

Understanding the Relationship Between Demographic Factors and Different Styles of Managing Conflicts Among Employees in Automobile Industry

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Key Words:

1. Conflict management
2. Demographic factors
3. Organization culture
4. Organization system

Abstract

Conflict is quite evitable in any organization and the only way to resolve is to understand and prepare employees to resolve it at right time and with right approach. Since lot of behavioural, ethical, moral, knowledge centric and time oriented changes happen with employees which also affect our approach towards handling differences. With diversity of opinion, aspiration, mental set up, maturity, past experience and goal with which each individual works differences are quite obvious. Until these conflicts are been resolved organization cannot utilize potential at fullest and at the same time the culture of organization also suffers.

This paper attempts to understand how based on demographic variables conflict management styles vary and how founded on these employees can be trained to effectively manage the conflict.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Based on the significance that conflict plays in any organization irrespective of its size, structure, policy and norms differences and disagreement cannot be evicted but can only be resolved. Previous studies emphasise on how demographic factors affect the selection and practice of different conflict management style. The objective of this study was thus to identify how as per selected demographic factors the prevalence of conflict management style vary.

Quantitative research, descriptive was utilized based on stratum sampling. Employees working in automobile industry were selected for the study. Data interpretation on the basis of total 150 employees response on the questionnaire made on the basis of Thomas Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument was made and correlation was used to understand the relationship.

After analysis it was found that conflict management style differed based on gender of employees where women employees preferred. Based on gender it is clear that female employees were generally seen to adopt collaborating, avoiding and accommodating and male employees were seen adopting competing and

compromising style, with respect to income level it was seen that collaborating style had negative correlation with income which implies that employees with high income level employees adopt less collaborative style in conflict management and competing style increases with increase in income level of employees which indicates that employees becomes more competitive as they raise in income.

Age as a demographic factor it was found that higher correlation was found in accommodating and compromising style of conflict, based on tenure or years of experience it was found that tenure had a negative correlation with compromising conflict style which indicates that with increase in years of experience the compromising attitude decreases and competing style increases.

INTRODUCTION

"Conflict is inevitable, but combat is optional." -Max Lucade the famous quote emphasises on the fact that that conflict cannot be avoided but for organization it is important that these conflicts should be diagnosed, handled and worked effectively.

Conflicts are one of the important parts of organizational life. The main parties of conflict are always human part of organization. These individuals are the most important asset of organization, as managing other resources is not possible without proper utilization of human resource.

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Human resource/s cause conflicts when they interact. Conflict handling is important for both organizations and employees.

Organizations can get great returns, better utilization of resources, better outcomes, improved work environment and above all better future as a whole. On the other hand, employees can also reap more advantages with proper conflict handling style. Handling conflicts makes it possible for employees; to interact with others in proper way, to get work done and to do work properly with others in efficient manner and to have better work life in organization. Individuals use various styles to handle conflicts, these style vary individual to individual. Properly handling conflicts increases efficiency at both individual and group levels.

There have been various models and methods by which conflict can be handled in multiple ways but for organization it can be understood that organization should ensure the reasons of conflict, possible remedies and consequences.

Conflict involves a situation in which people's concerns—the things they care about—appear to be incompatible. In that situation, intentions can be described along two independent dimensions—cooperativeness (attempting to satisfy the other's concern) and assertiveness (attempting to satisfy one's own concern). Five conflict styles are defined in terms of those dimensions. Competing (low cooperativeness, high assertiveness) is the attempt to satisfy one's own concern at the other's expense. Its opposite is accommodating (high cooperativeness, low assertiveness), which sacrifices one's own concern in favor of the other's. Avoiding (low cooperativeness, low assertiveness) neglects both people's concerns by sidestepping or postponing a conflict issue. Collaborating (high cooperativeness, high assertiveness) is an attempt to find an integrative or win/win solution that fully satisfies both people's concerns. Finally, compromising (intermediate in both cooperativeness and assertiveness) is an attempt to find a middle-ground settlement that only partially satisfies each person's concern.

This model of conflict behaviour focuses that employees have the ability to deal with conflict five different ways. Managers in today's workplace have ample opportunities to observe this model. Depending on the attitude and behaviour of the employee, it is possible to be managing a department that has traits of all five conflict modes.

Some employees may avoid conflict all together (uncooperative and unassertive), while others may find themselves making too many exceptions (cooperative and

unassertive). On the complete other end of the spectrum are those employees who constantly feel the need to compete when a conflict arises (assertive and uncooperative). The fourth mode is collaborating (assertive and cooperative). Research has shown that this is a successful way to combat conflict and can generally be satisfactory for all parties involved. Thomas' model also has a fifth mode, compromising, which serves as a middle ground for both assertiveness and cooperativeness.

Thus, this paper attempts to understand different conflict management styles and how demographic factors like age, income level, tenure, gender affect conflict management style and thus helping organization to understand how depending on demographic factors these styles vary and can help employees to improvise their ways for effective performance.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In order for supervisors and managers to understand how to manage conflict, they first must thoroughly understand what conflict is. Conflict can be defined as the behaviour by a person or group intended to inhibit the attainment of goals by another person or group (Gray & Starke, 1984).

Past research on conflict behavior has been one dimensional: competition vs. cooperation. More current research, however, indicates that conflict in organizations is much more than that. Introduced in 1964, Blake and Mouton developed a two-dimensional conflict behaviour model that is still referenced today. The two dimensional model of conflict includes: assertiveness, defined as a party's attempt to satisfy his own concerns, and cooperativeness, defined as attempts to satisfy the concerns of another person (Ruble & Thomas, 1976).

According to Riggio (2003), there are four main types of conflict in organizations. The first is intra-individual conflict. This occurs when a person is faced with two different decisions. The conflict occurs within the mind of the manager. The second type is inter-individual conflict. This is what most people associate as "conflict" in an organization, and it can be defined as differences that occur between two people. On the third level is intragroup conflict, which surfaces when a person in a group works towards a different goal than the rest of the group. This is conflict at the organizational level of analysis. The last type of conflict that Riggio mentions is intergroup conflict. Another common example of conflict is the existence of the fourth type, or intergroup conflict.

Fundamentally, Robbins (1978) believes that conflict can be condensed into three general categories: communication issues, structure problems, and personal behavior factors. For managers to be able to successfully stimulate and combat conflict, they must be able to classify where the conflict arose from, and what their roles need to be in the conflict resolution process. The contingency approach to conflict resolution, builds on Ruble & Thomas' (1976) model of how employees deal with conflict, but it also adds several different factors.

Avoidance style – The advantage of this style is that can maintain the relationship between managers and subordinates. The weakness of this style does not resolve conflict. Montoya-Weiss, Massey and Song (2001), found that using this style will hurt relationship of a team. People usually let the conflict be lessened while time goes on. In fact, avoiding the problem does not make it go away, but make it worse.

Compromising style - Benefit of this style is conflict can resolve in short time while the relationship is still maintained. Weakness of this style is compromising styles usually starts to another results (Suboptimum decisions). If people overuse this style, it may cause the people being greedy and ask for several times to get achieve their desires.

Collaborating style – The advantage of using this style is make all parties happy with the final decision (Montoya-Weiss et al., 2001). On the other hand, due to letting all parties to be satisfying the final decision, it may use longer time and put in more effort than other styles. The Difference of Conflict Management Styles

Forcing style – The benefit of this style is enhanced organizational decisions will be choose if the forcer is correct rather than choosing a less effective decisions. The weakness of this style is aggressions and anger occurs toward its users. Research suggested that forcing is a negative conflict management style that would decrease team performance (Cohen & Bailey, 1997).

Accommodating style – Relationship is maintained by the users. The more effective ideas may not be used due to accommodating style. Misuse of this style may leads to lose of relationship that they try to maintain.

According to Flanagan and Ruden (2008), research over the past fifteen years has determined that there are two essential types of conflict in organizations: task conflict and relationship conflict. Task conflict concentrates on how to resolve problems caused by differences in viewpoints,

ideas and opinions. Researchers have discovered that conflict will result in creativity and improved decision making.

It is another way to acknowledge conflict in a positive term. The Difference of Conflict Management Styles . The second type of conflict is known as relationship conflict. Examples of relationship conflict are disagreements about values, personal or family norms, or about personal taste. People refer to relationship conflict in negative terms. There is a reason why people always use negative words to describe conflict. This is because they are often involved in relationship conflict. Researchers have showed that relationship conflict lowers the productivity and motivation amongst team members. Insufficient communication amongst team members can lead to less choices and poor decisions. In additions, team members may simply agree to a decision without thinking of the impacts and quality of implementation.

Holt and DeVore (2005) conducted a recent meta-analysis of self-report data on conflict styles from 36 studies of organization members. Overall, they found that males in individualistic cultures (including the US) reported somewhat higher levels of competing, while females reported higher levels of compromise. In general, we note that there is fairly consistent agreement in the empirical literature that gender differences in conflict style, when they are found, tend to involve higher competing by men.

Tidd & Friedman (2002) narrated that conflict handling reduces negative impact of conflict and uncertainty, and use of positive conflict handling style can mitigate and remove its effects.

Rahim (2002) found, firms can be effective one if they manage and enhance conflict handling processes and the way they intervene. How conflict is handled is a response to scenarios present at work (Friedman et al. 2000).

Properly handling conflicts increases efficiency at both individual and group levels (Tjosvold, 1998). There are various models given by various researchers, like early models used to measure only one dimension of others concern i.e. cooperativeness and uncooperativeness (Deutsch, 1973). There are two dimensions of conflict handling self interest (Assertiveness) and others concern (Cooperativeness).

Finally, compromising style is combination of both assertive and cooperative styles; it considers making efforts to solve conflicts. Friedman, et al (2000) discussed

that the way conflicts are handled may shape organizational environment, level of conflict and stress. Butler Jr. (1994) has discussed styles used by negotiators and found that those negotiators who use integrating (collaborating), obliging (accommodating) or avoiding style were more effective than those who use dominating (competing) style. Individuals who use integrative (collaborative style) conflict handling style experience lower level of work conflict and stress at job, but people using avoiding or dominating (competing) style were facing more conflicts and work stress (Friedman et al. 2000). Researchers have discussed conflict handling styles in different perspective and found that there are various determinants of selection of conflict handling styles; various researchers have given various findings. Like differences of conflict handling styles on the basis of gender, position in job, experience, age (Brahnam et al., 2005; Polkinghorn & Byrne, 2001).

OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

Based on the above literature the objectives of the present study are as follows-

- a) To identify the impact of gender on the selection of style of conflict management among employees
- b) To determine the impact of age on the selection of conflict management style among employees
- c) To identify the impact of level of income on the selection

of style of conflict management

d) To identify the impact of tenure on the selection of conflict management style.

Research design – Type of research is descriptive. Based on stratum sampling employees working in different automobile units in and around Faridabad are chosen for the study.

Type of sampling is stratum sampling and data collection was done with the help of self-administered questionnaire based on the five different conflict management style viz Compromising, competing, collaborating, accommodating, avoiding based on the Thomas Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument which is a model for handling conflict was used for preparing questionnaire. Data was collected from 150 employees (Questionnaire filled in complete form and considered for analysis. Both male and female employees were considered for study to determine if based on gender any difference in conflict management style exists. There were 62 females and 88 males. 44.67% were married and the average salary was between 25,000 to 35,000 rupees per month.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Reliability of items

Based on pilot study of 52 employees the reliability coefficient of the five different conflict management style was assessed-

Table:1 Reliability Analysis

Style	Cronbach Alpha	No. of Items
Compromising	0.625	6
Competing	0.742	6
Collaborating	0.655	4
Avoiding	0.712	5
Accommodating	0.654	5
Overall scale	.825	26

The first objective of the study was to determine if the selection of conflict management style varies based on gender of employees in the organization. Based on the data collected and t-test applied to determine if there is any significant difference in the selection of conflict management style and gender from table 2 it is clear that based on mean score women scored much higher on collaborating, accommodating and avoiding style of conflict management and men scored higher on compromising and competing style. From the table it is clear that there is significant difference between men and

women in competing and avoiding style thus rejecting null hypothesis that there is no significant difference between male and female in conflict management style and no significant difference was seen in compromising, collaborating and accommodating style.

Thus, men and women vary in their selection of conflict management style where men prefer competing and compromising style and women preferred and adopted collaborating, avoiding and accommodating others much in comparison to other conflict management style.

Table:2 t-test to determine significant difference in conflict management style among employees based on gender

Factor	Gender	M	SD	t	df	Sig(2 - tailed)
Compromising	M	3.25	.712	-1.199	149	-.021
	F	3.11	.727			
Competing	M	4.25	.625	.258	149	.000
	F	3.25	.521			
Collaborating	M	3.68	.865	2.412	149	.024
	F	3.96	.845			
Avoiding	M	3.25	.712	3.124	149	.000
	F	3.97	.852			
Accommodating	M	4.21	.587	-2.175	149	.562
	F	4.28	.525			

The second objective of the study (Table-3) was to assess if depending on age the conflict management style varies. Based on the data collected and bivariate correlation applied it was seen that there was positive correlation of age with all the five styles which indicates that as one increases in age the adoption of these styles also

increases. From table 3 it is clear that higher correlation was found in accommodating and compromising style of conflict increased with increase in age as one grows in age with maturity and experience the spirit of taking everyone together also increases.

Table:3 Bivariate correlation between age and styles of conflict management

	Age	Compromising	Competing	Collaborating	Avoiding	Accommodating
Age (Pearson correlation)	1	.765**	.614	.525	.214	.785**
Correlation Sig	150	.000	.012	.025	.425	.000
N	150	150	150	150	150	150

The third objective of the study was to identify if income affects the selection of conflict management style. From table- 4 Bivariate correlation it was clear that collaborating style had negative correlation with income which implies that employees with high income level employees adopt

less collaborative style in conflict management and competing style increases with increase in income level of employees which indicates that employees becomes more competitive as they raise in income level.

Table : 4 Bivariate correlation between income level and styles of conflict management

	Tenure	Compromising	Competing	Collaborating	Avoiding	Accommodating
Income (Pearson correlation)	1 150	-.438	.614	-.525	-.314	-.421
Correlation Sig		.012	.000	.000	.547	.024
N	150	150	150	150	150	150

Table:5 Bivariate correlation between tenure and styles of conflict management

	Tenure	Compromising	Competing	Collaborating	Avoiding	Accommodating
Income (Pearson correlation)	1 150	-.438	.614	-.525	-.314	-.421
Correlation Sig		.012	.000	.000	.547	.024
N	150	150	150	150	150	150

The last objective of the study table-5 was to determine if tenure affects styles of conflict management. Based on data collected and bivariate correlation it is clear that tenure had a negative correlation with compromising conflict style which indicates that with increase in years of experience the compromising attitude decreases and competing style increases. Other styles like collaborating, avoiding and accommodating styles had negative correlation with years of experience but they did not seem to be statistically correlate.

FINDINGS

Thus, based on the above analysis it is clear that

demographic factors like age, income level, gender and tenure are related and as independent variables affect the dependent variable of this study i.e conflict management style.

a)Based on gender it is clear that female employees were generally seen to adopt collaborating, avoiding and accommodating and male employees were seen adopting competing and compromising style.

b)Based on income level it was seen that collaborating style had negative correlation with income which implies that employees with high income level employees adopt less collaborative style in conflict management and competing style increases with increase in income level of

employees which indicates that employees become more competitive as they raise in income level.

c) Based on age as a demographic factor it was found that higher correlation was found in accommodating and compromising style of conflict.

d) Based on tenure or years of experience it was found that tenure had a negative correlation with compromising conflict style which indicates that with increase in years of experience the compromising attitude decreases and competing style increases.

IMPLICATIONS

The study is useful to understand how demographic variables can affect selection of conflict management in an organization since we as individuals based on these demographic variables adopt different strategies to resolve differences and as an organization it is also important to see the strategic goals of organisation can only be met when there are either no conflicts which is not possible so the only choice available is to understand, assess, and improvise upon and build on desired behaviour as unless the conflict with negative consequences are dealt positively it can affect organization culture, climate and environment largely.

Once it is understood which variable affects and how much the conflict style training, behavioural assessment, performance and required environment supported by policies and practices should be designed so as to ensure a congenial work environment and an enthusiastic working environment. This can not only help in fostering positive and harmonious work culture but will also help in building a strong employer brand.

CONCLUSION

Thus, it can be concluded that there is a causal relationship between demographic factors and conflict management styles. Organization should ensure that conflict at any level and intensity should be positively driven so that a healthy competition can be created and all the developmental aspects and practices of employees can be directed towards fostering team work, superior subordinate relationship, accommodative attitude, positive work culture, effectual training and effective HRD climate as

conflicts are inevitable but preparing organization and training employees for handling conflict is important.

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