

Motives and communication behavior of the steering committee in managing student organizational conflicts

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ABSTRACT

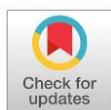
Purpose: to analyze the dynamics of organizational conflict in ICSSA by examining the sources and forms of conflict, conflict management styles, decision-making patterns, and their implications for organizational communication practices and member involvement.

Method: this study uses a qualitative, phenomenological approach, with data collected through literature reviews, field observations, and in-depth interviews with ICSSA steering committee members and other directly involved parties in the dynamics of organizational conflict.

Findings: conflict in ICSSA is influenced by its hierarchical structure, centralized leadership, financial independence, and hierarchical communication, with the highest intensity at the regional and national levels. A predominantly avoidant conflict-management style and unilateral decision-making reduce member engagement, transparency, and organizational legitimacy, while limited collaborative communication builds understanding and trust.

Implications: this study emphasizes the importance of transparent, participatory, and dialogic communication in student organizations to manage conflict constructively, increase member engagement, strengthen leadership legitimacy, and maintain organizational cohesion and sustainability.

Originality: it focuses on an integrated analysis of organizational values, member perceptions, organizational communication, and leadership in conflict management in student organizations with virtual or hybrid work arrangements, a context rarely studied in the Indonesian organizational communication literature.



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Introduction

Organizational values play a fundamental role in shaping individual behavior, perceptions, and performance within the organization. Each member brings a distinct

background, interests, and perspectives, making differences in perception and conflict inherent in organizational dynamics (Pace & Faules, 2015). Conflict is a natural consequence of organizational interactions and is not always negative if managed appropriately through effective communication and leadership. The development of digital technology has driven the rise of virtual work practices in various types of organizations, including student organizations. This work pattern enables collaboration across space and time, but simultaneously increases the complexity of organizational communication. Limited nonverbal cues, cultural differences, and the dominance of indirect communication, such as email, can lead to misunderstandings and differences in perception among members (Rahmani et al., 2023). This phenomenon has become even more pronounced during the pandemic, when online interaction has become the primary means of organizational activity (Leonardi et al., 2021).

Organizations with clear agendas and objectives require shared perceptions among their members so that organizational agendas can be implemented optimally (Gato et al., 2022). Differences in perception often trigger prolonged conflicts and hinder the achievement of organizational goals (Kartikawangi & Dahesihsari, 2020). Conflict generally originates from differing assumptions in interpreting organizational issues, particularly in organizations characterized by diverse member backgrounds and limited face-to-face interaction (Prayogi & Rajeba, 2023). Previous studies have emphasized that conflict is an inseparable part of organizations and requires effective organizational communication for management (Nurhayati et al., 2022; Pace & Faules, 2015; Thelen & Formanchuk, 2022). Other studies indicate that conflicts managed constructively do not have negative impacts on organizations; instead, they can foster creativity and innovation (Helmayuni et al., 2022). Nevertheless, most existing studies focus on formal or corporate organizations, while research examining conflict within student organizations, especially those operating in virtual or hybrid settings, remains relatively limited.

In addition, studies that comprehensively integrate organizational values, members' perceptions, organizational communication, and leadership roles in conflict management remain limited. In fact, student organizations possess unique characteristics as volunteer-based organizations that require creativity and innovation as the foundation of organizational sustainability (Ruliana, 2018). Therefore, there is a need for research that explains how conflicts arising from differences in perception can be managed constructively to enhance the effectiveness of student organizations. Based on this research gap, the present study offers a novel contribution by holistically analyzing the influence of organizational values on members' perceptions and organizational conflict, and the roles of communication and leadership in managing conflict constructively. The focus of this study is on student organizations operating in virtual or hybrid work patterns, which remain underexplored in the Indonesian organizational communication literature.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the dynamics of organizational conflict in ICSSA by examining the sources and forms of conflict, conflict management styles, decision-making patterns, and their implications for organizational communication practices and member engagement. This study is significant because while organizational conflict has been widely examined in formal and corporate contexts, there is limited research on student organizations, particularly those operating in virtual or hybrid work settings, where communication complexities and diverse member backgrounds increase the likelihood of perceptual differences and conflict. Student organizations are unique in being volunteer-based entities that rely on creativity and

innovation for their sustainability, making the management of conflict critical to organizational effectiveness. Moreover, few studies have comprehensively examined the combined influence of organizational values, members' perceptions, communication practices, and leadership roles on conflict management. This study is expected to make theoretical contributions to the development of organizational communication and conflict management studies, as well as practical contributions to managers and leaders of student organizations in fostering a conducive, creative, and innovative organizational climate.

Method

This study employs a qualitative, phenomenological approach to understand and interpret individuals' subjective experiences of a social phenomenon. The phenomenological approach emphasizes how reality is directly experienced, interpreted, and understood by the research subjects (Kartikawangi & Dahesihsari, 2020). Unlike case study research, phenomenological studies do not focus on analyzing a particular case; instead, they seek to explore the essence of meaning derived from individuals' personal experiences within a specific context, including organizational communication and interaction processes (Prayogi et al., 2023). Phenomenology is understood as a form of in-depth descriptive analysis of consciousness, lived experiences, and research subjects' perceptions of the phenomena they encounter. Therefore, this approach is considered relevant for uncovering the dynamics of conflict within the Indonesian Communication Science Students Association (ICSSA), how the organization manages such conflicts, and the communication behaviors that emerge throughout the conflict process.

Data collection techniques included literature review, field observation, and in-depth interviews. The literature review aimed to gather data and information relevant to the research focus, sourced from scholarly books, academic journals, regulations and legislation, encyclopedias, and other written materials in both print and electronic forms (Creswell, 2015; Firdausi et al., 2022). This review served as the theoretical and conceptual foundation for analyzing the research findings. In addition, this study employed unstructured in-depth interviews and informal conversations as the primary techniques for collecting primary data. These techniques were chosen to allow the researcher to explore respondents' experiences, perspectives, and subjective interpretations in a more flexible and in-depth manner. The interview questions were not rigidly structured but were tailored to each informant's characteristics and responses, enabling richer, more contextually grounded data to emerge (Moleong, 2017). Using a phenomenological approach, this study seeks to holistically capture the subjective experiences of each informant directly involved in conflicts within ICSSA. Accordingly, the data obtained are derived from the real experiences of the research subjects, resulting in a deep, authentic, and objective understanding of organizational conflict, its management patterns, and the communication behaviors that occur throughout the conflict process (Ayuningtyas et al., 2023).

Results and discussion

Organizational conflict in ICSSA

The ICSSA is a national-scale student organization with a multi-tiered management structure ranging from the university, branch, regional, to national levels. Such a broad organizational scope inevitably increases the potential for conflict,

particularly in communication, coordination, and leadership transitions. As noted by Chatterjee & Kulakli (2015); Prayogi et al. (2025), conflict significantly influences organizational communication effectiveness, either positively or negatively depending on how it is managed. Based on field observations and in-depth interviews with members of the ICSSA steering committee (chairperson, general secretary, and treasurer), conflicts frequently occur between general members and the steering committee, especially at higher organizational levels. One unique characteristic of ICSSA is that, in recent years, the regional-level steering committee has consistently been elected from the same university. Although this policy is justified as a cost-saving strategy to facilitate coordination, it has unintentionally created feelings of exclusion among members from other universities. These members often perceive themselves merely as recipients of instructions or post-event information rather than active participants in organizational decision-making.

Financial independence further reinforces internal tensions. ICSSA's funding relies entirely on member contributions and non-binding donations, as stipulated in its Articles of Association and Bylaws. While this independence strengthens organizational autonomy, it also heightens members' sensitivity to transparency, accountability, and leadership decisions. Conflicts often intensify when members perceive unequal participation in decision-making (Prayogi & Yulianti, 2023), particularly regarding leadership changes and the implementation of organizational programs. The occurrence of organizational conflict within the ICSSA can be understood as a structural consequence of its extensive, multi-tiered organizational design. As a national student organization operating across multiple institutional and geographic contexts, ICSSA faces inherent challenges in coordination, authority distribution, and alignment of communication. Such complexity increases the likelihood of misinterpretation, delayed feedback, and inconsistent implementation of organizational directives, all of which are recognized antecedents of organizational conflict in large-scale organizations (Zeberga et al., 2025).

The findings suggest that conflict in ICSSA is particularly pronounced at higher organizational levels, where direct interaction between leaders and members becomes increasingly limited. This condition reinforces hierarchical communication patterns and reduces opportunities for dialogic engagement. When communication primarily flows in a top-down manner, members may experience a diminished sense of agency and voice, leading them to perceive conflict not merely as disagreement but as a manifestation of structural marginalization. This supports Chatterjee & Kulakli's (2015) argument that the effectiveness of organizational communication in conflict situations depends heavily on the inclusiveness of communication processes. A notable source of tension identified in this study is the repeated selection of regional-level steering committee members from a single university. Although administratively efficient, this practice inadvertently undermines the principle of representativeness that is central to member-based organizations. From the perspective of organizational legitimacy, leadership that is perceived as exclusive or homogeneous may weaken members' psychological attachment to the organization. Consequently, communication from such leadership is more likely to be interpreted as authoritative rather than collaborative, amplifying resistance and conflict (Tan et al., 2023).

Financial independence further complicates the dynamics of conflict within ICSSA. While autonomy in funding reduces external influence and strengthens organizational sovereignty, it simultaneously elevates internal expectations for transparency, accountability, and equitable participation. Members who contribute

financially tend to view themselves as stakeholders with legitimate claims to information and influence. When decision-making processes are perceived as opaque or centralized, financial independence may paradoxically intensify distrust and dissatisfaction, rather than fostering collective responsibility (Stoiber et al., 2025). Moreover, the interaction between financial autonomy and centralized leadership heightens sensitivity during periods of organizational transition, particularly during leadership changes and program implementation (Cubillos et al., 2024). Conflicts that arise in these contexts are not solely procedural but are deeply symbolic, reflecting struggles over recognition, fairness, and organizational identity. Such conflicts are more difficult to resolve because they involve subjective interpretations and value-based judgments rather than clear operational discrepancies (Raha & Kazemi, 2025).

From an organizational communication standpoint, the recurring conflicts in ICSSA highlight the limitations of efficiency-driven governance models in participatory organizations. Cost-saving and coordination efficiency, while important, cannot substitute for inclusive communication practices that acknowledge diverse member experiences (Ecker et al., 2022). Without mechanisms that allow members to participate in deliberation and meaning-making actively, organizational conflict is likely to persist and escalate, particularly at the national level. Organizational conflict in ICSSA emerges from the interplay of structural complexity, leadership concentration, financial autonomy, and communication asymmetry. Addressing these conflicts requires not only procedural adjustments but also a reorientation of communication practices toward greater transparency, representation, and dialogic engagement. Such an approach would enable conflict to function as a constructive organizational resource rather than a recurring source of fragmentation (Saikrishna, 2025).

Sources and forms of conflict

The findings indicate that the most frequent sources of conflict within ICSSA include: Differences in perception, especially regarding leadership transitions and organizational direction. Sources of conflict include communication barriers resulting from geographical distance between campuses and provinces, one-way communication patterns characterized by top-down instructions without adequate feedback mechanisms, and ego-related and institutional interests, particularly during leadership elections at both regional and national levels. These findings align with Pace & Faules' (2015) view that organizational conflict emerges when two or more parties experience incompatible goals, values, or interpretations of reality. In ICSSA, such contradictions often surface during accountability report sessions and leadership transitions, which are considered the most conflict-prone moments in the organization.

The sources of conflict identified in ICSSA reflect a complex interaction between perceptual, structural, communicative, and symbolic factors. Differences in perception, particularly regarding leadership transitions and organizational direction, emerge as a primary trigger of conflict. These perceptual discrepancies are not merely cognitive misunderstandings but are rooted in divergent interpretations of authority, responsibility, and organizational identity (Gorli et al., 2024). In a multi-tiered organization such as ICSSA, actors at different levels often construct distinct realities based on their positional experiences, leading to conflicting expectations and evaluations of leadership performance. Geographical dispersion further intensifies these perceptual differences by limiting opportunities for face-to-face interaction and informal sense-making. Physical distance between campuses and provinces transforms communication into a largely mediated, formal process, reducing contextual richness

and increasing the likelihood of misinterpretation. As a result, messages intended as coordination efforts may be perceived as unilateral commands, reinforcing feelings of alienation among members at lower organizational levels. This finding underscores the role of spatial and technological constraints in shaping organizational conflict within nationally distributed organizations.

The dominance of one-way communication patterns represents another critical source of conflict. When communication primarily flows from leaders to members without adequate feedback mechanisms, it restricts dialogic engagement and suppresses alternative viewpoints (Yue et al., 2021). From an organizational communication perspective, such asymmetrical communication structures tend to frame conflict as deviance rather than as a legitimate expression of participation. Consequently, members may resort to resistance, silence, or passive noncompliance, further exacerbating organizational tensions. Ego-driven and institutional interests are particularly salient during leadership elections at the regional and national levels (Lerner, 2021). Leadership contests in ICSSA are not solely administrative processes but are imbued with symbolic value, prestige, and institutional representation. Competing personal ambitions and university affiliations often intersect, transforming individual disagreements into collective conflicts. These dynamics align with Pace & Faules' (2015) assertion that organizational conflict frequently arises from incompatible goals and values, rather than from procedural issues alone.

Accountability report sessions and leadership transitions serve as critical arenas where latent conflicts become overt. These organizational moments compel actors to publicly justify decisions, evaluate performance, and renegotiate power relations. As a result, unresolved tensions that accumulate during routine operations tend to surface simultaneously, increasing the intensity and emotional charge of the conflict. Such conflict-prone moments reveal how organizational rituals and formal forums can function as both mechanisms of governance and catalysts for confrontation (Kasera, 2025). Taken together, the sources and forms of conflict in ICSSA suggest that conflict is not an episodic disruption but a recurring organizational condition shaped by structural design and communication practices. Addressing these conflicts requires more than procedural regulation; it necessitates a communicative reconfiguration that recognizes differing interpretations, facilitates reciprocal dialogue, and legitimizes dissent as part of organizational life. Without such adjustments, conflicts are likely to persist, re-emerge, and escalate during critical organizational junctures.

Conflict management styles in ICSSA

This study adopts the conflict management style framework proposed by Hall and further elaborated by Pace & Faules (2015), which identifies five personal conflict styles: competing, collaborating, compromising, accommodating, and avoiding (Figure 1). The results show that all five styles are present among the ICSSA steering committee across different organizational levels. (1) Competing styles are often displayed by individuals seeking leadership positions, particularly at the national level, where prestige and access to organizational facilities intensify competition. (2) Collaborating styles are observed among the steering committee who attempt to integrate diverse perspectives and seek solutions acceptable to all parties. (3) Compromising styles appear during negotiations, especially when conflicting parties aim to avoid prolonged disputes. (4) Accommodating styles are evident among members who prioritize organizational harmony over personal interests. (5) Avoiding styles are commonly adopted by the steering committee when conflicts are perceived as potentially

disruptive, leading to deliberate silence or postponement of responses. Although these styles enable ICSSA to continue functioning, the dominant reliance on avoiding and unilateral decision-making has contributed to suppressed conflicts and decreased member engagement, particularly at the regional and national levels.

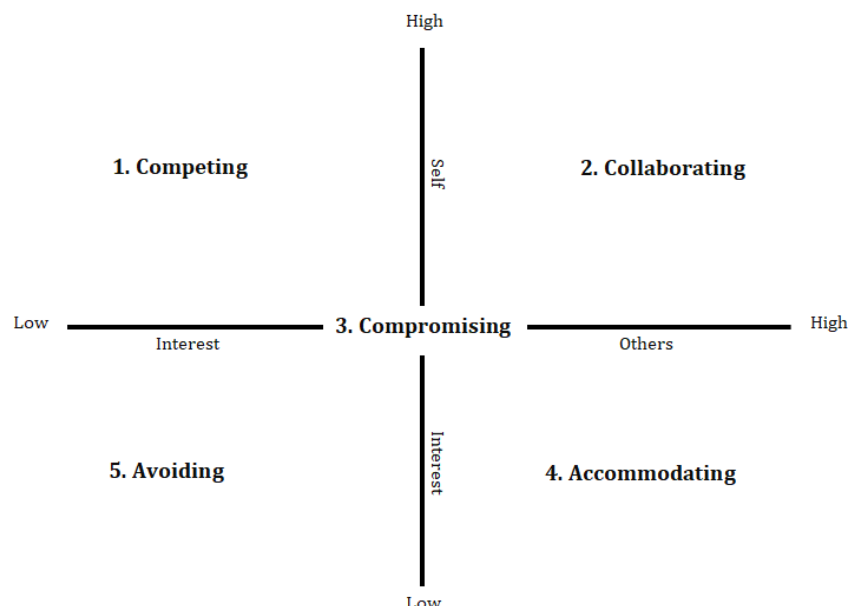


Figure 1 the conflict management style framework
Source: secondary data

The competing style is predominantly observed among individuals pursuing leadership positions, particularly at the national level. These conflicts are characterized by assertiveness and a focus on personal or institutional gains, often intensified by the prestige, authority, and material privileges associated with top management positions. While competition can drive performance and innovation, it may also heighten tension and provoke rivalries, especially when mechanisms for transparent evaluation and participatory decision-making are insufficient (Quandt & Castilho, 2024). Conversely, the collaborative style manifests in steering committees seeking integrative solutions that reconcile divergent perspectives. This style reflects a conscious effort to prioritize collective goals over individual agendas and embodies principles of participatory governance. Collaborating steering committees contribute to organizational resilience by fostering mutual understanding and reinforcing trust, particularly during critical junctures such as leadership transitions and program implementation (Sunoto & Daryanto, 2025).

The compromising style is frequently employed as a pragmatic strategy to prevent conflicts from escalating. By encouraging concessions from multiple parties, compromising facilitates short-term resolution; however, it may also leave underlying structural or perceptual conflicts unaddressed, potentially resurfacing in subsequent organizational cycles. This dynamic underscores the need to balance expedient conflict resolution with long-term structural adjustments (Chitondo et al., 2024). Accommodating styles appear among members who deliberately subordinate personal preferences to maintain organizational harmony. While accommodation can preserve interpersonal relationships and reduce immediate disruption, excessive reliance on this style risks fostering passive compliance, suppressing legitimate dissent, and creating

latent tensions (Akande et al., 2025). Similarly, the avoiding style, commonly adopted by the steering committee when conflicts are perceived as potentially disruptive, reduces immediate confrontation but can contribute to unresolved issues, organizational inertia, and declining member engagement, particularly at the regional and national levels.

The interplay of these styles illustrates a broader pattern in ICSSA's conflict management: while steering committees' varied approaches enable the organization to function and adapt, the dominant reliance on avoiding and unilateral decision-making has unintended consequences. Suppressed conflicts, coupled with limited member participation, may compromise transparency, weaken accountability, and reduce organizational legitimacy (Grundy et al., 2022). In the long term, such patterns can foster disengagement among members, erode trust in leadership, and exacerbate tension during high-stakes events such as national congresses and leadership transitions. From a theoretical perspective, these findings reinforce the notion that conflict management in student organizations must be understood as a dynamic negotiation between individual agency, structural constraints, and communication practices. Effective management requires not only the strategic use of conflict styles but also systemic interventions that promote inclusivity, feedback mechanisms, and institutionalized channels for dialogue (Azhari et al., 2024). By recognizing both the functional and dysfunctional implications of each style, ICSSA can better leverage conflict as a constructive force rather than a recurring source of organizational strain.

Decision-making and conflict resolution

The study finds that ICSSA frequently manages conflict through centralized and unilateral decision-making, resembling an authoritarian communication pattern. Steering committee members argue that this approach prevents conflict escalation and protects organizational stability. However, interview data reveal that such practices often result in emotional disengagement, reduced commitment, and passive resistance among members. Consistent with Pace, Peterson, and Burnett's (1979) framework on effective communication, conflict resolution in ICSSA could benefit from integrating both cognitive and emotional dimensions. Differences in understanding may be addressed through clarification of meanings, examination of evidence, and identification of shared goals. Meanwhile, differences rooted in emotions require strategies such as fostering self-esteem, encouraging open dialogue, involving all members, summarizing discussions objectively, and allowing emotional expression (Arwansyah & Suharyanto, 2025).

The findings indicate that ICSSA predominantly relies on centralized, unilateral decision-making for conflict management, particularly at higher organizational levels. This approach, which mirrors an authoritarian communication pattern, is justified by the steering committee as a mechanism to prevent conflict escalation, maintain operational continuity, and protect organizational stability. From a pragmatic standpoint, such centralized control allows leadership to act swiftly during high-stakes events, such as accountability reporting sessions, leadership transitions, and national congresses. These findings resonate with prior literature suggesting that hierarchical decision-making can temporarily suppress overt conflict and facilitate short-term organizational functioning (Seitz & Choo, 2022). However, the reliance on unilateral decision-making carries significant unintended consequences. Interview data reveal that members often experience emotional disengagement, decreased commitment, and passive resistance when their perspectives are marginalized. In effect, unresolved tensions accumulate, particularly during periods of leadership transition, creating latent

conflicts that may resurface in subsequent organizational cycles. This phenomenon aligns with the observation that organizational conflict is not merely a procedural issue but is deeply intertwined with members' sense of agency, recognition, and participation (Pace & Faules, 2015).

Applying Pace, Peterson, and Burnett's (1979) framework on effective communication highlights the dual necessity of addressing both cognitive and emotional dimensions in conflict resolution. Cognitive differences, manifested as divergent interpretations of responsibilities, organizational goals, or procedural fairness, can be managed through clarification of meanings, examination of evidence, and identification of shared or superior goals. Such interventions enhance members' understanding, reduce misperceptions, and support informed decision-making. Simultaneously, emotional differences, rooted in perceived inequities, relational tensions, or unmet psychological needs, require deliberate strategies to restore trust and engagement. Techniques such as fostering self-esteem, facilitating open dialogue, involving all relevant members in discussions, providing objective summaries of deliberations, and allowing the safe expression of emotions are essential to prevent the escalation of latent conflicts into disruptive behavior.

These findings underscore a critical insight: effective conflict resolution in ICSSA requires a balance between structural authority and participatory engagement. While unilateral decisions may be efficient, over-reliance on this approach risks alienating members, suppressing constructive feedback, and weakening organizational cohesion. By integrating cognitive clarification with emotionally sensitive communication, the steering committee can transform conflict from a source of disruption into an opportunity for organizational learning, increased member commitment, and more resilient governance structures. Furthermore, the study suggests that institutionalized mechanisms for dialogue, such as mediated discussions, feedback loops, and deliberative forums, could complement the current decision-making process. Such mechanisms would allow for proactive identification of emerging conflicts, equitable consideration of member perspectives, and timely resolution before disputes escalate. In this sense, conflict management is not solely a function of hierarchical authority but a dynamic, communicative process that sustains organizational legitimacy and inclusivity (Prayogi et al., 2019).

Escalation of conflict at the national level

One of the most significant findings of this research is that conflict intensity increases as the organizational level rises. At the university and branch levels, conflicts are generally manageable due to limited scope and closer interpersonal relationships. However, at the regional and national levels, where management spans provinces and islands across Indonesia, conflicts become more complex, personal, and politically charged. Interviews with former national leaders confirm that leadership positions at the national level are highly contested due to their symbolic prestige and material benefits. As a result, conflicts during National Deliberations often escalate verbally and emotionally. While physical conflict has been largely prevented through mediation by senior advisory boards, unresolved tensions frequently persist beneath the surface, contributing to an unhealthy organizational culture.

The study reveals a clear pattern of conflict escalation that corresponds to the hierarchical level within ICSSA. While conflicts at the university and branch levels remain relatively manageable due to smaller organizational scope, stronger interpersonal relationships, and more frequent direct interactions, the intensity and

complexity of conflicts increase significantly at the regional and national levels. This finding aligns with organizational theory, which posits that larger, multi-tiered structures with dispersed membership are more prone to structural and interpersonal tensions (Sarhadi, 2016; Seitz & Choo, 2022). At the regional and national levels, the complexity of conflict is compounded by several interrelated factors. First, the broader geographic distribution of members across provinces and islands introduces logistical challenges that hinder effective communication and coordination. Second, leadership positions at these higher levels carry symbolic prestige, institutional authority, and access to resources, making them highly contested and increasing the stakes of interpersonal rivalry. Interviews with former national leaders indicate that the competition for such positions often leads to emotionally charged disagreements and, in some cases, confrontational exchanges during National Deliberations.

Despite the potential for physical escalation being mitigated by the intervention of senior advisory boards and mediated deliberations, unresolved tensions frequently persist as latent conflicts. These latent conflicts manifest as passive resistance, selective compliance, and disengagement from organizational activities among members who perceive exclusion or inequitable treatment. Over time, such patterns contribute to an unhealthy organizational culture characterized by reduced transparency, diminished trust in leadership, and a decline in collective commitment to organizational goals. This observation resonates with Pace & Faules' (2015) assertion that unaddressed conflicts, especially at higher organizational levels, often undermine group cohesion and long-term organizational effectiveness. Moreover, the escalation of conflict at the national level illustrates the intersection of personal, institutional, and political interests within student organizations. Individual ambitions, university-based allegiances, and regional affiliations can intensify rivalry, creating a complex web of competing priorities that challenge standard conflict-resolution practices. The study suggests that unilateral or top-down decision-making, while temporarily effective, may inadvertently suppress these tensions rather than resolve them, leaving latent conflicts to resurface during subsequent national events.

From a theoretical perspective, this finding underscores the importance of proactive, structured conflict-management mechanisms in large, multi-level organizations. Mediation, structured deliberation, participatory decision-making, and transparent accountability procedures are essential not only to resolve immediate disputes but also to prevent the institutionalization of latent conflicts and to safeguard organizational culture. In the absence of these mechanisms, the cyclical escalation of conflict at higher levels may perpetuate disengagement, reduce member agency, and threaten the organization's long-term sustainability. In summary, the escalation of conflict at the national level demonstrates that organizational size, positional prestige, and geographical dispersion are critical factors amplifying both the intensity and complexity of disputes (Simo et al., 2025). Effective management requires an integrated approach that balances authoritative oversight with participatory engagement, leverages mediation strategies, and cultivates a culture of open communication to transform potentially destructive conflicts into opportunities for organizational learning and cohesion.

Implications for organizational communication

The findings suggest that unresolved and suppressed conflicts within ICSSA may lead to long-term consequences, including member apathy, reduced participation, and weakened organizational solidarity. While conflict is an inevitable aspect of

organizational life, its management requires transparent, participatory, and dialogic communication practices. As Ruliana (2018) emphasizes, effective communication plays a decisive role in determining organizational success or failure. The findings highlight significant implications for organizational communication within ICSSA. Unresolved or suppressed conflicts, particularly those emerging at regional and national levels, have long-term consequences that extend beyond immediate disputes. These include member apathy, reduced engagement in organizational activities, erosion of trust in leadership, and weakened organizational solidarity. In effect, unresolved conflict not only disrupts operational processes but also undermines the social and relational fabric critical to sustaining a national-scale student organization.

Effective conflict management, therefore, requires communication practices that are transparent, participatory, and dialogic. Transparency ensures that members understand the rationale behind decisions, the allocation of responsibilities, and the criteria for leadership selection (O'Regan et al., 2022). Participatory communication allows members to voice their perspectives, share concerns, and engage in deliberation, fostering a sense of agency and co-ownership in organizational outcomes. Dialogic communication, in turn, facilitates mutual understanding, reduces misperceptions, and builds inter subjective meaning among members, which is essential in a multi-tiered and geographically dispersed organization like ICSSA (Creswell, 2015; Ruliana, 2018). The study underscores the risk that one-way, top-down communication, currently observed in ICSSA through the steering committee's unilateral decision-making, may inadvertently reinforce hierarchical control while suppressing constructive feedback. Such practices can create latent conflicts, wherein members comply outwardly but disengage emotionally, thereby diminishing their motivation to participate in organizational initiatives. Over time, this pattern contributes to organizational stagnation, as innovative ideas and diverse perspectives remain underrepresented in decision-making processes (Haubrock et al., 2024).

From a theoretical standpoint, these findings reinforce the premise that communication is both a mechanism and a mediating factor in organizational conflict. Emphasizes, effective communication is decisive for organizational success, not only in achieving operational goals but also in shaping the organizational climate, cohesion, and resilience. Within ICSSA, adopting structured channels for feedback, regular mediated deliberations, and transparent accountability reporting could strengthen both vertical and horizontal communication flows, enabling the organization to address conflicts constructively rather than merely suppressing them. Furthermore, the study suggests that fostering a culture of communicative reflexivity, where members and leaders actively reflect on past conflicts, recognize patterns of misunderstanding, and adjust interaction norms, may enhance long-term organizational learning. By transforming conflict from a source of tension into an opportunity for dialogue and collective problem-solving, ICSSA can maintain member engagement, reinforce solidarity, and build a more adaptive and resilient organizational structure. In summary, the implications for ICSSA's organizational communication are twofold. First, unresolved conflicts highlight the critical need for participatory, transparent, and dialogic communication practices. Second, proactive communication strategies that integrate cognitive and emotional dimensions of conflict can strengthen both individual member commitment and the collective capacity of the organization, ensuring sustainable governance and a healthy organizational culture.

Conclusions

Organizational conflict within ICSSA is a structural phenomenon arising from the complexity of a multi-tiered organizational system, the concentration of leadership, financial autonomy, and communication patterns that tend to be hierarchical and one-way. Conflict originates not only from differences in perceptions and individual interests, but also from limited spaces for participation, weak feedback mechanisms, and unequal representation in decision-making processes, particularly at the regional and national levels. Various conflict management styles, ranging from competition to avoidance, are employed by organizational leaders; however, the dominance of unilateral decision-making and conflict avoidance strategies contributes to the emergence of latent conflicts, declining member engagement, and weakened trust in leadership. The escalation of conflict at the national level indicates that conflict within ICSSA is symbolic and political, closely linked to struggles over legitimacy, prestige, and organizational identity. Therefore, conflict management within ICSSA requires a reorientation of communication practices toward transparency, participation, and dialogue that integrates cognitive and emotional dimensions, enabling conflict to be used as a source of organizational learning and cohesion-building rather than a factor of disintegration.

Theoretically, the findings of this study affirm that organizational conflict does not merely stem from individual differences but is instead a consequence of a multi-tiered organizational structure, the concentration of leadership, financial autonomy, and hierarchical, insufficiently dialogical communication patterns. These findings thus reinforce the relevance of organizational conflict theory and participatory communication theory. In practice, this study demonstrates that conflict management practices that rely excessively on unilateral decision-making and conflict avoidance strategies can generate latent conflicts, reduce member engagement, and weaken leadership legitimacy. Therefore, organizations such as ICSSA need to develop communication practices that are more transparent, inclusive, and dialogical through institutionalized feedback mechanisms, more equitable leadership representation, and conflict management approaches that attend to both the cognitive and emotional dimensions of members.

This study has several limitations, as the use of a qualitative phenomenological approach with a limited number of informants renders the findings highly contextual and not intended to be generalized to all student organizations. Therefore, future research is recommended to involve more diverse informants across different levels of membership, to combine qualitative and quantitative approaches in order to broaden the scope and validate the findings, and to conduct longitudinal or comparative studies across student organizations to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of conflict dynamics and their management within the context of national-scale student organizations.

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