. The second part was Semi-structured interview which according to Fossey, (2001) has further use in following up on specific ideas or issues, explore specific experiences ensuring that the sensitivity of subject being researched will float in respondents' consciousness.

Data Collection and Ethical Consideration

To capture the essence of the phenomenon of this investigation, the initial move of this research was to ensure a written consent to be interviewed in the subjects was first sought (Arkley, & Knight, 1999; Bailey, 1996). Prior to the interview proper, respondents were well informed that the interview would last for two hours and their utterances would be tape recorded for purposes of transcription and data interpretation. To ensure their openness and their natural expressions of sharing, respondents were assured of utmost confidentiality of their responses. Interview questions were delivered in English yet it was inevitable that some of the responses were expressed in Filipino. Such expressions were well interpreted from *emic* side to the outsider's perspective or the *etic* side of the responses.

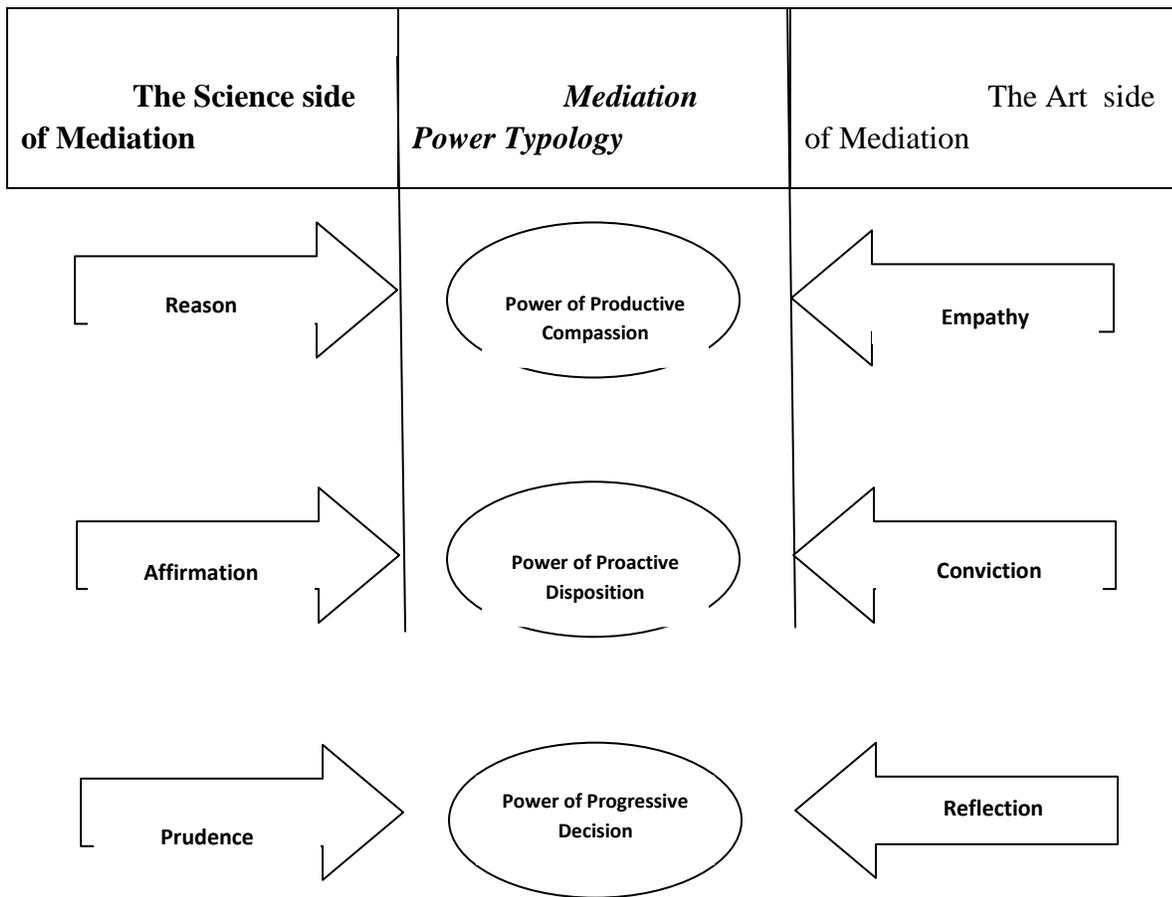
Mode of Analysis

This phenomenological design has adapted Martins' (1992) way of analyzing the collected data which consists of three different moments of phenomenological reduction called e'poche.' The first moment, by keeping the description in its original format that puts it between brackets aimed to analyze experience as lived without allowing personal or theoretical concepts to get in the way of the rigor with which the description is being listened to. The second moment, a radical gestalt perspective is created where observer and subject are the focus of the description consisting of arranged data in themes to identify significant topics in that subject's transcript called units of significance. The third focuses on the prereflexive sources on what interviewees' say about their daily lives and states the meanings of the experience psychological insights included therein. Field texts were analyzed via a *dendogram* where data were grouped into similar themes expressed by the participants (Faulkner, & Sparkes, 1999). Once final analysis was done, the researcher presented this to the peer review process, a practice called 'member checking. These techniques served as feedback to ensure trustworthiness of captured findings (McWilliam, Kothari, Catherine Ward-Griffin, Forbes, & Leipert, 2009).

3. Research Findings

From the verbalizations, musing and sharings of the respondents, this phenomenological study purports to capture the conflict mediation experiences of a select group of school administrators and school board of trustees in their attempt to mediating conflicts between and among employees of the Philippine School Overseas (PSOs). Purposely, this paper answers the central question "*What makes a leader a conflict mediation enabler?*" As shown in this study, mediation, as a means of amicable conciliation of the conflict phenomenon, is seen both science and art. As a science, it provides will power that enables school managers to process and deliberate information imperatively manner. As an art, it nurtures human relationship that puts premium on the centrality of the human person endowed with dignity. Coupling the science and art aspects of mediation endows a school manager with the powers of productive compassion, power of proactive disposition, and power of progressive decision. These powers are said to be the by-product of managers' ability to blend reason and empathy, affirmation and conviction, and prudence and reflection as shown in the table.

Table 1 Mediation Power Typologies



Power of Productive Compassion

In making decisions on matters that relate to termination, policy modifications and giving a release certificate to employees, the role of compassion as a management value important in conflict mediation. As shown by the findings of this paper, the PSO’s school administrators make it a point that when making decisions, communication lines are opened and opportunities are laid down purposely for practicing justice. A confirmatory statement relative to this was revealed by school administrators who had a collective thought of taking actions for their people.

“I would just like to inform you sir, that one of my considerations of terminating staff aside from being a low performing teacher is the capability of being employed in other establishments. It is really hurting on my part that I recruited teachers from the Philippines only to terminate them and I know their reasons of going abroad.”

“I always consider what my staff feels, and how they will react on the decision. The same thing with the students, I always make sure that changes in policy would be for the good of all.”

“I am for the good of everybody not for my ownself vested interest. As long as I follow the policy I have to do it. It is one of my duties to maintain and implement the decision of all.”

“I seldom use my absolute authority I always consider the collective decision and adhered to the voice of the majority even if the decision is very unpopular.”

The foregoing collective experiences typify how compassion as illumined by empathy and right reason guide a manager’s thinking and behavior. Interestingly, when reason is coupled with empathy, decisions are directed to a path where fairness is described as power of productive compassion. Evidently, one trustee shared ***“I always look at the two sides of the coin to avoid biases. I balance the decision from the dictate of the heart and the mind, and not from the dictate of others.”*** Indeed, making decision grounded on empathy and right reason transcends a manager’s understanding of his subordinates’ concern without losing sight of the objective reality. The power of productive compassion becomes more evident if the decision informs an individual to constantly promote understanding and life giving.

Power of Proactive Disposition

Interestingly, PSOs school administrators operate in an environment of pains and struggles that put into test their leadership skills and divine faithfulness. Cognizant of this, one school administrator shared her unforgettable experience that had almost caused her life when she was confronted with the most challenging situation in the school. Following was her narration:

“Few years back when the school was on its second year of operation, I almost gave up everything including my life and my family. The school was facing financial problem up to the point of closure for reasons of financial incapability. It was a very bad experience and I ended myself in jail because of financial obligations for teachers, school building rentals and a lot more. I was in prison for issuing a bouncing check to somebody. The following morning I was released and I went home. I was so depressed. If not only of my two kids who gave me strength, I would have jumped out of the building so that problems would be solved. I was holding my rosary and asked God why he gave me this problem and made me feel too much pain. While I was praying, I felt that there was somebody who enlightened my mind, so I said, Thy will be done. Here I am now a survivor, a risked taker and a visionary because I believe that the school survived because of my prayer and conviction to move on no matter how difficult the problem was. Had I committed suicide, I would not be able to see the blossoming success of the school and I could not also enjoy the fruit of my labor. I really Praise GOD for the challenges I encountered because He made me see the beauty of life when I leaned on his divine grace and promise.”

The foregoing story speaks of a disposition that enables a school manager to look at events in a proactive way. Another revelation shared by school administrators when difficulty at work almost succumb them to defeat. All have shared some experiences:

“I am a prayerful man. The Lord will not give us difficult situation that we cannot carry. So I trust Him.”

“These are purely the test of my faith and my leadership and this is also the price of being in this position.”

“I just laugh at it and try to reflect everything. I talk and smile at people who are trying to destroy me and even shake their hands. Thru this gesture probably I can change their mind that I am not the kind of person who they think I am. I always believe the power of good over evil.”

Their responses were also confirmed by other administrators who were asked about how they would react on destructive comments and school problems. They said:

“Well, as an administrator of the school, I am always confronted with problems. But I see them as challenges that eventually make me stronger in facing bigger and even worse in the future. When I came here I was not a very experienced principal but I considered problems as a way of helping me to grow to become a better administrator and a better person.”

“I take comments positively who knows that these destructive comments will lead me to a more improved system .”

“I take it as an eye opener on areas where I should improve on.”

They serve as my way of reflecting myself whether along the way I have also committed lapses.”

The foregoing verbalizations show how various managerial episodes have become an authentic space for learning where strong conviction and affirmation nurture a manager's experience of the so called power of proactive disposition. Such power makes a manager to exercise his power guided by a strong belief to the Supreme being.

Power of Progressive Decision

Understanding further the power of mediation lays wide latitude of administrators' absolute authority in decision-making. Enlightened with this, two school administrators vehemently expressed that making decisions require prudence and reflection. They averred:

“My decision is based on reflective fairness not on a structured dogmatic policy. I sometime delay my decisions to ask for enlightenment before I decide on something. It is hard to make decision based on politics and hearsay; not on sound judgment. In human organization, we always deal with people who also have the right to be heard.”

“There are two aspects that I need to consider in coming up with the decision. First I try my best to be guided with the actual logic, the scientific way of making decisions. Second is, when decision has been made it has to ensure that it will not create another problem before implementing it. When I make decision, it always takes time. I need

quiet time for reflection before I could come up with its finality most particularly if it involves human life.”

Combined power of reflection and prudence in decision making liberates a school manager to be devoid of deceptive judgment and politics which make them experience power called power of progressive decision. This power reverberates in the consciousness of leaders to process ideas and examine trustworthiness of facts that predominate good over evil, take careful account of circumstances, weigh costs and benefits, value principles and interests in a more humane and judicial way.

4. Discussion

From the fascinating insights and musings of a select group of PSOs school administrators, findings in this phenomenological study clearly indicated that mediation is both a science and art. Mediation is information driven scientific stance that lies on the validity of question raised and the truthfulness of answers generated which are neither timeless nor even perennial, but products of historical processes as a dynamic attempt beyond the bounds of mechanics but for all crucial notions, induction and simplicity (Jardine, 2003). Such effort is concretized by renouncing the desire to punish for an offense being committed (Undung & De Guzman, 2009). As an art mediation requires attaching one's emotion within the human consciousness, pre consciousness or even unconsciousness level (Johnson, 1987; Vinnicombe, 1976). This level is termed by Mandler, (1998) as a conceptual representations of “transformations of perceptual information” that can arouse deepest aesthetic feeling” (Vinnicombe, 1976) which is the fundamental feature of art (Boas, 1923).

On the whole the practice of mediation typifies the connection of both science and art which describe the dynamic interplay between and among mediation power typologies: namely, the power of productive compassion, the power of proactive disposition and the power of progressive decision. Said mediation powers enable the school administrators to view and address conflict in a more prolific and humane way which typifies the distinct place and the role of emotional quotient (EQ) in school management. Mayer and Salovey (1997) for their part, defined EQ as the ability to perceive accurately, appraise, and express emotion, the ability to access and/or generate feelings when they facilitate thought, the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge and the ability to regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth. Translated in management terms, to be emotionally intelligent is to create a good balance between thinking and feeling, where the former clarifies the latter end, the latter illumines the former.

The Power of Productive Compassion

This mediation power views conflict management as a human and humane activity that best operates within the precept of mercy not of pity. By and large, mercy provides lifelong comfort while pity is a temporary relief (Dossey, 2007). As the lived experiences of school would put it, compassion is an act of mercy that provides an enduring comfort to employees. Compassion does not mean feeling sorry or pity for people but feeling with the other, learning to

dethrone oneself from the centre of his world and put another there. The extent to which school managers enter into the feeling realm of their followers situates a person not only in the test of religiosity but a means to enter into enlightenment (Dossey, 2007). Crawshaw, (1996) strongly claimed that the ultimate leverage for significant change rests with a community of compassion in which the deepest values of the people are understood through the leaders' co-passion for suffering. It does more than to ameliorate psychopathology but also predicts positive psychological strengths that links from painful feelings to a happier, more optimistic mindset, and appears to facilitate the ability to grow, explore, and wisely understand oneself and others (Nev, Rude, Kirkpatrick, 2007).

On one hand, when compassion is manifested through delightful reason, administrators provide opportunity for his staff to explore possibilities within his reach. As Dreitzel (2002) opined reasons are ethics preoccupied with the inner workings of man's heart, and wants it to arrange in such a way that it lives in peace that concerns the preservation of one's reasonable intentions. This constitutive thinking is spontaneously carried out by a transcendental subject a pure intellect existing outside space and time as the timeless forms in which it obtains self-consciousness (Hunter, 2009). Reason seeks to achieve a systematization of empirical laws in a systematic organization. As a whole, reason in its regulative employment proceeds constitutively as a guide to its endless quest for a unified ideas that favor both employees and employer after pointing to the need for given intuitions that instantiate the abstract of pure concepts of the understanding and thus provide them with objective reality (Jardine, 2003; Friedman, 2003). On the other hand, the importance of empathy in school leadership practice cannot be underestimated. No school administrator can see and appreciate the joy of human transformation without empathy (Undung & Guzman, 2009). Empathy comes from the German word *Einfühlung*, commonly refers to a complex of affective-cognitive activity involving emotional attunement and imagining how another person feels (Holpern, 2007; Wispé, 1986). It is about a person's ability to understand and to immerse one's feelings or emotions that helps guide the progression of thoughts in the form of highly salient sensory information directing the consciousness to act favorably (Epstein, 2004, Mehrabian, & Epstein, 1972). Empathy is a universal and effective phenomenon (Mehrabian, & Epstein, 1972) as a fundamental dimension of interpersonal and communication competence that follows the Confucian golden rule focusing on human heartedness (Dossey, 2007; Redmond, 1989). This principle of human heartedness is parallel to what Kouassi (2008) emphasized that in conflict mediation, empathy is evident in a form of diplomacy and negotiations requiring special effort on the part of human beings to go beyond raw emotions and minimize the risk of conflict escalation as well as its duration. Diplomacy is synonymous to preservation of peace. But the absence of empathy leads to judgmental bias that displays "knew-it-all-along" effect or "hindsight bias (Szalanski & Fobian, 1991). Upon learning the outcome of an event or the answer to a question, people tend to believe that the result is relatively inevitable. Such hindsight bias has been shown to be a robust phenomenon in a variety of judgmental domains including historical events. Therefore empathy plays a pivotal role in educational leadership practice. It creates and (Fischhoff, & Beyth, 1975) maintains a sound and dynamic interpersonal milieu in dynamic social enterprises such as schools, colleges and universities (Undung & Guzman, 2009). Through empathy, the leader who is emotionally attuned is able to extend much consideration to followers. Such evidence can be felt by mutual trust, understanding, respect for, and support for another's ideas and appreciation

of their feelings (Ferch, & Mitchel, 2001; Goleman, 1995). Guided by a compassionate heart, a caring school leader deals with and transforms his subordinates with empathy. The extent to which a caring leader advances empathic concern depends, in great measure, on his ability to understand and feel the needs and concerns of his followers and addresses these through caring activities and decisions (Undung & De Guzman, 2009).

Indeed the power of productive compassion is an act of mercy within the context of empathy and reason. When compassion resides within the realm of empathy and reason, it generates the power to mediate within the bounds of compassionate wisdom. Such wisdom is essential in prioritizing knowledge of events and foreseeing possible consequence when decision is declared. Accordingly, being wise, means knowing the story and being able to see and appreciate the deepest significance of occurring conflict as it is enfolded in a context-bound of intuitive judgment.

Power of Proactive Disposition

Achieving congruence between conviction and affirmation in human relationship and in leadership praxis calls for power called proactive disposition which recognizes a manager's proactive way in looking at things, persons and events. Such conviction orders conscience to affirm one's freedom in valuing self-worth, faith and respect for other's opinion in an outright intuition at the consciousness level. An intuition is a form of conviction that may presage the insightful moment of "feeling of knowing" or "tip of the tongue" phenomenon (Klosko, Keren & Nyikos, 2003). It is a judgment for a given course of action that comes to mind with an aura or conviction of rightness or plausibility that offers potential guidance for individual judgment and decision making anchored on human choice (Hodgkinson, Smith, Burke, Claxton & Sparrow, 2009). As defined by Cleveland and Jacobs (1999), human choice is the basic mechanism for liberating and productively harnessing the potential energy in society. It is the mind's decisions that releases human energy and propels it into action, for purposes and toward ends preselected by the human mind. Conversely, the human mind universally generates specific conceptions or senses of time in particular one for which Cassirer (1944) and Audi (1995) deploy the term universality which lies in the heart that takes form of a common experiential context for epiphany which is more-or-less identical to standard philosophical definitions of intuition. However, Ratner, and Herbst, (2003) opposed when they said that it is frustrating but true that even one's best decisions sometimes would result to in unwanted outcomes. Perceived dilemma when trying to decide subsequently leads to the negative affect generated by one's initial unfavorable consequence sensationalized with regret. Undoubtedly, regret is a negative emotional influence that the rational decision process can have indirect effects on individual behavior in shaping his attitudes and judgments (Gutnik, Hakimzada, Yoskowitz, & Patel, 2005). Conviction requires both internal values and a context that brings a teleological intentionality or self-directedness and alternative trajectories through possibility of space (Lucas, 2005), of productive harnessing of potential energy (Cleveland & Jacobs, 1999) of human moral and ethical knowledge (Crandall, 2004). These self-directedness and trajectories guide the mediator to mediate conflict employing conviction and affirmation as essential power in keeping with the idea of wide reflective equilibrium and judicial opinions. Wide reflective equilibrium attempts to produce affirmation of

the mind and a conviction of the heart that sets actions under the moral principles of what is good, beneficial and what one ought to do (Klosko, Keren & Nyikos, 2003). This is also similar to what Dahbour (2003) kept emphasized that to attain reflective equilibrium it must be grounded on affirmation originated as a notion of individual's freedom to determine the conditions of his own life characterized by shift of concern from 'personhood' to 'peoplehood' or self-determination. Each individual has to become aware of his choices based on what his mind tells and what his heart dictates (Gratton & Ghoshal, 2003). Cleveland and Jacobs, (1999) remarked that the quality of multiple individual choices is a complex function of the quality of information, education, knowledge, ideals, opinions, attitudes, and values in society that revive sense of affirmation. Affirmation is self-determination of pure freedom that dissipates absolute fear of penetrating depth of commitment which can be gained only when the mind is properly attuned to moods and motivations associated with profound and fundamental knowledge and dialectical thinking (Burbidge, 1981; Crandall, 2004). Dialectical thinking is widely presumed to be responsible for providing balanced view on self-relevant information of costs and benefits before the final decision has to be made (Choi & Choi, 2002; Ji, Zhang, Osborne, & Guan, 2004).

Certainly, people have different levels of interpersonal skill and emotional acuity. These differences are present in the way school administrators of PSOs mediate conflict by providing their employees capacity for creativity and resourcefulness and by extending greater freedom of choice where actions are products of personal intuition, knowledge and experience. This proved that the power of proactive disposition emanates from the merging of conviction and affirmation rooted solely in the external manipulations of lived reality, reality that may yield anything more than a simple majority of positive experiences but a mechanism for the generation of really strong and enduring convictions. This power directs school administrators not just to observe their people but also to ensure corporate values are lived, well exercised and balanced despite changes and challenges that occur at the workplace. In a dynamic organization, proactive disposition elevates individual's democratization of work that requires self-affirmation and enduring conviction to move on. Each has to take responsibility for his or her own development, instead of passively relying on others to manage it for them. In a fast changing world, all elements of human capital erode rapidly. Knowledge becomes obsolete unless it is updated; relationships weaken unless they are continuously refreshed; self-efficacy and courage diminish unless judiciously exercised. The extent to which power of proactive disposition is expressed nurtures school administrators' high sense of optimism, which in turn, the capacity to see hindsight, hindsight and foresight at the same time encourages employees to see and address failures graciously. Failures are indeed processes of perfection and not to doom one's vision.

Power of Progressive Decision

In providing conceptual foundation in conflict mediation in PSOs, findings reflect that uniting prudence and reflection create progressive power in decision making. This power guides school administrators to make decisions illumined by a prudential mind tempered by the reflective heart. Such practice ensures a good grasp of wisdom discourse with sufficient integrity thus avoiding managerial failure on their part. By and large, management and leadership theorists and practitioners correlate wisdom with prudence which they termed organizational wisdom (Srivastva & Cooperrider, 1998). Organizational theorists, Malan and Kriger (1998), refer to this

as a “sixth sense or well-developed intuitive powers” that balance ideas and excellent judgment. Excellent judgment, insightfulness and character are needed in leaders which feature the principle of wisdom as equated to a rational prudence of individual self-interest and moral evaluations of impersonal egoism (Panichas, 1988). Interestingly, prudence comes from the latin word, *prudencia*, that connotes discernment, discretion and foresight (Nichols & White, 1979). In a broader sense, to be prudent in decision making, one must have the assumption of natural philosophy rooted in the common *experience* of universal truth that satisfies a particular societal or legal conception of critical process (Redekop, 2002; Lipkin, 1990) A society or legal system that formulates a standard of conduct embodying the degree of criticism required in holding individual accountability and responsibility (Lipkin, 1990). According to Mapel, (1990), prudence is concerned with interpreting and applying the principles of morality in particular situations and with making instrumental calculations within the given frameworks of preference, not with balancing or trading off moral principles against other values. Undoubtedly, prudence does not conform to compromise but to what is morally acceptable and upright. Such uprightness dethrones personal motives and vested interests but nurtures wisdom that defines the attributes of wise leaders. Wise leaders respect experience and tradition, and use this resource appropriately (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000). They are all able to draw upon wisdom various perspectives, ontogenetic, and historically situated (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000). Nonetheless, wise leaders are epistemologically skeptical. Their fluid intelligence (Sternberg, 1990) questions the knowledge inherent in propositions. Thus, wise leaders occasionally need to be skeptical and play the role of devil’s advocate. Furthermore, they focus at the right level or aspect by choosing the “facts” salient in a given situation (Eflin, 2003). In other words, they “filter and interpret the noise from within their own organizations and determine the salient points on which to act” (Malan & Kriger, 1998). Therefore, wisdom is not just concerned with rational processing of knowledge but a prudential process that brings together reflective action and the transcendental depth of decision making. Moreover, wisdom accepts the complex, cuts through ambiguity, and derives its energy from the tensions and uncertainties of a complex world. In short, the wise finds the best possible resolutions in complex and difficult situations when others do not; this may even mean choosing the best “bad” decision in diabolical situations (Mc Kenna, Rooney & Boal 2009) .

At an organizational level, prudence is borne out of reflective action. Reflective action manifests as the ability to detect changing patterns in organizations over time and perceive rates of change in internal and external environments of organization” (Malan & Kriger, 1998) This further elucidates that reflective people recognize the value of excellent judgment with a grasp that reconciles changes, and contradictions of human nature which can be magnified by process of discernment. At impersonal level, such discernment requires experience (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001) and awareness. This awareness allows leaders to recognize and manage uncertainty because they are aware of the limits of reason based on cognition (Bigelow, 1992). Baltes and Staudinger (2000) and Sternberg (1990) assert that wise leaders realize the limits of human information processing and that future cannot be predicted through technical applications (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000; Sternberg, 1990). Realizing that progressive decision making implies moving beyond existing rules and being tolerant of ambiguous situations is one of the most salient predictors of wisdom (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000) that cuts across the boundary of conformity to the world that administrators live in. These two principles of prudence and reflection are mutually exclusive but represent two facets of a single phenomenon; they must be

jointly coordinated by the agent of power particularly the power of a progressive decision to achieve prudential goal in conflict mediation.

5. Conclusion

This study attempts to create a panorama of conflict mediation experiences of a select group of administrators representing the Philippine School Overseas. Though governed by curricular structure and policies of the Philippine Department of Education, conflicts arising from the internal and external environment of the school challenge school administrators and board of trustees to exercise distinct mediation powers render the overall conflict mediation landscape as intersection of both science and arts. Mediation, as a science, puts into test the ability of the school leader to exercise a wide latitude of rationality that justifies the merits of every decision made. Mediation, as an art, invites the school leader to temper his moves and words with enduring values that incarnate life into the dynamics of human relationship. Interestingly, when art and science starts to permeate conflict mediation, the triad powers such as the power of productive compassion, the power of proactive disposition and the power of progressive decision will be employed. The power of productive compassion induces school leaders to embrace both empathy and reason that exemplify the act of mercy over the act of pity. The power of proactive disposition prompts managers to consider challenges proactively in the light of conviction and affirmation thus, possessing an enduring strength that appreciates life and its adversities. The power of progressive decision empowers managers to mediate conflict within the tenet of prudence and reflection. When prudence and reflection unite, mediation goes beyond and even bends the existing rules and policies judiciously without compromising one's dignity, but allowing the individual to exercise his right to justice and equality.

Since conflict mediation mitigates disputes and can possibly avoid conflict escalation, the foregoing mediation power typologies offer a number of implications in maintaining organizational equilibrium, in providing life-giving opportunities that enable members to value work and human relationship and to preserve the real meaning of judicious exercise of authority and power which by all means can transform conflicts into a positive and healthy discussion of productive ideas for the betterment of the organizational success and stability. In the context of human organizational culture, maintaining order and decorum of employees cannot be overlooked. The inevitability of conflict challenges school managers to sustain peace at the work place and be guided by a corporate philosophy where loyalty and individual commitment are considered and maintained in keeping with the idea of wide reflective equilibrium, providing members with opportunities to value work and human relations can elevate the moral standard of any human organization. By and large, it increases work confidence among employees and develops an atmosphere of empowerment where they maximize their inner potentials to uplift standard quality of work output and strengthen their faith and confidence with their managers. Understanding the character of human life enables managers to exercise their authority judiciously. It thus broadens their capability to magnify strengths over the weaknesses of their people with positive assumption that in case of conflict they would always be in the middle of the disputes protecting disputants' image and saving the moral ascendancy of employee-employees relationship. It is not by choice but by urgent need that school leaders have to define and articulate clearly their organizational vision and their roles with a view to optimizing employees'

commitment to the school organization. In this way members shall emulate one another, and recognize and understand the limitation of their colleagues. Impliedly, school vision-mission and motivating insights from school managers' followers define the core of any leadership function. However, school managers cannot cultivate good relationships without regularly cultivating their own relational skills. This goes without saying that learning from daily work of leadership with the help of insightful and caring colleagues can maintain symbiotic relationship.

While findings show that conflict mediation in Philippine Schools Overseas (PSOs) continues to flourish, it seems unavoidable to assume that there may be other forms of conflict mediation styles, forms and strategies waiting to be explored and be made known. This study has created a backdrop from which future research may take off. The apodictic reality that surfaced in the lived experiences of the school administrators in PSO's has posed encouragement to all school leaders and the affiliate school officials to always keep their cool and be humane in attempting to mediate conflict. They should ensure their presence as the third-party involved concomitant with what the disputants expect them to be. Mediating conflict is a challenging job for administrators yet very meaningful and fulfilling if during the mediation process they are able to play their role as mediation enablers. If school heads maintain coherent rationale in decision-making and balance relationships with responsibilities, they can feel certain and appear consistent to others. Mediation maintains its principle of peaceable resort and non escalation of case which can happen best when school heads pause for a while and reflect on their own leadership styles. They need to listen to the staff, students, and parents and help them translate their concerns into actionable strategies. Instead of living in that false assumption of being "the expert," school heads need to help others examine and reframe their own challenges and develop strategies for action. Through these mediation power typologies, school heads come to see how their own words, actions, and manners as well as their ability to hear cognitive and emotional messages enhance or inhibit their success not just as supportive instructional experts but leaders with sound minds and empathetic hearts for their people.

The role of conflict mediation in learning institutions can neither be underestimated nor disregarded. Since Philippine Schools Overseas are highly complex human organizations managed by imperfect school administrators, it is quite inconclusive to remark that other conflict-prone areas in learning institutions that call for conflict mediation have been fully addressed in this study. This preliminary investigation can be a useful means for school managers to hone their skills in decision making and harness all possible means of replicating other ways and forms of conflict mediation at their respective workplace. Such move is vital for school administrators to implore mediational powers in conflict mediation deeply grounded on both mind and heart. While conflict management is a ripe issue in PSO's and conflict mediation is still at the stage of infancy, viewing it from other managerial and human organizations perspectives may open possible research opportunities that can provide more conflict management options and expectations.

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