

Gednder Differentials In Styles Of Organizational Conflict Management

Taqadus Bashir Chaudhry*, P. A. Shami**, Iqbal
Saif*** and Mehboob Ahmed****

The recent trends and challenges have brought dramatic changes in terms of creating virtual workplaces for both men and women. The present empirical study aims to investigate male-female differences in conflict management styles in work setting, with special reference to identify the primary and secondary styles adopted to resolve interpersonal conflict. Conflict management styles have been assessed by using 37-items Organizational Conflict Management Inventory disaggregated further into, five sub scales as: Integrating, Obliging, Avoiding, Dominating, and Compromising. The study reflects that there is no significant difference between men and women in handling interpersonal conflicts. However, the women tend to excel in avoiding, obliging and dominating styles, whereas men appear to adopt integrating and compromising styles. The preferred primary style among both during interpersonal conflict with their superiors is Integration, while the secondary style among men is compromising and among women avoiding.

Field of Research: Organizational Behaviour, Conflict Management, Gender Differences

* Foundation University FUIMCS, 1 New Lalazar, FF Educational Complex, Rawalpindi, Pakistan email: doc.tbc@gmail.com

** Director General, Academy of Educational Planning & Management, G-8/1, Sarya Chowk. Islamabad. email: drpashami@hotmail.com

*** Head of Department, Faculty of Management Sciences, Foundation University FUIMCS, 1 New Lalazar, FF Educational Complex, Rawalpindi, Pakistan email: drmisaf@gmail.com

**** Assistant Professor, Department of Economics, AIOU, Pakistan.

1. Introduction

Significant attention has been received by the group conflict management within the organizations in the academic and non-academic literature. (Wall & Callister, 1995; Jehn, 1997; Jameson, 1999; Rahim, 2000, 2001, 2002; Pearson, Ensley & Amson, 2002; De Dru & Weingart, 2003). Not only research but also the practitioner's interest in conflict management reflects the fact that conflict is inevitable in organizational and social life (Cosier & Ruble, 1981; Miles, 1980), and researches show that managers spend a major amount of their time dealing with conflict (Pondy, 1992; Pulhamus, 1991; Thomas & Schmidt, 1976).

Studies reveal that the growth in organizational interdependencies, the shift to collaborative team-based structures, increased diversity, and heightened environmental uncertainty all can lead to substantially higher degrees of organizational conflict (Amason, 1996; Amason, et al., 1995; Jameson, 1999; Pondy, 1992; Wall & Callister, 1995). Conflict has been defined as a "Process in which one part perceives that its interests are being opposed or negatively affected by another party" (Wall & Callister, 1995; Bowling, Leslie & Marks, 2001). Rahim (1992) identifies conflict as an "interactive process manifested in incompatibility, disagreement or dissonance within or between social entities.

The presence of conflict can have an organization-wide impact by calling attention to problem areas, which can lead to a search for solutions and improvements that can cause fundamental changes in important aspects within the organization (Pondy, 1992). Properly managed conflict can also contribute to improved decision making quality within organizations (Amason, 1996). With increasing numbers of women moving into decision making positions in organizations (Powell, 1988) along side men, coupled with the obvious

importance of conflict management skills in providing effective leadership, there has been an increased focus on the possible existence on gender differences in the ability to manage conflict.

Gender is one of the individual variables that have received much attention in conflict research (Gayle, Preiss & Allen, 1994; Walters, Stuhlmacher & Meyer 1998) for its potential moderating effect. Some researchers are attracted to this area of research in response to the fact that "skepticism surrounding women's ability to adopt managerial roles and responsibilities has prevailed since the advent of women within the corporate hierarchy" (Portello & Long, 1994). The researchers have explored and exploded the traditional view, along with impediment to women's progress through the managerial ranks, that women are not "as good as men" at handling conflict or at negotiating. Other researchers, taking to heart either traditional cultural stereotypes or the theories of cultural feminists, have sought to explore whether women really do speak in "a different voice" than men when negotiating or handling conflict (Korabik, Baril, & Watson, 1993). Question remains whether do the women communicate differently than men in such situations? Do they behave differently? Do they pursue different outcomes?

2. Literature Review

Gender has been the focus in many aspects of communication. Scholars have disagreed about what differences exist and to what degree they exist between male and female managers concerning preferred conflict resolution style. Some scholars do not believe that gender significantly impacts communication strategies at all (Conrad, 1991; Korabik, Baril, & Watson, 1993). Korabik et al (1993) found that women managers do not differ from male managers in preferred conflict resolution style,

but they do differ from their non-managerial counterparts (Korabik, Baril, & Watson, 1993). The situation demands investigation into the contradictory views to expose reality.

The contemporary view of conflict is that it can be positive force in organizations if it is managed properly (Jameson, 1999; Pelled, Eisenhardt & Xin, 1999; Rahim, 2001, 2002; Rahim, Magner & Shapiro, 2000; Wall & Callister, 1995). As a positive force conflict can help maintain an optimum level of stimulation and activation among organizational members, can contribute to an organization's adaptive and innovative capabilities, and can serve as a basic source of feedback regarding critical relationships, the distribution of power, and the problems that require management attention (Miles, 1980). Conflict management styles have been and continue to be measured by a variety of different taxonomies. One of the first conceptual schemes for classifying conflict revolved around a simple cooperation—competition dichotomy (Deutsch, 1949). While numerous researchers proposed revision of this framework, Rahim and Bonoma's (1979) conceptualization has been one of the most popular. They differentiated the styles of resolving interpersonal conflict on two basic dimensions: concern for self and concern for others. The first dimension explains the degree (high / low) to which a person attempts to satisfy their own concerns, while the second dimension explains the degree to which an individual tries to satisfy the needs or concerns of others.

Combining the two dimensions mentioned above results in five specific styles of conflict management i.e. integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding and compromising. Integrating is characterized by both high concerns for self and for others, while an avoiding style is associated with both low concerns for self and for others. An obliging style involves low concern for self and high concern for others; conversely a dominating style is characterised by high concern for self and low concern for

others. Compromising is associated with intermediate concern for both self and others. It has been argued that individuals select among three or four styles (Pruitt, 1983; Putnam & Willson, 1982), but evidence from confirmatory factor analysis suggests that the five factor model has a better fit with data than models of two, three and four styles (Rahim & Magner, 1994, 1995). Shockley & Morley (1984) assessed male-female preferences for conflict styles, using 61 university students (20 males, 41 females) and 100 employed adults (28 males, 72 females). They completed a conflict mode instrument developed by K. Thomas and R.H. Kilman (1974) measuring preference for competing, collaborating, compromising avoiding, and accommodating conflict styles. Results show significant differences between males and females for competitive and compromising conflict styles.

Duane (1989) compared the extent to which 63 men and 7 women used 5 methods of conflict management (CM) in resolving 1st-step grievances of employees. Women were less inclined to avoid grievance-related issues, tended to be more competitive, and were less willing to accommodate their opponents' demands compared with men. However, Shockley & Morley did not seem to differ significantly in their use of collaborative or compromising modes of CM. Nelson & Lubin (1991) explore how legislators share power by administering the Conflict Mode Instrument (CMI) by R.H. Kilmann and K. W. Thomas to 49 Democratic and 49 Republican legislators (87 males and 11 females). No political party differences were found, but females were significantly higher on the CMI Accommodating subscale.

3. Methodology and Research Design

This is a descriptive non-contrived one-shot study. Population comprised of managers of different organizations from which sample of 220 managers including both male and female were

drawn. Survey method was adopted and data was collected through OCMI (Organizational Conflict Management Inventory) The present research was an attempt to investigate the various styles—integrating, obliging, compromising, avoiding and dominating; that men and women use during interpersonal conflict within organizations. The study involved 23 multinational & national organizations focusing on organizational behavior with particular reference on conflict management.

1. To investigate the gender difference in conflict resolution styles of subordinates towards their superiors.
2. To investigate the primary and secondary styles of resolving conflict among men and women.

Conflict management styles is assessed by using 37-items Organizational Conflict Management Inventory (Anis-ul-Haque, 2003), which measures how organizational members handle their interpersonal conflicts with their superiors. It had five sub scales. Integrating (12 items), obliging (7 items), Avoiding (7 items), Dominating (7 items), and Compromising (4 items). Each item was rated on five-point Likert scale ranging from never to always.

Table 1: Alpha Reliability Coefficient

Conflict Resolution Styles	Alpha Reliability Coefficient
Integrating	0.91
Obliging	0.80
Compromising	0.67
Avoiding	0.73
Dominating	0.85
OCMI (Organizational Conflict	0.90

Management Inventory)	
-----------------------	--

The reliability value for the subscales ranges from 0.67 to 0.91 showing a moderate to high interval consistency of the scales. The overall reliability coefficient of the inventory is 0.90.

Table 2: Conflict management Styles—Mean, standard deviation and t scores

Conflict Resolution Styles	Men (n=161)		Women (n=69)		t	p
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Integrating	54.39	6.09	51.19	9.33	2.23	0.031
Obliging	23.33	2.62	28.31	6.60	2.052	0.023
Compromising	15.60	2.63	11.00	2.30	0.975	0.391
Avoiding	29.40	5.95	30.48	5.81	2.15	0.212
Dominating	17.85	5.87	18.37	3.04	0.582	0.741

The above table indicates five styles of conflict resolution score by men and women. The result in this table shows that: there is no significant difference between men and women in handling of interpersonal conflict. However, the women apparently excelled than men in terms of mean scores on avoiding, obliging and dominating styles, whereas men have obtained high mean score on integrating and compromising style of conflict management.

Table 3: Ranking of Conflict Resolution Styles for men (n = 161)

Conflict Resolution Styles	Mean Scores
Integrating	4.27
Compromising	3.40
Avoiding	3.05
Obliging	3.04
Dominating	2.12

It is clear from the mean scores of five conflict management styles that integration is the preferred style of conflict management among men during interpersonal conflict with their superiors, while the secondary style is that of compromising.

Table 4: Ranking of Conflict Resolution Styles for Women (n = 61)

Conflict Resolution Styles	Mean Scores
Integrating	4.09
Avoiding	3.33
Compromising	3.25
Obliging	3.22
Dominating	2.22

The table indicates that integrating is the most preferable style for women as well; but as far as secondary style for managing conflict is concerned, it is the avoiding style for women.

4. Discussion of Findings

Conflict is an unavoidable component of human activity. Organizations are confronted with both internal & external sources of conflict. Internally, the conflict can range from disagreement over workloads to large union disputes. Whether the source of conflict is external or internal, it is important for managers to understand the management styles of those they manage, as the application of ineffective conflict strategies or styles can result in high stress, high turnover rates and litigations that can ultimately undermine the overall health of organization (Hirschman, 2001; Mckenzie, 2002). The purpose of this research was to investigate gender differences in conflict management styles in work setting as well as to identify the primary and secondary conflict management styles of men and women.

The study shows that there is no significant difference between men and women in handling of interpersonal conflicts. However, the women apparently excelled than men in terms of mean scores on obliging and compromising, whereas on the other hand the men have apparently higher mean scores on integrating and avoiding styles of conflict management as compared to women. The most preferred style for men managers is integrating and the least preferred is that of dominating. Whereas in the case of women the most preferred style or the primary style is that of integrating as similar to that of men, but as far as the secondary style is concerned the women have avoiding style of conflict management Gire (1993) obtained the similar findings showing a greater preference for neither negotiation nor collaboration. Duane (1989) also reported that gender did not seem to differ significantly in their

use of collaborative or compromising modes of conflict management.

In the integrating style of conflict management it involves the high assertiveness and high cooperativeness, i.e. high concern for self as well as other party involved in conflict, that is why it is more used. Where as in the case of dominating, there is high concern for self and low concern for the other party involved. Cetin and Hacifazlioglu (2004) found that however gender play significant role in determining the conflict management style and female try to be less offensive towards their colleagues whereas, male convey a more flexible and tolerant attitude. Feminine group scored higher than masculine for avoiding, and the masculine group was found to be significantly higher on dominating.

5. Conclusion

Results and Conclusion of the study matches with many other international research findings and the styles adopted to manage the interpersonal conflict are almost the same through out the world except Chine (Sirivun, 2001). This is mainly because of the reason that men and women both like power and love to practice it at their work places but when they encounter any kind of interpersonal conflict, men are more compromising where as women tends to avoid the conflict. Integration is the most preferred style for men and women in handling interpersonal conflict with their immediate superior. It is evident from the results that women excelled men on using avoiding, obliging and dominating styles, whereas men stand out on integrating and compromising style of conflict management. Culture can be one reason behind the preference of avoidance among women besides the absence of knowledge and skills of management.

Among men, primarily integration is the preferred conflict management style followed by compromising, avoiding & obliging. Therefore integrating is the most preferable style for both genders; but as far as secondary style for managing conflict is concerned, it is the avoiding style for women. Trainings can be arranged to modify the behaviors while choosing the conflict management styles in an organizational setting for both genders. The study although does not focus on the immediate supervisor's conflict management styles but it does reflect their influences and their conflict management styles on their subordinates as well as the culture of their organization. It becomes imperative to consider the concerns such as power and leadership while studying conflict management styles.

Future studies need to test the possibility of such interactions to address many key questions e.g. do the situational elements (i.e. nature of competitors, task & perceived situational power) dominate the gender based differences in negotiation styles or not. Future studies should further assess whether certain personality types or personality-related factors moderate the choice of conflict-handling strategy. And additional groups be considered for future research e.g. if this study is replicated using acculturated working professionals, comparisons between the two groups i.e. emerging and experienced professionals can be made in an effort to identify the relationship that might exist between work experience and the existence of a given conflict resolution styles.

References

- Amason, A. C. 1996. Distinguishing the effects of functional and dysfunctional conflict on strategic decision making: Resolving a paradox for top management teams. *Academy of Management Journal*, 39, 123-148.
- Amason, A. C., Thompson, K. R., Hochwarter, W. A., & Harrison, A. W. 1995. Conflict: An important dimension in successful management teams. *Organizational Dynamics*, 23, 20-35.
- Anis-ul-Haque, M. 2003. Adaptation and Validation of Organizational Commitment Questionnaire in Pakistan Corporate Culture (unpublished). National Institute of Psychology, QAU. Islamabad.
- Blake, R.R.S. & Mouton, JH.S. 1964. *The managerial grid*. Houston, TX: Gulf Publishing
- Bowling, G., Leslie, A. D., Marks, M. 2001. Maximizing the benefits of Task Conflict: The Role of Conflict Management. *International Journal of Conflict Management*, 12/1, 4-22.
- Cetin, M., Hacifazlioglu, O. 2004 Academics' Conflict Management Styles. *Dogus University Journal*, January. Istanbul.
- Cetin, M., Hacifazlioglu, O. 2004 Conflict management styles: A comparative study of University Academics and High School Teachers. *Journal of American Academy of Business, Cambridge*; September. 5, ½; ABI/INFORM Global.
- Conrad, C. 1991. "Communication in conflict: Style strategy relationships". *Communication Monographs*, 58, 143-155.

Cosier, R. A., & Ruble, T. L. 1981. Research on conflict-handling behavior: An experimental approach. *Academy of Management Journal*, 24, 816-831.

De Dru, C. K. W., & Weingart, L. R. 2003. Task versus relationship conflict, team performance, and team member satisfaction: A meta-analysis: *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 88, 741-749.

Deutsch, M. 1949. A theory of cooperation and competition. *Human Relations*, 2, 129-151.

Duane, Michael J. 1989, "Sex differences in styles of conflict management'. *Psychological Report*, 65(3, Pt 1), 1033-1034

Gayle, B. M., Preiss, R. W., & Allen, M. 1994. Gender differences and the use of conflict strategies, in L. H. Turner & Allen, M. Sterk (Eds.). *Differences that make a difference* (pp. 13-26). Westport, Ct: Bergin & Gravey.

Gire, James T. & Carment, D.W. 1993. Dealing with disputes: The influence of individualism-collectivism. McMaster U, Hamilton, ON, Canada. *Journal of Social Psychology*, Vol.133 (1), 81-95.

Hirschman, C. 2001, "Order in the hearing", HR Magazine, Vol. 46, 58-64

Jameson, J. K. 1999. Toward a comprehensive model for the assessment and management of intraorganizational conflict: Developing the framework. *International Journal of Conflict Management*, 10, 268-294.

- Jehn, K. A. 1997. A qualitative analysis of conflict types and dimensions in organizational groups. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 42, 530—557.
- Korabik, K., Baril, G. L. and Watson, C. 1993, “Managers’ conflict management style and leadership effectiveness: the moderating effects of gender”, *Sex Roles*, Vol. 29, No. 5/6, pp. 407-22.
- Mckenzie, C. 2002, “Developing a CCO: Conflict-competent organization”, *Management*, Vol 49, No. 2, 34-36
- Miles, R. H. 1980. *Macro organizational behavior*. Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman.
- Nelson, Donald T. & Lubin, Bernard, 1991. “Performance of state legislators on the Conflict Mode Instrument”. *Organization Development Journal*, 1991 (Spr), Vol 9(1), 79-80.
- Pearson, A. W., Ensley, M. D., & Amson, A. C. 2002. An assessment and refinement of Jhen’s intragroup conflict scale. *International Journal of Conflict Management*, 13, 110-126.
- Pelled, L. H., Eisenhardt, K. M., & Xin, K. R. 1999. Exploring the black box: An analysis of work group diversity, conflict, and performance. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 44, 1-28.
- Pondy, L. R. 1992. Reflections on organizational conflict. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 13, 257-261.
- Portello, J. Y. and Long, B. C. 1994. “Gender role orientation, ethical and interpersonal conflicts, and conflict handling styles of female managers”, *Sex Roles*, Vol. 31. No. 11/12, pp. 682-701.

Powell, G. N. 1988. *Women and Men in Management*. Sage. Beverly Hills, CA.

Pruitt, D. G. 1983. Strategic choice in negotiation. *American Behavioral Scientists*, 27, 167-194.

Pulhamus, A. R. 1991. Conflict handling—A common sense approach to appraising supervisory performance. *Public Personnel Management*, 20, 485-492.

Putnam, L. L., & Wilson, C. E. 1982. Communicative strategies in organizational conflicts: Reliability and Validity of a measurement scale. In M. Burgeon (Ed.), *Communication Yearbook* (Vol. 6, pp. 629-652). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Rahim, M. A., Bonoma, T. V. 1979. Managing organizational conflict: A model for diagnosis and intervention. *Psychological Reports*, 44, 1323-1344.

Rahim, M. A. 1992. *Managing conflict in organizations* (2nd ed.). New York: Praeger.

Rahim, M. A. 2000. Empirical studies on handling conflict. *International Journal of Conflict Management*, 11, 5-8.

Rahim, M. A., Magner, R. A., 1995. Confirmatory factor analysis of the styles of handling interpersonal conflict: First-order factor model and its invariance across groups. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 80, 122-132.

Rahim, M. A., Magner, N. R., & Shapiro, D. L. 2000. Do justice perceptions influence styles of handling conflict with supervisors? What justice perceptions precisely? *International Journal of Conflict Management*, 11, 9-31.

Rahim, M. A. 2001. *Managing conflict in organizations* (3rd ed.). Westport, CT: Quorum Books.

Rahim, M. A. 2002. Toward a theory of managing organizational conflict. *International Journal of Conflict Management*, 13, 206-235.

Shockley-Zalaback, Pamela S. & Morley, Donald D. 1984. "Sex differences in conflict style preferences". *Communication Research Reports*, Vol (1), 28-32.

Sirivun, Utit 2001. An Investigation of the Primary and Secondary Conflict Management Style Preferences of Men and Women in the Role of Local Managers, International Managers, and College Students in Thailand. ProQuest Information and Learning. UMI 3006659, USA.

Thomas, K. W. and Kilmann, R. H. 1974, Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument, Consulting Psychologists Press, Palo Alto, CA.

Thomas, K. W., & Schmidt, W. H. 1976. A survey of managerial interests with respect to conflict. *Academy of Management Journal*, 19, 315-318.

Wall, J. A., & Callister, R. R. 1995. Conflict and its management. *Journal of management*, 21, 515-558.

Walters, A. E., Stuhlmacher, A. F., & Meyer, L. L. 1998. Gender and negotiator competitiveness: A meta-analysis. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 76, 1-29.