

# Conflict Management Style and Gender-Role of Boss and Subordinates

SanamMahar<sup>1a</sup>, QamaruddinMaitlo<sup>2b</sup>, Ajmal Waheed<sup>3c</sup>, Dr.Niaz Ahmed Bhutto<sup>4d</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The author is scholar of MS at Sukkur Institute of Business Administration, Sindh, Pakistan.

<sup>2</sup>The author is scholar of MS Leading to PhD at Sukkur Institute of Business Administration, Sindh, Pakistan.

<sup>3</sup>The author is Assistant Professor at Quaid-e-Azam University, Pakistan.

<sup>4</sup>The author is an Associate Professor at Sukkur Institute of Business Administration, Sindh, Pakistan

<sup>a</sup>Sanam.mahar@gmail.com, <sup>b</sup>qamar.maitlo@iba-suk.edu.pk <sup>c</sup>awkhan2@yahoo.com, <sup>d</sup>niaz@iba-suk.edu.pk

**Key Words:** Conflict, conflict managing style, gender, gender role.

**Abstract.** This paper examines the relationship between the gender-role and the conflict management styles of peers. A sample of N=130 employees from the education sector were taken for the consideration. The gender role is measured using Bem Sex Role Inventory, whereas Rahim Organizational Conflict Instrument-II was used to measure the conflict management styles of the boss and the subordinates. The results of our research study evidently demonstrated that in the gender role the masculine value was high in the dominating style, while the high value of feminine were on the avoiding style and the integrated style was preferred by the androgynous.

## Introduction

Conflict is presumed to be present in almost every context of human interaction, which makes the importance of conflict management strategies highly significant. Conflict management strategies vitally increase the performance and effectiveness of an individual and in turn the effectiveness of the organization as a whole. Within this scenario, the main focus is on the human being itself and the manner in which each individual manages conflict. Taking into account the notion that human being itself is extremely unpredictable from the psychological façade and perplexing behavioral patterns, even though some specific characteristics are attributed solely to particular human gender i.e. masculine, feminine.

Different individuals have different styles to handle conflict and the way or style they manage their conflict indicates the resultant relationship between them. But before that, these conflict handling styles when addressed also reflect the effect of gender-role of that particular individual. What the individual perceives himself/herself as either masculine, feminine or a hybrid of both characteristics, apart from his/her physical gender, would be his/her gender-role (Bem1974). Gender-role defines the socially learned characteristics, behaviors, values and norms of individuals. Since every individual behaves and acts on the basis of his/her innate and learned values therefore it would be enough to notify the effect of gender-role on conflict managing styles Bem and Lenny (1976), Kagan (1964) and Maccoby (1966). In the organization the conflicts between the boss and subordinates is as frequent as anywhere else but for a healthy organizational environment the conflict level should be to the threshold of functionality.

## Literature Review

**Conflict:** There are myriad possibilities to define conflict probably as many as there are occasions for it to happen One set of definitions recommends so as; conflict is present in situations where there are apparent differences in interests, views, or goals. Another such that of Deutsch (1973) implies that for a conflict to be present, one party must in fact obstruct the ambitions of another. Yet again there are definitions resembling Abel (1982) which uphold the view of incompatible assertion

to assets. Felstiner, Abel and Sarat (1981) and Yngvesson (1988) rightly suggest that the explanation of conflict diverges because of the different perceptual and behavioral interpretations of various parties; therefore any definition must be flexible in order to fit in the context. The deficiency in much of the literature is the distinction between the actual conflict and its cueing circumstances. Pondy (1967) advocates that literature over the time presents conflict as being referred to as either of the following: (a) the Precursor conditions of conflict full behavior such as scarcity of resources, policy differences etc., (b) the Affective level of the individuals in the conflict such as strain, worry, resentment, fear, etc (c) the Cognitive level of those involved in the conflict such as their perceptions about and awareness of the conflict full situations (d) the actual conflict full behavior of the individuals involved in the conflict; this behavior continuum initiates from submissive resistance and ends on open hostility (p. 298) Conflict has two approaches; to begin with the one which follows Schmidt and Kochan (1977), which focuses upon incidents pertinent to competitive intentions, comparable as purposely interfering with the differing individual's or party's goals, interests or views. This characterization is nearer to accepted practice of the expression conflict in the industrial relations literature (e.g. strikes and job actions). The next approach which follows Pondy (1967) and the 1976 *Handbook* chapter, envelops those events (usually perceptions) which precede the selection of conflict-management styles. To formulate a more clear and comprehensible picture and a more workable definition which surrounds different aspects of conflict, based on the contemporary literature, Conflict are the real or perceived perceptions, emotions and behaviors of the individuals or parties as well as the contexts and backgrounds in which the conflict takes place, which could be before (the taking into account the antecedent conditions) the conflict or synchronized with it, taking place at the actual moment of conflict.

**Conflict management styles:** Rahim and Bonama's (1979) categorization of the styles of settling inter-personal conflict is based on two facades, first when a person considers himself and his own concerns and the second when a person considers others and the concerns of others. Each of the dimensions is a continuum in nature, therefore consideration of the interests of one's own self or of the others', can be high or low. Moreover based on these two dimensions a third dimension can be analyzed which is a state in the middle where a person possesses a bit of both the facades that is to say consideration of one's own interests as well as the other's. Taking these categories as the foundation, five particular conflict managing styles have been devised namely (a) *Integrating*, in which a person highly considers his own interests as well as the interests of the other's, (b) *Avoiding*, is just the opposite of the integrating style, it is when a person has neither a concern for himself nor the others indicating low concerns in both the major two dimensions, (c) *Obliging* is a state in which a person does possess a high concern for others but possesses a low concern for himself. (d) *Dominating*, is the reciprocal of the obliging style of conflict management, it is when a person has a high concern for own interests but a low concern for the interests of the other's. Last but not the least (e) *Compromising* style is the category which comes under the third dimension, this is when a person has some consideration for himself and some for the other.

**Integrating:** From the theoretical aspect on integrating style, it is presumed to produce a lesser conflict loaded atmosphere; Fisher and Ury (1991) support the argument of integrating in such a manner that a well judged, effective and efficient outcome of any dispute would only be by the means of careful and effortful examination of the aims and well being of all the persons involved. Experimental research indicates resembling opinions, of the sort of Pruitt et al, it shows that the peak level of mutual rewards were accomplished when negotiators possessed both a high concern for self and a high concern for others.

**Obliging:** Obliging refers to a more concern for others rather than for one's self, it also refers to easily giving up own interests for the sake of fulfilling other's. This strategy apparently seems an unproblematic way to patch up disagreements but not an always entirely efficient option. In obliging style one faction plainly gives in to the aims and interests of the other faction, in anticipation of resolving the conflict. A study by Fry, Firestone, and Williams (1983) concluded that members who are reluctant to stand up for their own requirements and which only looked after their partner's interests and needs of newly formed couples, , tended to concede so rapidly that they missed opportunities for joint gains.

**Dominating:** When persons consider their own interest more than that of the others that is when they use the 'Dominating' style. People who use this style hold the view that by addressing at least their side of the disagreement and their own needs, will partially resolve the conflict. The possibility also remains that using such conflict handling style in which only one side of the problem is addressed will not conclude to complete and effective solution to the problem. According to Pruitt et al, dominating style users overlooked joint achievements.

**Avoiding:** People who tend to use an avoiding style of conflict management are deficit of the awareness of the problem's importance or how to deal with it. Not only do they lack consideration for themselves because they feel awkward to signify themselves, but also a low consideration for others as well which makes it difficult for them to understand other persons problems, need and interests. The avoiding style users are quite unable to devise better and effective solutions or alternatives to their conflict problem because they don't possess the fundamental knowledge of their own concerns or the other's besides not being much aware of the problem itself. With such contexts where there are lesser resources to employ ultimately tend to lesser probability of resolving the conflict, thereby unnecessarily stretching the problem. Hence people who avoid the problem are expected to encounter many and usually longer problems.

**Compromising:** Compromising is a pivotal sort of style more like barter where one has to give something to get something likewise here both the factions have to give up some of their own concerns in order to achieve an equilibrium position of agreement. This takes place when there is equal consideration for one's own concerns and the concerns of others. It would be win-win strategy in most cases from the fact that all the persons compromising end up satisfied because neither of the factions entirely loses, but not to forget that neither of the factions entirely wins; only partial. Compromising is achieved by better communication of all the concerns among the persons involved and through mutual recognition of the requisites. Compromising would lead to the attainment of a different objective than that of the original.

**Gender role:** Gender-role represents the learned patterns of masculine and feminine characteristics (Cook, 1985). The gender role conceptualizes the maleness and femaleness as self-governing dimensions, with individuals of either sex able to possess high or low level of masculinity and femininity. Persons who hold high degree of both are labeled undifferentiated. Bem and Lenny (1976), Kagan (1964) and Maccoby (1966) suggest that the five styles of conflict management are compatible with the gender-role point of reference. Bem and Lenney (1976) in their study propose that individuals, who are strongly sex-typed, usually are confined to project a certain stereotypical behavior; on the contrary, androgynous individuals possess high magnitude of behavioral plasticity which allows them to project characteristics of both masculinity and femininity.

**Conflict Management Styles:** The instrument used to measure the conflict managing styles in this paper is the Form C of Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory (Rahim, 1983a). The ROCII-II instrument consists of 28 items designed to assess the five different styles of conflict management which are: Avoiding, Compromising, Dominating, Integrating and Obliging. Individual will respond to each and every of the 28 items corresponding to a five point Likert scale, where 1 represents strongly agree and 5 represents strongly disagree. The ROCI-II questionnaire has shown good internal reliability. Weider-Hatfield (1998) showed an average Cronbach's alpha of 0.79. Likewise, studies by Rahim (2001), Rahim, Antonioni, and Psenicka (2001), Goddwin (2002), King and Miles (1990) and Knapp, Putman, and Devis (1988) have demonstrated construct validity for the ROCI-II. The results from the sample indicate the value of Cronbach  $\alpha$  is: .79(Avoiding), .63(compromising), .75(dominating), .80(integrating), and .75(obliging).

**Gender-role Orientation:** In order to assess the gender-role of the sample this paper uses the instrument of Bem Sex Role Inventory (Bem 1974) The scales comprises of 20 masculine and 20 feminine attributes to measure each individual's perceived masculine and feminine characteristics. Participants responded in terms of how well each attribute portrays them comparable on a seven point Likert scale, where 1 symbolizes never or almost never true and 7 symbolizes always or almost always true.

## Methodology

Male and female employees from the education sector were selected to fill the questionnaire, the ROCI-II and the BSRI. The purpose of this measure to classify the individual in the four gender role category, masculine, feminine, differentiated and undifferentiated, and the individual

preference to make your mind up conflict through obliging, dominating, compromising, integrating and avoiding. The data were collected through the questionnaire distribution by the author to the 130 persons in the education sector, 103 were returned, 95(79% were the response rate) were completely filled and were used.

**Results:** As we are interested in the general tendencies, so in two conflict scenario the primary data is averaged and the correlation between the variables varies from .39 to .61,  $p < 0.01$ .

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1.A							
2.C	0.8						
3.D	-.29**	.2					
4.I	-.2**	.55**	.9				
5.O	.51**	.43**	.3	.08			
6.S	-.3	-.17*	.27*	.06	-.03**		
7.M	-.43**	.03	.44**	.32**	-.19**	.36**	
8.F	.23	.06	-.18	.22	.21	-.13	.28**

\* $P < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$ . (two-tailed)

**Table 1: Correlation between conflict management styles, sex and BSRI**

(Note: N=69, A=agreeableness, C=compromise, D=dominating, I=integrating, O=obliging, S=sex, M=masculinity, F=femininity)

The inter item correlation is shown in the table 1, the five conflict management styles, agreeableness, compromise, dominating, integrating and obliging, sex and gender role are given. The most of the results are same as reported by the Rahim (1983). In the correlation table there is significant relation between variables.

Style	M	F	A	U	O
A	2.51 (.69)	3.45 (.55)	2.91 (.74)	3.38 (.53)	3.5 .67
C	3.54 (.45)	3.55 (.35)	3.67 (.41)	3.0 (.43)	3.67 (.38)
D	3.25 (.48)	2.66 (.57)	3.3 (.71)	2.78 (.53)	2.97 (.63)
I	4.05 (.37)	3.7 (.49)	3.98 (.31)	3.7 (.46)	3.95 (.45)
O	3.05 (.52)	3.42 (.41)	3.14 (.56)	3.09 (.57)	3.17 (.53)

**Table 2: Mean and standard deviation for conflict managing style and gender role orientation**

(Note: A=agreeableness, C=compromise, D=dominating, I=integrating, O=obliging, M=masculine, F=feminine, A=androgynous, U=undifferentiated, O=overall)

In the table 2 the descriptive statistics of all the variables is given.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, it was evident that the gender role the masculine value was high in the dominating style, while the high value of feminine were on the avoiding style and the integrated style was preferred by the androgynous. In nutshell, the results supports for the gender role and the conflict management styles, there is a relation between these both variables. The limitations are there especially regarding the instruments which were used in the research; it is difficult to collect the

data through these instruments. The further study is required in to the matter, that why different genders give preference to diverse conflict management styles.

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