

Interpersonal Conflict Management styles in Services Settings

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Abstract

The existence of interpersonal conflict in the work environment typical to services settings is proved both in literatures and with practical observations. While the existence of interpersonal conflict is identified to be detrimental to the organizational growth, the presence of competitive interpersonal conflict is viewed well in the long run operations of the services enterprises. Under these backdrops the present study measures the existing levels of conflict management styles among the employees of the services sector. Based on the survey data generated from 550 employees found across various services segments, it is identified that the various conflict management styles adopted are significantly related with each other. From among the conflict management styles such as Integrating, Compromising, Dominating, Obliging and avoiding styles, conflict management style of the type Integrating is found to be with highest adoption levels. Also, the conflict management style of the type avoidance is found to be with least variations on adoptions among the employees. Based on these findings appropriate implications are discussed in the work.

Key Words: Conflict, Service enterprise, Integrating Style, Compromising Style, Dominating Style, Obliging Style and Avoiding style.

1.0 Conflict: Introduction

Conflict is defined as a variance between two or more groups with perceived mismatched goals. This variance can be about the distribution of resources or disagreement regarding objects, values, and so on that can occur on the interpersonal or organizational level (McKenna and Richardson, 1995). Different authors define conflict in numerous ways; the common point in the definitions offered though is the parties' perceived mismatched goals (Wall and Callister, 1995).

Classical and behavioral approach view conflict as an organizational abnormality, a potential dangerous process with negative outcome such as anger, resentment, confusion, lack of cooperation, etc (Argyris, 1958). Thus it's believed that avoiding or suppressing conflict which is dysfunctional or negative that harms the organization or creates problems in the achievement of goals. Hence, organizations need to find possible ways to get rid of such conflicts and maintain good relationship between individuals or groups (Campbell et al., 1970). While existences of conflict in organization are viewed with inhibitions, Integrationist view of conflict is broader. More specifically in some cases conflict may be helpful, facilitative and functional. For instance conflict is not only inevitable but also desirable for coming out with various views on a matter. It is good for bringing out positive changes in organizations and individuals and could act as major stimulant for change, creativity and innovation. Such type of conflict is functional or positive in nature which improves or increases organization's performance.

1.1 Stages of Conflict

The stages of conflict are classified into 5 stages that may or may not have progressive dependencies with each stage. These five stages of conflict are (i) Latent conflict (ii) Perceived conflict, (iii) Felt conflict (iv) Manifest Conflict and (v) Conflict aftermath. While explaining these

stages of conflict, Gomez et al. (2001) observes that each conflict stage is tied up with a series of inter-locking conflict events as follows;

Latent conflict: There can be a role conflict in organization due to scarce resources, deviation of subunit goals, clash for position etc. these conflicts were present but the conflict has not yet appeared. Latent conflict provides necessary conditions for making conflict to outbreak.

Perceived conflict: Here basic source of conflict results due to groups or individuals misunderstanding of each other's true position. Such a conflict can be resolved by open and fair communication.

Felt conflict: Even though the two conflicting groups or individuals perceive that there is a basis for conflict, conflict will not arise unless the differences become personalized or internalized.

Manifest conflict: This is the stage where conflict comes only by the way of behavior like aggression, sabotage, apathy, withdrawal, etc. all of such overt conflict reduces organization's effectiveness.

Conflict aftermath: The result (aftermath) of a conflict may be either good or bad depending on how the conflict is resolved. If it is resolved in a mature way by resolving the reasons, it creates good working conditions. If it is merely suppressed, latent conditions of conflict may be aggravated and outburst more forcefully in future.

2.0 Theoretical background on Conflict Management Styles

On the basis of nature of the individual and situational factors five conflict management styles are identified and suggested as follows:

Integrating style: It allows both conflicting groups and individuals to achieve their desired outcomes where both are in win-win situation. It is opposite of conflict. Conflicting Groups or individuals openly share information, both attempt to listen and develop empathy. Issues are looked at objectively. Hence, this style involves a high level of concern for both conflicting groups and individuals (Rahim et al., 2000). Moreover the two vital elements of this style are confrontation and problem solving characterized by open communication and simplified misunderstanding.

Compromising style: There is no distinct winner or loser because each conflicting party is expected to give up something of value for a concession. It is effective when the goals can be divided like sharing of resources and emphasis on compromise through bargaining. This style shows intermediate concern for self and others. In this style both conflicting groups or individuals are found in compromise-sacrifice solution, which means that both conflicting parties accept to give up something to make mutually acceptable decisions. Compromising style takes a smaller amount of time than integrating style, and is suitable when conflicting groups or individuals have less time for taking a decision (Rahim and Bonama, 1979).

Dominating style: It is also termed as confrontation and competing. This style is power oriented and is associated with direct physical aggression, high assertiveness. One conflicting group's or individual's gain is another conflicting group's or individual's loss. While it is not viewed as constructive solution (Rahim, 1985), in such style one person thinks only for his own rights and disregards other's feeling. Dominating style indicates high level of concern for self and low level of concern for others. This style may be demanded in a situation where a decision should be taken quickly and no consensus can be reached.

Obliging style: It is also termed as accommodating or smoothing. This style is low on assertiveness and high on cooperativeness. Conflict is resolved by allowing the desire or interest of only conflicting group or individual to prevail (Rahim, 1983). Groups will be self-sacrificing with emphasis on commonalities and saving future relationship. It is win-loss situation. It means that obliging style shows low concern for self and high concern for others. One person ignores and gives up his personal feeling so that others expectations are met. Hence such style came into use when a person has a high feeling for others and a low feeling for self; ensure that he is keeping himself in line with company policies.

Avoiding style: This style is also termed as withdrawal or suppression. Groups of conflict fail to address issues and show behaviors such as withdrawal, indifference, evasion, apathy, fight, person ignores disagreement, may be hesitant to talk on issue. This way conflict is suppressed. It means that avoiding style shows low concern for self and others. Such style is mostly used by those individuals who do not want to face conflict and by those who are not willing to either admit fault or to put it on others (Rahim et al., 2001). Avoiding style of conflict provides time to both groups to calm before conflict arises. In other words a person who is avoiding the conflict is unsuccessful to fulfill personal as well as concern of others.

3.0 Objective

Having identified the various stages of conflict and various inadvertent conflict management styles adopted by the individuals or groups in typical organizational settings, the present study aims to find out the kind of inter relationship existing between inadvertent Conflict management styles of individuals in service sector.

3.1 Hypothesis

H1: Conflict management styles such as Integrating style, Obliging style, Dominating style, Avoiding style, and Compromising style are not related with each other.

3.2 Methodology

This study employed survey of service sector employees to gather data with the help of validated survey instrument in the form of questionnaire for hypothesis testing and to address research objectives 660 questionnaires were distributed among them. For the purpose of analyses of the data collected the respondents who did not respond to all questionnaires or for whom there was a suspicion of random response such as use of the identical answer throughout is excluded. A total of 550 respondents met these inclusion criteria and thus, constitute a sample size for the present study. Since, the respondents for the survey were identified on the basis of judgment comprising factors such as conflicting possibilities, individuals in service sector and job complexities, the sampling procedure adopted for the present study is categorized as Judgment sampling method. To ascertain whether conflict management styles are related with each other, bivariate correlation is used.

3.3 Questionnaire Design

Questionnaire was framed for the present study comprising the measurement schemes for measuring the variables (a) Demographic profile of the respondents and (b) Conflict Management styles. While the provisions for recording standard set of details in Demographic profile was incorporated in the Questionnaire, the conflict management styles were measured through study variables distinct to each of the styles in a standard 5 point likert scale (Rahim and Magner, 1995). Further, the reliability of the survey instrument was established through the values of CronBach Alpha obtained well above the suggested value of 0.6(Nunnaly, 1978).The details of the specific values of reliability measures corresponding to each of the conflict management styles are also provided in the Exhibit-1.

Exhibit-1: Details of the Measurement Scales with Corresponding Reliability values

S.No.	Details of the Scale	Cronbach Alpha
	Conflict management Styles (Rahim and Magner, 1995)	
(i)	Integrating Style	0.911
(ii)	Obliging Style	0.876
(iii)	Dominating Style	0.797
(iv)	Avoiding Style	0.856
(v)	Compromising Style	0.756

4.0 Interrelationship among Conflict management styles

The relationship possibility of 5 conflict management styles such as Integrating style, Obliging style, Dominating style, Avoiding style, and Compromising style relating with each other is defined in hypothesis-1 taken up and its results are shown in the table-1, as an outcome of Bivariate Correlation test. From the results, it can be inferred that Pearson ‘r’ values between the range 0.762 and 0.844 corresponding to 10 different correlations are found to be significant at 5 percent level. All the possible correlation are found to be correlating with each other at higher levels and these results forms the basis to reject the hypothesis-1. Thus, conclusions can be drawn that the inadvertent conflicting management styles adopted by the individuals in the service firms are significantly related with each other.

The descriptive details comprising mean and standard deviation values for each of conflict management styles is also estimated and provided in the table-1. With all conflict management styles relating with each other at higher levels of correlations the conflict management style of the type integrating has highest mean value of 24.517 with highest standard deviation value of 5.636, whereas the conflict management style of the type avoiding has lowest mean value of 14.106 with lowest standard deviation value of 3.363. The highest mean value of 24.517 with highest standard deviation value of 5.636 for conflict management style of the type integrating confirms highest presence of this style with maximum variations among employees.

The next higher mean value of 21.089 with second highest standard deviation value of 5.079 for conflict management style of the type obliging confirms second higher presence of this style with second maximum variations among employees. The next higher mean value of 20.857 with third highest standard deviation value of 5.054 for conflict management style of the type dominating confirms third highest presence of this styles level with third maximum variations among employees.

The mean value of 17.337 with a standard deviation value of 4.273 for conflict management style of the type compromising confirms last but not the least presence of this style with second least variations among employees. The lowest mean value of 14.106 with least standard deviation value of 3.363 for the conflict management style of the type avoiding confirms lowest levels of adoption of this style with least variations among employees.

Table-1:Details of Correlations Between Conflict Management styles

S. No	Dimension 1	Mean	Dimension 2	Descriptive Statistics		'r' value	Level of Relationship		
1	Obliging style	21.089	Integrating style	Mean	24.517	0.788**	Higher		
2	Dominating style	20.857		Mean rank	1				
3	Compromising style	17.337		Std. Deviation	5.636				
4	Avoiding style	14.106		Std. Deviation rank	1				
6	Dominating style	20.857	Obliging style	Mean	21.089	0.762**	Higher		
7	Compromising style	17.337		Mean rank	2				
8	Avoiding style	14.106		Std. Deviation	5.079			0.799**	Higher
				Std. Deviation rank	2				
10	Compromising style	17.337	Dominating style	Mean	20.857	0.804**	Higher		
11	Avoiding style	14.106		Mean rank	3				
				Std. Deviation	5.054			0.788**	Higher
				Std. Deviation rank	3				
13	Avoiding style	14.106	Compromising style	Mean	17.337	0.786**	Higher		
				Mean rank	4				
				Std. Deviation	4.273				
				Std. Deviation rank	4				
			Avoiding style	Mean	14.106				
				Mean rank	5				
				Std. Deviation	3.363				
				Std. Deviation rank	5				

*Significant at 5 Percent level

Source: Computed from Primary Data

5.0 Findings

The major finding of this work is the existence of interrelationship among the conflict management styles adopted in an inadvertent manner among the employees of Service sector. While the existence of interpersonal and group conflicts in services settings is an unavoidable proposition, the inadvertent conflict management styles exhibited by the employees suggest higher levels of controlled behavior of the employees in services settings. This major finding made in this work can be substantiated by the following other findings

1. Among the conflict management styles adopted by the employees, integrating style occupies the major source of conflict management followed by the styles such as Obliging, Dominating, Compromising and avoiding.
2. In terms of uniformity in the adoption of conflict management styles, avoidance strategy is found to be highest with least variation among the employees followed by the styles such as Compromising, Dominating, Obliging and Integrating.

6.0 Implications and conclusion

The findings made in the present work suggest the existence of high order of behavior of the employees in service sector, the finding that conflict avoidance strategy is uniform across all the employees provides the snapshot of the employee's determination to stay without conflict in services settings. While this is considered good for the services enterprises to operate without internal hassles, the existing scenario might lead them towards ineffectiveness in finding the possible overall services shortcomings of the enterprises. Hence, the services enterprises are suggested to create competitive internal systems that can be a source for optimum levels of conflict which can act as the drivers of change and new strategies in the long run operations.

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Appendix-Questionnaire on Conflict Management styles

Integrating Style

- 1 In my job I try to investigate an issue with my superior to find a solution acceptable to us.
- 2 in my job I try to integrate my ideas with those of my superior to come up with a decision jointly.
- 3 In my job I try to work with my superior to find solutions to problems which satisfy our expectations.
- 4 In my job I exchange accurate information with my superior to solve a problem together.
- 5 In my job I try to bring all our concerns out in the open so that the issue can be resolved in the best possible way.
- 6 In my job I collaborate with my superior to come up with a decision acceptable to us.
- 7 In my job I try to work with my superior for a proper understanding of a problem.

Obliging Style

- 1 In my job I generally try to satisfy the needs of my superior.
- 2 In my job I give into the wishes of my supervisor.
- 3 In my job I usually allow concessions to my superior.
- 4 In my job I often go with other suggestions of my superior.
- 5 In my job I try to satisfy the expectations of my supervisor.
- 6 In my job I usually accommodate the wishes of my superior.

Dominating Style

- 1 In my job I use my influence to get my ideas accepted.
- 2 In my job I use my authority to make decisions in my favor.
- 3 In my job I use my expertise to make decisions in my favor.
- 4 In my job I am generally firm in pursuing my side of the issue.
- 5 In my job I sometimes use my power to win a competitive situation.

Avoiding Style

- 1 In my job I attempt to avoid being “put on the spot” and try to keep my conflict with my superior to myself.
- 2 In my job I avoid open discussions of my difference with my superior.
- 3 In my job I try to stay from disagreement with my superior.
- 4 In my job I avoid an encounter with my superior.
- 5 In my job I try to avoid my disagreement with my superior to myself in order to avoid hard feelings.
- 6 In my job I try to avoid unpleasant exchanges with my superior.

Compromising Style

- 1 In my job I try to find a middle course to resolve an impasse.
- 2 In my job I usually propose a middle ground for breaking deadlocks.
- 3 In my job I negotiate with my superior so that a compromise can be reached.
- 4 In my job I use “give and take” so that compromise can be made.