

ASSESSING CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STYLES OF MANAGERS' IN RELATION TO PROFESSION DEVELOPMENT: SUBORDINATES' PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Conflict's dimensionality and complexity have been studied in detail. It was viewed as opportunities exist or expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties for interfering with the other's goal achievement who perceive incompatible goals, and deficient resources, which may occur at the time of change. Conflict management is the ability to work under stress and continued to be productive. It is a process of supportive confrontation management of the organizational conflict, which is considered one of the most important and responsible job of managers. Present study investigated the most preferred to least preferred use of five dimensions of conflict management styles exercised by the Indian leaders to resolve the organizational interpersonal conflict, as perceived by the subordinates. Data for this study was collected with questionnaire from two hundred fifty two middle level managers representing seven different organizations. Psychometric properties of the measures were tested and improved with exploratory factor analysis. Analysis of indicator and internal consistency reliabilities were tested. Principal Axis Factoring Technique revealed five factors of conflict managing style of leaders. Multiple regression analysis of professional development of subordinates and employ of conflict management style by the leaders discovered unequivocal influence of professional development (seniority and success) of subordinates over perception of used conflict managing strategies by the leaders.

Key words: conflict, conflict management style, professional development, perception, perspective, superior - subordinate

Introduction -

Disagreement and Conflict is an inseparable part of employees' life. Conventionally conflict was understood as a negative situation should be avoided at any cost, while contemporary viewed this as a phenomenon which necessitates management, it is an opportunity for personal growth and individuals try to use it to his or her best advantage. In

organizations potential conflict could be in practically every decision which managers make. Coping efficiently and effectively with potential conflicts is one of the most important aspects of the manager's position. Since conflict is seemingly unavoidable, it is obviously necessary for managers to be able to recognize the sources of conflict, to view it constructive as well as destructive potential, to learn how to manage conflict, and to implement conflict resolution techniques in a practical way (Fleetwood, 1987).

Conflict:

Conflict is perceived and viewed as functional, situational, and interactive (Georg Simmel, 1955). It can be defined as a "disagreement in opinions between people or groups, due to differences in attitudes, beliefs, values or needs. In the business world, differences in such characteristics as work experience, personality, peer group, environment, and situation, all lead to differences in personal attitudes, beliefs, values or needs." (Thomas, 2005) .It can affect everyone from positive to negative extent. With the time organizations have changed, so did their attitude to conflict management.. Companies try to adopt a strategic approach to managing various organizational conflicts including -interpersonal, intergroup, intragroup, and interorganizational (Aula & Siira, 2010; Gareth & Jennifer, 2008; Green, 2012; Morgan, 2012). The conflict process consists of five stages, are: Potential opposition or Incompatibility; Cognition and personalization; Intentions; Behavior; Outcome. (Robbins, 2005).

Conflict management Styles :

conflict management styles was suggested as individual dispositions, which is stable over the period of time in a range of situation (Blake and Mouton,1964; Thomas ,1976; Rahim, 1992),while others believed that conflict management are strategies (Knapp, Putnam, & Davis, 1988; Pruitt, 1983) , intentions (Thomas, 1979) selected to suit the circumstances . Conflict was described as "distinguishing between useful conflicts and conflicts

that should be eliminated (Huseman, Richard, Logue, and Freshley, 1977), also defined as (Thomas, 1976) "A process of cooperative confrontation" (Fleetwood, 1987). Essential element of conflict management strategy is the early recognition of the conflict and conflicting parties. Five styles of managing conflict were discovered (Thomas, 1976), are: Integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding, and compromising. In integrating style, concern for self and concern for others are high (Rahim, 2001), this style helps in getting wise outcome, which is durable and efficient, adapting this approach solution is mutually accepted (Gray, 1989; Rahim, 2001). Obliging style is characterized by low concern for self and high concern for others (Rahim, 2001), using this style commonalities are considered and differences are ignored (Rubin, Pruitt, & Kim, 2004). Dominating style indicates high concern for self and low concern for others. Dominating people go to any extent to get result of their own interest (Rahim, 2001). Avoiding style, has low concern for both, not bother about any issue and let it go approach is accepted (Rahim, 2001). This may be adopted when perusing effort may not lead to anywhere (Cai & Fank, 2002; Victor, 2012). Compromising style is observed as moderate concern for self and others, believes in give and take and swap of information for seeking a optimal solution (Rahim, 2001). Of late Segal and Smith (2011) advised for successful conflict resolution: where listening, maintaining relationship and forgiving was considered important for managing the conflict.

Personal factors also lead to organizational conflict, are - skills and abilities, personality conflicts, perception (Whetten & Cameron, 2012). Considering the personal characteristics of the subordinates may also force the superiors to use different styles of managing conflict the main objective of the present study was to find out the dimensions of the conflict handling strategies as subordinates' perspective

Objectives:

- To analysis the conflict management styles of superiors in the subordinates' perspective.
- To find out the relationship between use of conflict style of the superiors with the demographic characteristics of the subordinates.

Hypotheses:

Since conflict management strategies are personal disposition of the managers/ individual and stable over the period of time across the situation (Blake and Mouton, 1964; Thomas, 1976; Rahim and Magner, 1995), it was hypothesized that -

H1: Dimensions of managing the conflict strategies of the superiors will emerge as perceived by the subordinates.

Though the use of various styles to manage the conflict is predetermined but manager can not use those preferred style of his/her based on their choice in every circumstances or with every individuals (Knapp, Putnam, & Davis, 1988; Pruitt, 1983; Thomas, 1979). Since the highest level of joint gain is achieved when negotiators had both a high concern for self and others (Ben-Yoav & Pruitt, 1984b; Rahim & Buntzman, 1990). As subordinates get more experience (seniority) or move ahead in the hierarchical ladder of organizational (success) may perceive different style of conflict management of their immediate superiors. It was hypothesized that -

H2: Integrating style of managing conflict by the superior will be perceived by the senior subordinate. This may be well suited style used by the superior with subordinate.

H3: Compromising and obliging strategies of handling conflict may be perceived by the successful subordinate to be used by the superior in the organization.

Method:

Research Site: the study was conducted in seven manufacturing organizations located in Western India. These organizations were chosen keeping in mind the dimension of ownership. Out of seven, five were public sector organizations and two were privately managed. All organizations sampled were big and production unit. They employed more then 1,500 employees, used to produce fabrics, bags, woolen clothes, and other goods.

Sample: The sample was obtained in a manner that ensured sticking to the probability sampling method but with some degree of opportunity sampling bias. Two hundred fifty two executives from lower to middle level voluntarily participated in the study. Age group was ranging from 24 to 50 years. Mostly possessing professional degree, having working experience of 8 to 21 years.

Instrument:

Conflict Handling Strategy measures: The scale consisted of 35 items drawn from Rahim's (1983; 2001; Rahim and Magner, 1995) measure of the styles of handling interpersonal conflict. It has its origin in the instruments designed by Blake and Mouton (1964), Hall (1969), Lawrence and Lorsch (1967), Thomas and Killman (1974, 2007). In this study the measure was varied in terms of the rating scales (ranging from "1" not at all true to "7" to

great extent true) and the criteria for retaining an item. Scale measures the five styles of managing interpersonal conflict having eighteen items - integrating, dominating, obliging, avoiding, and compromising. Reliabilities range from .76 to .59 for these factors shown in table 3.

Factor analysis revealed five interpretable factors (Table 1). They were -

1. Integrating (high concern for self and others) style involves openness, exchange of information, and examination of differences to reach an effective solution acceptable to both parties. It is associated with problem solving, which may lead to creative solutions.
2. Obliging (low concern for self and high concern for others) style is associated with attempting to play down the differences and emphasizing commonalities to satisfy the concern of the other party.
3. Dominating (high concern for self and low concern for others) style has been identified with win-lose orientation or with forcing behavior to win one's position.
4. Avoiding (low concern for self and others) style has been associated with withdrawal, buck-passing, or sidestepping situations.
5. Compromising (intermediate in concern for self and others) style involves give-and-take whereby both parties give up something to make a mutually acceptable decision

Table 1. Factor loadings obtained: Conflict handling Strategies

Personal data (Demographic Characteristics): The demographic characteristics of the respondents were gathered with the help of single item scales. These items provided information regarding the respondents' age, education, tenure in present organization, and position. Respondent's designation, designation of his immediate superiors, hierarchical level, earned monthly income etc.

Factor analysis result constrained to two interpretable factors, accounting for a total of 49.2% of the variance. The first factor included the age, length of service, tenure in organization, and tenure in present position. This was named seniority. The second factor included promotion and achieved success. This was named success (Tables 2). Seniority had a mean of 17.79 and standard deviation was 7.88, and coefficient alpha of .85. These values respectively, were 6.33, 2.71, and .53 for success dimension. The correlation between the two scales was .47. (See Table 3)

Table 2. Factor loadings obtained: Demographic characteristics

Table 3. Descriptive statistics & Inter- correlation between conflict handling strategies Demographic Characteristics of the subordinates (Diagonal line presents Alpha coefficient)

Result

Factor analysis of conflict management strategies constrained five dimensions of style of handling the conflict used by the superiors in the organizations, as per subordinates' perspective. Personal data of the subordinates constrained two factors, namely seniority and success; these factors appeared to play an important role in predicting the use of conflict management strategies of the superior at interpersonal level.

Table 4

Result of multiple analysis show that the seniority was the significant factor in predicting the use of integrating strategies, explaining a total of 4% of the variance. Success had a significant positive on the use of compromising strategy, explaining a total of 7% of the variance. None of the other conflict handling strategies was found to be associated with personal data of the subordinates.

Discussion:

The main objective of the present study was to find out the dimensions of the conflict handling strategies of the superiors in subordinates' perspective, or as perceived by the subordinates, also to find out the relationship between use of conflict handling styles of the superiors and demographic characteristics of the subordinates. Factor analysis revealed five factors of conflict management namely : integrating ,dominating , avoiding, obliging and compromising , also two factors of demographic characteristics , those were : seniority and success . There is a strong relationship between demographic characteristics of the employees and their perspective about the use of various conflict management styles of the superiors. Regression analysis discovered that seniority emerged as a significant predictor for the use of integrating strategy while success emerged as a significant predictor for the use of compromising strategies. This finding suggests that the strategies of handling conflict of the superiors are also a function of the demographic characteristics of the subordinates.

As result of factor analysis revealed that in the subordinates' perspective: superiors preferred style to manage the conflict in the organization was integrating strategy followed by dominating, avoiding,

obliging and compromising. Reasonably accepted that any superior first try to resolve the conflict with mutual understanding, if it does not work superior prefers to use dominating or forcing style to resolve the conflict, subsequently superior may avoid the subordinate or give royal snub if conflict still persist. The individual, who were older, had the longer tenure in their organization and position (seniority) perceived their superiors making a greater use of integrating strategies, it proves the hypothesis, reason being that a superior with senior employees always try to maintained relationship and also rely for completion of task due to their experience in the service. Further their experience and position in the organization enables them to realize about the use of this strategy which requires collaboration with subordinates.

Respondents who have got more promotions and have achieved a great deal of success in their professional career perceived their superiors making frequent use of compromising strategy. It may be reasoned that dealing conflict with successful subordinates, due to this competitive world (employee may leave the organization), conflict with successful employees may restrict superior to use compromising strategy. Successful subordinate might perceive their superiors using compromising strategy of handling conflict for the benefit of the organization.

Implication of the study: the result of the present study suggest to the manager of the organization that whatever may be the preferred style of managers to handle the conflicting situation in the organization they must give proper attention while dealing with senior as well as successful employees. Senior people must be given responsibility along with due admiration, while successful people if competent and ready to give tough time to the seniors, which may harms the interest of the organization should be dealt differently.

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Table 1. Factor loadings obtained: Conflict handling Strategies

Items	IT	DO	AV	OB	CM
He/she works with his/her immediate subordinates for a proper understanding of a problem	56	-06	12	18	09
He/she brings all our concerns out in the open so that the issues can be resolved in the best possible way.	43	14	08	28	16
He/she often goes along with the suggestions of his/her subordinate	58	20	09	09	16
He/she exchange accurate information with his/her subordinates to solve a problem together.	42	-05	04	18	07
He/she sometimes uses his/her power to win a competitive situations	-11	69	05	-12	-01
He/she uses his/her expertise to make a decision in his/her favor	32	61	20	03	02
He/she uses his/her authority to make a decision in her/his favor	13	61	06	19	18
He/she uses his/her influence to get his/her ideas accepted	14	65	08	09	10
He/she generally avoids an argument with his/her immediate subordinates	28	08	70	06	-09
He/she avoids unpleasant exchange with his/her immediate subordinate.	26	11	68	02	13
He/she stays away from disagreement with his/her immediate subordinates.	01	20	57	12	17
He/she avoids an encounter with his/her immediate subordinates.	-06	01	54	23	33
He/she usually allows concessions to his/her immediate subordinates.	04	09	20	37	07
He/she usually accommodates the wishes of his/her immediate subordinates.	16	20	21	41	15
He/she give some to get some.	08	08	05	55	04
He/she negotiates with his/her immediate subordinates so that a compromise can be reached.	29	04	14	17	61
He/she usually proposes a middle ground for breaking dead locks.	29	17	08	09	72
He/she plays down our differences to reach a compromise	11	11	09	09	52
Eigenvalue	9.02	2.16	1.56	1.37	1.07
% of variance	25.8	6.2	4.4	3.9	3.1

Note. IT=integrating, DO=dominating, AV=avoid, OB= obliging, CM=compromising

Table 2. Factor loadings obtained: Demographic characteristics

Item	Factors Seniority	Success
Age	86	31
Length of service	91	31
Tenure in organization	78	35
Tenure in present position	43	-20
Number of promotion	28	86
Achieved success	14	53
eigenvalue	3.07	1.35
% of variance	34.2	15.0

Table 3. Descriptive statistics & Inter- correlation between conflict handling strategies Demographic Characteristics of the subordinates (Diagonal line presents Alpha coefficient)

	Mean	SD	IN	DO	AV	OB	CM	seniority	success
IN	17.26	4.08	73	-	-	-	-	-	-
DO	17.03	4.35	29	76	-	-	-	-	-
AV	17.14	4.02	36	29	76	-	-	-	-
OB	12.60	2.87	51	29	39	59	-	-	-
CM	12.33	3.24	48	30	39	35	75	-	-
Seniority	17.79	7.88	32	10	18	05	18	85	-
Success	6.30	2.71	17	15	11	08	22	47	53

Table 4

Stepwise multiple regression analysis results personal data (predictors) and conflict handling strategies (criterion).

Strategies	Personal data	
	Seniority	Success
Integrating		
R	.19	*
R ²	.04	*
Beta	.19 α	*
Order	1	*
Compromising		
R	*	.27
R ²	*	.07
Beta	*	.27 α
Order	*	2