# Personality Does Affect Conflict Handling Style: Study of Future Managers

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*Abstract*—Conflicts are one of the indispensible parts of organizations life. Managing conflicts is issue that is to be considered to solve the said problem and to overcome the negative impacts of conflicts at work place. This paper is aimed to examine relationship between personality traits and preferred conflict handling style. Big five traits model are selected for personality assessment. Big five personality factors are extroversion, conscientiousness, openness to experience, emotional stability and agreeableness. Conflict handling styles are compromising, competing, avoiding, accommodating and collaborating. This paper covers two personality traits Extraversion and Openness to experience and only two conflict handling styles i.e. avoiding and competing. A total of 300 students are 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.

*Index terms*—Personality, Big five traits, Students, Future Managers, Extraversion, Openness to experience, Conflict handling styles, Avoiding, Competing

## I. INTRODUCTION

Conflicts are one of the important parts of organizational life. The main parties of conflict are always human part of organization. These individuals are the most important asset of organization, as managing other resources is not possible with out proper utilization of human resource. Human resource/s cause conflicts when they interact. Conflict handling is important for both organizations and employees. Organizations can get great returns, better utilization of resources, better outcomes, improved work environment and above all better future as a whole. On the other hand employees can also reap more advantages with proper conflict handling style. Handling conflicts makes it possible for employees; to interact with others in proper way, to get work done and to do work properly with others in efficient manner and to have better work life in organization. Individuals use various styles to handle conflicts, these style vary individual to individual. Properly handling conflicts increases efficiency at both individual and group levels (Tjosvold, 1998).

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 (Brhanam et al., 2005; Barrier & Chin, 2005; Polkinghorn & Byrne, 2001).

Personality traits are one of the most important determinants of conflict management styles. Though there are various personality measurement models are 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, Emotional stability, and Conscientiousness (Robbins *et al.* 2008). Moberg (2001) found that big five factor model of personality has direct impact on the preferences of conflict handling style selection.

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.

## II. CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Conflicts can't be avoided and most of us see it as a destructive process (Lindelow & Scott, 1989 cited in Mukhtar & Habib, 2010). How we perceive conflict, positive or negative, depends how conflicts are handled (Rahim, 1986). Handling work conflicts is beneficial for both employees and organization. Tidd & Friedman (2002) 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 (2002) found, firms can be effective one if they manage and enhance conflict handling processes and the way they intervene. How conflict is handled is a response to scenarios present at work (Friedman *et al.* 2000). Properly handling conflicts increases efficiency at both individual and group levels (Tjosvold, 1998).

There are various models given by various researchers, like early models used to measure only one dimension of others concern i.e. cooperativeness and uncooperativeness (Deutsch, 1973). There are two dimensions of conflict handling self interest (Assertiveness) and others concern (Cooperativeness) (Thomas & Kilmaan, 1974). This model has five factors, avoiding, accommodating, collaborating, compromising and competing. Individuals with high self interest use either competing or collaborating styles, competing style maximizes individuals' gain on the cost of

others while collaborating style is self interest based but considering interests of others as well. Individuals with low self concern adopt two styles; avoiding and accommodating style, avoiding style is used when individual neither prefers self interest nor others interest, and accommodating style covers sacrificing self interests for the sake of others benefits. Finally, compromising style is combination of both assertive and cooperative styles; it considers making efforts to solve conflicts.

Friedman, *et al* (2000) discussed that the way conflicts are handled may shape organizational environment, level of conflict and stress. Butler Jr. (1994) has discussed styles used by negotiators and found that those negotiators who use integrating (collaborating), obliging (accommodating) or avoiding style were more effective than those who use dominating (competing) style. Individuals who use integrative (collaborative style) conflict handling style experience lower level of work conflict and stress at job, but people using avoiding or dominating (competing) style were facing more conflicts and work stress (Friedman *et al.* 2000).
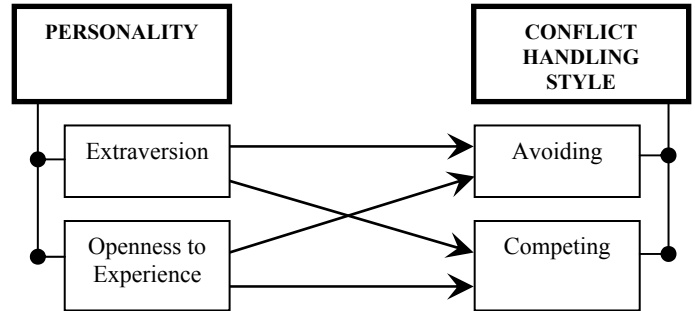
Researchers have discussed conflict handling styles in different perspective and found that there are various determinants of selection of conflict handling styles; various researchers have given various findings. Like differences of conflict handling styles on the basis of gender, position in job, experience, age (Brahnam et al., 2005; Polkinghorn & Byrne, 2001).

Personality traits are one of the most important determinants of conflict management styles. Though there are various personality measurement models are 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. Researchers have found meaningfulness of big five personality traits, for example Moss & Ngu (2006) found meaningful relation of big five personality traits and on the job behaviors and outcomes. Big five personality traits consists of five traits Extroversion, Agreeableness, Openness to experience, Emotional stability, and Conscientiousness (Robbins *et al.* 2008).

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". Robbins. *et al* (2008). Moberg (2001) found that big five factor model of personality has direct impact on the preferences of conflict handling style selection. Antonioni (1998) found that Extroversion, agreeableness, openness, and conscientiousness, are positively related with integrating (collaborating) style of conflict handling. Park & Antonioni (2007) found that personality traits like extraversion and agreeableness are having significant relation with conflict handling style.

This paper is based on the personality traits given by big five model of personality dimensions and preferred conflict handling styles used. Only two personality traits i.e. extraversion and openness to experience are taken to study impact of personality traits on conflict handling styles. Two conflict handling styles i.e. avoiding and competing are selected. Research model and hypothesis for relation are given in the following section:

**Research Model**



**Hypotheses**

**H1:** Extrovert people may prefer avoiding style to handle conflicts

**H2:** Extrovert people may prefer compromising style to handle conflicts

**H3:** People with high openness to experience may prefer avoiding style to handle conflicts

**H4:** People with high openness to experience may prefer compromising style to handle conflicts

### III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is designed to study conflict handling styles that might be preferred by future managers. Relationship of personality and conflict management styles is also found. University students were selected, future managers, for as population of the study. Only final year students were selected as they were going to join practical workforce in near future. 300 students were selected on the basis of cluster sampling from 3 public and 3 private sector universities. These universities were selected on simple random sampling basis. Personally administrated questionnaires were used to collect data. Questionnaire comprised of personality dimensions and preferred conflict handling styles. Data were analyzed using Microsoft Excel and SPSS 17.0.

### IV. FINDINGS

Table-1 shows descriptive statistics of the variables of interest. This means scores of the table show the type of personality and preference of style of the students. All the scores are above 9 the parameter, any value above 9 shows that the students are extrovert and they are prone to experience, similarly mean values of avoiding and compromising styles also show that preferable styles of conflict handling for students are avoiding and compromising.

TABLE-1    DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

|  | Mean | Std. Deviation | N |
|---|---|---|---|
| Extraversion | 9.6196 | 2.63390 | 255 |
| Openness_to_E xperience | 9.3608 | 2.20308 | 255 |
| Avoiding | 14.1804 | 2.60201 | 255 |
| Compromising | 14.9529 | 1.90465 | 255 |

Findings of Table-2 show scores of Pearson's Correlation. Findings of the table show that there is positive but insignificant relationship between extroversion and openness to experience, so it is not necessary that that an individual who possesses extraversion personality trait he might not possess trait of openness to experience (p>.10). Findings also suggest that individuals with extraversion personality trait their preferred style of conflict handling is compromising and they didn't use avoiding style of conflict handling (p<.05). On the other hand individuals with openness to experience are also more inclined towards compromising style of conflict handling (p<.10).

TABLE-2    PEARSON'S CORRELATIONS

|  | Extraversion | | Openness to Experience | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | R value | P value | R value | P value |
| Extraversion | --- | --- | .037[*] | .560 |
| Avoiding | -.058 | .359 | .056 | .374 |
| Compromising | .156[*] | .013 | .119[**] | .057 |

[*].Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

[**]. Correlation is significant at the 0.10 level (2-tailed).

## V. DISCUSSION OF THE STUDY

Considering findings of the study it can be concluded that the future managers (students) are having both extraversion personality trait and they are also prone to new experience. Similarly they can use both avoiding and compromising style of conflict handling. But the findings of the Pearson correlation show that individuals with both extraversion and openness to experience prefer compromising over avoiding style of conflict handling. So we can say that students are inclined towards keeping good terms with others and would try to use win-win or win-loose strategy, and they would like to maintain relations with others.

Findings of the study have good future implementations, as employers can observe the personality traits of individual and can identify preferred style of conflict handling that might be used by students at work. They can then imagine work place relations, outcomes, performance and organizational effects of the personality and conflict handling style.

While discussing the limitation of the study, the research only considers two personality traits and two conflict handling style; while taking about the whole personality dimension model and conflict handling style other factors are mission. These factors can be further used to get detialed insight of the students personality style and prefered conflict handling style.

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