Exploring the Relationship Between Personality and Conflict Resolution Style of Future Managers

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Abstract

Conflicts are indispensible be it personal life or organization. Conflict is considered to be a component of interpersonal interaction, although not bad and inevitable, but is an essential part of workplace. Over the last decade, there has been an increased attention towards conflict resolution by the organizations. Conflict interactions at workplace offer a great opportunity to explore to what extent specific personality characteristics influence the style of conflict resolution. This paper is aimed to explore the relationship between personality traits and preferred conflict resolution style of future managers. Big five Personality Inventory model and Thomas Kilman conflict resolution instrument is used to assess the personality and conflict resolution style respectively. Big five personality traits are extroversion, conscientiousness, openness to experience, agreeableness and neuroticism. Conflict handling styles are compromising, competing, avoiding, accommodating and

collaborating. A total of 50 management students were randomly selected for data collection. Description and correlation is used for analysis. Findings suggest that there is significant relationship between personality type and conflict handling style adopted by individuals. Implications of the study for future researchers as well as practical implications are discussed in the paper.

INTRODUCTION

Business today may face challenge of conflict from every direction; be it unhappy customer or dissatisfied employee. The challenge of conflict is not always properly dealt with. Effective management of conflict can lessen the amount of time and money spent in trying to solve an issue, reduce the damage it could cause to those involved, and help decision makers make smarter choices much before the damage. Conflict is part of working life, but it is how we deal with it that is important. If conflict is not addressed at the right time, it may lead to massive destruction resulting in only ruins of the organization in long run. If an individual is perceived to manage conflict in an appropriate and effective manner within an organizational setting, that individual is also perceived to be more competent in general [14]. Hence it can be said that the effectiveness of individual employees, teams and the entire organization depends on how they manage interpersonal conflict at work [46]. Managers spend an average of 20 percent of their time managing conflict [43] and evidence suggests conflict and conflict management at work substantially influence individual, group and organizational effectiveness as well as wellbeing as indicated by health complaints and doctor visits [11],[37] . Tidd & Friedman narrated that conflict handling reduces negative impact of conflict and uncertainty, and use of positive conflict handling style can mitigate and remove its effects [45]. Rahim found, firms can be effective one if they manage and enhance conflict handling processes and the way they intervene [32] . How conflict is handled is a response to scenarios present at work [13]. 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 [6], [28]. Personality traits plays a vital role in determining the conflict resolution styles. Though there are various personality measurement models available, but Big Five Personality Dimensions also known as Five Factor Model also known is one of the most widely studied and discussed model by researchers. Big five personality traits consists of five traits Extroversion, agreeableness, Openness to experience, Neurotism and Conscientiousness [34]. Moberg found that big five factor model of personality has direct impact on the preferences of conflict handling style selection[28]. This study is aimed to study the relation of personality type and what is preferred conflict handling

style of university students (future managers). This study would be helpful to see what style of conflict handling students would prefer in future to handle work conflicts in their organization.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Conflict and Conflict Resolution

De Dreu [11] defined conflict as 'a process that begins when an individual or group perceives differences and opposition about interests and resources, beliefs, values, or practices that matter to them. Conflict can be defined as a perceived incompatibility of certain actions or goals [26] . Conflict can't be avoided and most of us see it as a destructive process [25]. Interpersonal conflict occurs when individual have different opposite goals and prevent each other from achieving [2]. How we perceive conflict, positive or negative, depends how conflicts are handled [30]. Resolution of work conflicts is beneficial for all the stake holders of the organization. A individual generally tend to employ one consistent way of reaction in a situation of conflict. Research focused on conflict generated several different models and schemas of resolving conflict [7] and [42]. Tidd & Friedman [32] 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 [32] found, firms can be effective only if they manage and enhance conflict handling processes and the way they intervene. Properly handling conflicts increases efficiency at both individual and

group levels [46] . There are innumerable scales and tools given by various researchers to measure conflict resolution style. The early models measured only one dimension of cooperativeness and uncooperativeness [13]. Blake and Mouton and Thomas [7] first presented their typology of handling interpersonal conflict. In their model they specified five types: problem solving, smoothing, forcing, withdrawal and sharing. There are two dimensions of conflict handling self interest (Assertiveness) and others concern (Cooperativeness) [41] Since its introduction, their model has been reinterpreted by a few researchers [41] and Rahim & Bonoma, (1979) and signified in vary of instruments [23]. Similar to Blake and Mouton (1964) scheme has been used by Rahim and Bonoma [1979] to categorize the styles for handling interpersonal conflict. The research suggests that each individual will have a predominant or preferred style, but that in certain situations we might abandon our preferred style for another (Lulofs & Cahn, 2000). Three of the styles namely Collaboration, Competition and Avoidance also represent strategies in conflict resolution. Medea (2004) proposes that there are four levels of conflict, and that most strategies would be effective for some levels and ineffective at other levels, which supports the idea of a situational approach to conflict management. If we accept the concept of predominant styles and of a situational approach to managing conflict, then it follows that a person's effectiveness would be affected by the extent to which their predominant style could be abandoned in favour of another.

Personality and Conflict Resolution

A review of the existing literature by Adler and Weiss [1] reported that most of the organizational researchers either ignored or see personality variables in low regard. However, couple of recent studies proved that significant relationship do exist between personality and work performance and work team effectiveness [26] . Personality is found to be associated with quality of social interaction and social relationships people have [9] . Since, social interactions take place on a daily basis and also include conflict-based interactions, personality factors may be significant in how individuals deal with conflict based interactions. When conflict is dealt positively, it leads to agreement and help maintaining relationships using the change or tense phase [19]. Some people behave inherently in a compassionate manner by understanding the feelings of others and responding to others with sympathy and kindness. Herkenhoff [15] asserted that people who are emotionally intelligent tend to make good friends, good partners, enhanced co-workers, and better leaders. Various facets of personality like self monitoring, emotional intelligence and personality traits described by various personality theories such as MBTI (Johnson, 1997; Percival et al., 1992), Big Five model [3] and [16] are found to affect the conflict handling strategies used by people in different social relations. 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 [6] . Techrune [46] was the first who mentioned about the personality as a prediction factor of conflict management style of conflict. Moberg [24] found that big five factor model of personality has direct impact on the preferences of conflict handling style selection. Researches show that individuals with both extraversion and openness to experience prefer compromising over avoiding style of conflict handling [17] . Although there are various tools and models to measure personality but Big Five personality scale also known as five factor model is most widely used and discussed by the researchers. Big Five factor model became a new age in measuring personality because of its five dimensions combining individual's disposition in order to create complex and overall personality structure [21]. The most suitable for this study are research conducted by David Antonioni focused on relationship between The Big Five personality factors and conflict management styles based on ROCI II [2]. Big five personality traits consists of five traits Extroversion, Agreeableness, Openness to experience, Emotional Stability and Conscientiousness [34]. Extroversion is "a personality dimension describing someone who is sociable, gregarious, and assertive". Agreeableness is "a personality dimension that describes someone who is good-natured, cooperative, and trusting". Conscientiousness is "a personality dimension that describes someone who is responsible, dependable, persistent, and organized". Emotional stability

is "a personality dimension that characterizes someone as calm, self-confident, secure (positive) versus nervous, depressed, and insecure (negative). Openness to experience is "a personality dimension that characterizes someone in terms of imagination, sensitivity, and curiosity" [34]. Antonioni [16] found that Extroversion, agreeableness, openness, and conscientiousness, are positively related with integrating (collaborating) style of conflict handling. Park & Antonioni [16] found that personality traits like extraversion and agreeableness are having significant relation with conflict handling style. H. Park, D. Antonioni [16] investigates how an individual's interpersonal conflict resolution behaviors affected by the individual's personality (assessed by the Big 5) and a situational factor (the other party's conflict behavior), as well as how the two factors interact. Sabna Mukhtar, M. N. Habib [36] in their paper "Private Sector Managers Approach to Conflict Management: A Study of Relationships between Conflict Management Styles and Personality Type" examines the nature and strength of the link between conflict management styles and personality type. The results of the study indicate a strong linkage between personality type and the approach of conflict resolution.

Although previous researches show that a relationship exists between personality and conflict resolution styles, however it has been found that not many researches have been done in the area of management graduates who in turn are the future managers. Research

in this field will lead to a better understanding in the field of conflict management. This paper is based on the personality traits given by big five model of personality dimensions and preferred conflict handling styles used using Thomas kilmann Conflict resolution instrument.

PURPOSE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine the role of personality in conflict resolution strategies opted by future managers. This study is an attempt to understand the relationship between personality factors (using Big Five Model) as an independent variable and conflict handling styles of future managers as a dependent variable.

Specifically, the objectives of the study are:

1. To examine how various personality factors relate to differences in choices of conflict management strategies. In this study only three personality traits ie extraversion, openness and Neuroticism are taken into consideration.

2. To understand and explore how future managers deal with the day-to-day interpersonal conflicts and giving suggestions for organizational processes like Recruitment, Selection, training and coaching.

Significance of the Study

The idea behind the study is to find out how future managers deal with day to day conflicts. Previous researches have focused a lot on conflict resolution strategies but examination of the individual choice of the strategies is still lacking. Hence it is apparent that there exists gaps and there seems to be a significant need for understanding the nature of conflict and exploring the role of personality variables on the choice of conflict handling styles.

Hypotheses of the Study

H1: Extroversion will positively predict collaborating style and negatively predict accommodating or compromising style to handle conflicts

H2: Openness will positively predict collaborating style and negatively predict avoiding style or compromising styles.

H3: Agreeableness will positively predict Accommodating style and negatively predict competing style to handle conflict

H4: Conscientiousness will positively predict collaborating and competing styles. It will negatively predict avoiding and compromising style

H5: Neurotism will positively predict accommodating and avoiding styles and negatively predict collaborating style and compromise style to handle conflicts

METHODOLOGY

Sample

A predominantly quantitative approach was adapted for this study. The Present Study is a sample study and conducted in Management College. The sample consisted of 50 final year students doing MBA .

Data Sources

For this study primary data as well as secondary data is used. The primary data was collected by researcher personally conducting a field survey. The secondary data available in print form and various online databases were also used.

Instruments and Tools for Data Collection

Two research instruments were used in the study, The TKI (Thomas and Kilmann 1974,2002). It is designed to assess an individual's behavior in conflict situation. The tool identifies five style of handling conflict that vary in the degree of assertiveness and cooperativeness. The five styles are competing, collaborating, compromising, accommodating and avoiding. It has 30 items with two options. Participants will be asked to select one option which is characteristic of their behavior. Kilmann and Thomas (1977) reported four-week test-retest reliabilities as follows: competing .61, collaborating .63, compromising .66; avoiding .68, and accommodating .62. Big Five Inventory (BFI) by John &Srivastava, 1999 is a 44 item tool

for measuring the personality variable. The alpha reliabilities of the BFI scales typically range from .75 to .90 and average above .80; three-month test-retest reliabilities range from .80 to .90, with a mean of .85.

Research Variables

The dependent variables measured in this study are the five independent dimensions of conflict management style, identified as competing, collaborating, compromising, accommodating and avoiding. The independent (predictor) variables in this study are the Big Five personality traits viz. Openness to experience, Conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and Neuroticism

Data Analysis

The quantitative data collected was subjected to various statistical analyses. The data analysis was done by using frequency distribution, correlation and regression analysis. Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS (ver.15).

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics for Conflict Management Style

The conflict management styles of managers are shown in Table 1. The results indicate that most widely used conflict management strategies by the future managers are the collaborating with mean score of 6.520 and Accomodating with mean score of 6.500.

The least used style is competing with a mean score of 5

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Competing	50	1.00	10.00	5.0000	2.44114
Collaborating	50	2.00	10.00	6.5200	1.75243
Compromising	50	2.00	11.00	5.5600	1.90766
Avoiding	50	3.00	10.00	6.4200	1.76230
Accommodating	50	.00	11.00	6.5000	3.05227
Valid N (listwise)	50				

Correlation Analysis of Personality Factors and Conflict Management Styles

In order to understand the choice of a particular preferred conflict handling style, it was hypothesized that the big five personality factors would have significant effect on the choice of conflict management style. To determine if the hypothesis were supported by the data, a correlation matrix was calculated as given in table 2.

H1: Findings from table 2 shows that Extroversion is found to be positively correlated with collaborating, avoiding and competing with correlation of .269, .216 and .179 respectively. Also Extroversion is negatively correlated accommodating with correlation coefficient of -.426. Hence the hypothesis is partially supported by the findings that Extroverts will prefer collaborating style. No specific relation exists with compromising style.

H2: Findings reveal that openness is positively correlated with collaborating style with correlation .294 . It is negatively correlated to Avoiding, styles of conflict resolution with correlation -.176. Hence the hypothesis is partially supported by the findings that people high on openness will prefer collaborating style. Again no specific relation is found with compromising style.

H3: Findings shows that Agreeableness is positively correlated with Accommodating style with correlation .496 and negatively correlated to Compromising, Avoiding and Competing with correlation -.379, -.242 and -.154. Hence the hypothesis is supported by the findings that people high on Agreeableness will prefer accommodating style.

H4: Findings reveal that Conscientiousness is positively correlated to competing style with correlation .226 and negatively correlated to collaborating style with coefficient -.128. Hence the hypothesis is partially supported by the findings that people high conscientiousness will prefer competing style but no specific relation exists with collaborating style.

H5: Findings suggest that Neurotism is positively correlated with

Table 2: Correlation Matrix of the Conflict Management Strategies and Big Five Personality Factors

		Competing	Collaborating	Compromising	Avoiding	Accommodating
Extraversion	Pearson Correlation	.179	.269	-.005	.216	-.426**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.215	.058	.974	.132	.002
	N	50	50	50	50	50
Agreeableness	Pearson Correlation	-.154	.034	-.379**	-.242	.496**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.286	.814	.007	.090	.000
	N	50	50	50	50	50
Conscientiousness	Pearson Correlation	.226	-.128	-.056	.044	-.099
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.114	.377	.700	.762	.496
	N	50	50	50	50	50
Neurotism	Pearson Correlation	-.277	-.028	.035	-.111	.283*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.052	.849	.810	.443	.046
	N	50	50	50	50	50
Openess	Pearson Correlation	-.054	.294*	-.039	-.176	.002
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.708	.039	.788	.222	.990
	N	50	50	50	50	50

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Accommodating style with coefficient .283 . It is negatively correlated to competing and Avoiding with coefficient -.277, -.111. No specific relation to collaborating and compromise. Hence the hypothesis of positively predicting avoiding style is negated rather it is negatively correlated.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The major objective of the present research was to determine the role of personality variables in the choice of conflict management strategies of the employees. It is observed from the results of the study that personality factors do predict all the five conflict handling styles. The results affirmed that individuals with high of extroversion will have a preference for collaborating style in comparison to other styles of managing conflict. Openness is found to be related to collaborating style and negatively related to avoiding style of conflict resolution. As expected Agreeableness is significantly related to accommodating and negatively related to compromising ,avoiding and competing styles . Conscientiousness is positively correlated to competing style and negatively correlated to collaborating style. Neurotism is positively correlated with Accommodating style and negatively correlated to competing and Avoiding.

The results of the study have some practical implications that can be useful for researchers as well as for managers and policy makers in the organizations. This study has thrown light on the impact of various personality factors

on conflict handling styles of individuals. The findings of this study give an insight to the managers for a need to understand the conflict situation and work towards being able to choose the suitable conflict management style for managing conflict. Conflict management training can also be an area of focus to help managers use appropriate conflict handling styles. Also, the human resource managers should undertake the various human resource functions like recruitment and selection keeping in view that a right mix of employees with different personality types can lead to better team culture and group dynamics within the organization. The application of this knowledge in the various organizational processes will contribute to positive conflict management in the organization Also, there can be some counseling sessions or training sessions organized for employees on usage of right conflict handling styles. This may be helpful for an organization to be successful and to achieve organizational objectives with positive employee relations. Employees are the key asset of any organization and their positive behavior on the job is the key to organizational success. In addition, further research can be done by incorporating the other contextual and organizational factors influencing the choice of conflict management strategies by individuals.

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