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A Study of Gender Role and Conflict Management Styles among Organizational Employees



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Abstract

This study has been an attempt to look at the relationship between conflict management strategies adopted across the different groups of gender roles. There have been a lot of researches on sex differences in managing conflict. There have also been a lot of inconsistencies between sex differences and conflict management style hence there was a need to examine a different determinant of conflict management style like gender roles. For the study questionnaires were administered to collect data with the help of tools like a personal data sheet, Bem's Sex Role Orientation Scale and Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory (ROCI II). Data was collected from 220 male and female employees working in Government departments and was analysed using One Way ANOVA. For further analysis Turkey test was also applied to study the interaction effect between the four gender roles. It was inferred that masculine employees prefer compromising style the most and it is the least preferred style of feminine employees. On the other hand dominating style and avoiding style of conflict management were most preferred by undifferentiated employees whereas androgynous persons least preferred these styles of conflict resolution.

Keywords : Gender, Gender Role, Masculine, Feminine, Androgynous, Undifferentiated, Conflict Management Style.

Introduction

Conflict is inevitable problem of any workplace and learning to resolve a conflict is a difficult task. Addressing conflict is an important element to achieving organizational effectiveness and enhancing productivity. An unresolved conflict can cause serious and varied consequences. Companies with chronic conflicts fail to attract and retain good employees as well as customers. Thus conflict resolution is important. Every person has their own unique style of resolving conflict. More or less every individual uses integrating, compromising, dominating, obliging or avoiding style. But there are many factors which affect the style adopted. One of the most relevant factor is gender. A lot of researches have shown inconsistencies in the styles used by males and female employees whereas many studies have depicted no measurable differences between men and women's conflict management style. In this research another determinant of conflict management style has been introduced. The determinant is gender role.

Gender is the socially and biologically constructed component of human sexuality but gender roles represent learned patterns of masculine and feminine characteristics and these differences in role demonstrate how individuals behave in certain circumstances. (Cook 1985). Gender roles allow individuals to be categorized as masculine, feminine and androgynous because any individual can possess high levels of masculinity and femininity. A masculine gender role represents possession of masculine traits such as quick decision making, independent, forceful, strong personality, aggressive, ambitious, assertive whereas feminine gender role indicates the presence of feminine characteristics such as being compassionate, tender, understanding, affectionate, sensitive, warm, loyal, soft spoken. According to the interactionist's approach, gender roles are never fixed but constantly negotiated between individuals. These roles influence all kinds of behavior and thus also affect behavior at workplace. Traditionally, only feminine and masculine gender roles existed due to division of nature of work by each gender. However over a period of time many male or female gender roles have emerged. Different people

possess varying amounts of masculinity and femininity. With reference to this, four gender roles have been identified in the study. In the era of modernization and globalization because men and women work closely at par with one another in teams differences in terms of power, values, attitudes and social factors contribute to the creation of conflict. Conflict could arise due to a variety of factors such as communication setting, structural factors and personal factors but each individual adopts a different strategy for managing workplace conflict depending upon their gender role and the situational factors. Hence this study was conducted to understand how one's gender role orientation affects the conflict management style that is adopted.

A study conducted by Mahar, Maitlo, Waheed, Ahmed and Bhutto (2004) examined the relationship between gender role and conflict management styles of peers. The results evidently demonstrated that the masculine value was high in the dominating style while the high value of feminine were on the avoiding style and the integrating style was preferred by the androgynous. Another relevant study used two similar financial organizations and looked at gender roles, conflict management styles and status in workplaces (Brewer et al; 2002). It found a relationship between gender roles and conflict management strategies and status and conflict management strategies but the findings were applicable to only financial organizations. Another study was conducted by Brusko, Leah (2010) on conflict management strategies, gender roles and status roles in an organizational setting and the findings were consistent with previous research conducted by Brewer et al.(2002) and showed a relationship between three gender roles and five conflict management styles. Thus identifying a mediating variable and a better relationship between gender roles and conflict management styles was needed.

Objective of the study

The objective of the study was to examine the impact of gender role orientation on conflict management style of organizational employees.

Research Methodology

Research Tools

The research tools used were

1. Personal data sheet: To collect information regarding employees' sex, age, designation, educational qualification, work experience, marital status and monthly income personal data sheet was used
2. Bem Sex role Orientation (BSRO) Scale: Bem's Indian adaptation of psychological sex role orientation inventory (BSRI-A) by Rao, Gupta and Murthy was used to measure sex role orientation of individuals as conceptualized by BEM (1974).The inventory adapted by Rao, Gupta and Murthy (1982) retains 30 items in the form keeping in mind Indian culture. It consisted of 15 'Masculine' and 15 'Feminine' adjectives. Against each of the 30 items a continuum of

seven point scale with 1 representing 'Never' to 7 representing 'Almost always true' was done to identify the extent of masculinity or femininity in each individual. To obtain masculinity and femininity for each individual mean score of the ratings for the 15 adjectives in each dimension were calculated separately and a median split method was used to divide them further into high or low masculinity or femininity (63 in case of masculinity and 76 in case of femininity). They were divided into four groups as advocated by Spence.

3. Androgynous- Those with high on both masculine and feminine.
4. Masculine – Those with high masculine and low feminine.
5. Feminine – Those with low masculine and high feminine.
6. Undifferentiated – Those with low on both masculine and feminine.
7. Rahim Organisational Conflict Inventory (ROCI-II) The ROCI contained 28 items on a five point Likert Scale measuring the five conflict management styles namely avoiding, integrating, compromising, dominating and obliging.

Sampling

Data for the present research was collected from employees working in Government organizations. 220 respondents were randomly selected from Government organizations such as Telecom Office, Post Office, Income tax department and banks. It included equal number of male and female employees. Of these 55 male employees and 55 female employees having high designations were chosen and remaining 110 employees were other than section officers – male and female

Statistical Analysis

Data analysis was carried out using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences). To examine the effect of gender role orientation on conflict management style, One Way ANOVA related F test was used. Four types of gender role orientation were considered to classify selected subjects. For further analysis of significant interaction effect between the four groups Turkey Test was used.

Research Procedure

The main objective of the study was to examine the effect of independent variable like gender role orientation on conflict management style of organizational employees which was dependent variable. For the purpose five conflict management styles and four gender role orientation were considered. Data was collected from 110 male employees and 110 female randomly selected employees working in banks, telecom department and income tax department with the help of administered questionnaires like personal data, Bem's sex role orientation scale and Rahim Organisational conflict Inventory. The collected data was analysed using One Way ANOVA and Turkey test for further analysis.

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Interpretation and Results

Table 1: Mean and SDs of Conflict management style with reference to gender role orientation (N=220)

Styles	Masculine		Feminine		Androgynous		Undifferentiated	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Integrating	28.18	5.72	25.18	5.51	27.02	7.73	27.14	4.97
Compromising	18.30	4.26	15.33	2.95	18.00	4.00	16.98	3.33
Dominating	19.54	5.19	18.52	4.32	16.34	3.25	21.65	3.81
Obliging	22.00	4.13	21.52	3.81	21.48	4.23	21.74	3.49
Avoiding	21.90	4.21	20.63	3.45	14.64	3.99	23.63	2.70

Table 2: ANOVA Summary of Conflict management style with reference to gender role orientation (N=220)

Style	S.S		df	M.S.		F Value	
	B _{SS}	W _{SS}		B _{SS}	W _{SS}		
Integrating	162.9	632816.85	3	216	48.7	2929.70	0.16
Compromising	28.54	5420.65	3	216	85.62	25.09	3.41**
Dominating	47.82	6691.14	3	216	143.46	30.98	4.63*
Obliging	7.54	3410.37	3	216	22.62	15.79	1.43
Avoiding	2985	2037.71	3	216	8955	9.43	82.91*

P<0.01 = *, P<0.05=**

Style 1 Integrating Style

This style of conflict resolution refers to an attempt made to find a solution that creates win – win solution. When there is a high concern for self as well as others this style of conflict management is adopted.

When F test was applied to check the effect of gender role orientation on integrating conflict management style, no significant impact was found. The F – value was 0.16 and proved to be insignificant. Hence null hypothesis was accepted and was concluded that there was not significant impact of gender role orientation on integrating conflict management style.

Style 2 Compromising Style

This style is an attempt to achieve an equilibrium position of agreement by mutual give and take. It is possible to resolve a conflict through mutual recognition and effective communication between the conflicting parties.

When F test was applied to check the effect of gender role orientation on compromising conflict management style, significant impact was found. The F – value was 3.41 proved to be significant at 0.05 level of significance. Hence null hypothesis was rejected and was concluded that there was significant impact of gender role orientation on compromising conflict management style.

For further interpretation of this result Turkey test was applied to find out the significance of differences among mean scores of all the four groups.

Table 3: Summary of Turkey Test for Compromising Conflict Management Style with Reference to Gender Role orientation

Group	B (15.33)	D (16.98)	C (18.00)	A (18.30)
B	-	1.65**	2.67**	2.97**
D	-	-	1.02	1.32*
C	-	-	-	0.03
A	-	-	-	-

P<0.05 = **, P< 0.01= *

So far as the effect of gender role orientation on conflict management style was concerned, the

results of the turkey test indicated that out of possible 6 comparisons made, 3 mean differences were found significant at 0.05 level and 1 mean difference was found significant at 0.01 level of significance. The most striking results were obtained for the group of feminine employees (B). The lowest amount of compromising style was used by this group as compared to the other three groups. The group of masculine employees (2.97) used this style more as compared to other groups. Masculine employees are competitive, calculative, communicate shoulder to shoulder and are ready to take risk hence they find this style of compromise more suitable to resolving a problem. This style was also observed to be used by androgynous employees (2.67) since they possess high masculine traits along with feminine traits. Their masculinity would urge them to use the compromise style. However the preference of this group was less as compared to masculine employees. On the other hand some undifferentiated employees (1.32) also preferred to use this style but not as much as the masculine employees. Thus it was concluded that masculine employees resort to this conflict management style more frequently than feminine and undifferentiated employees.

Style 3 Dominating Style

Dominating style implies considering one's own interest more than that of others. In this style only one side of the problem is addressed. It is known as win- lose orientation. There are stereotypes that men are more dominating than women and hence dominating conflict management style in men and women are different. To examine the effect of gender role orientation on dominating conflict management style One Way ANOVA was carried out to analyse the data of dominating conflict management style among subjects of all four groups. The results of F test revealed that gender role orientation had a significant impact on conflict management style adopted by organizational employees. The F – value which was 4.63 proved to be significant at 0.01 level of significance. The mean scores revealed that

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undifferentiated and masculine employees used this style more than feminine employees.

Table 4: Summary of Turkey Test for Dominating Conflict Management Style with Reference to Gender Role orientation

Group	C (16.34)	B (18.52)	D (19.54)	A (21.65)
C	-	2.18*	3.2**	6.31**
B	-	-	1.02	4.13**
A	-	-	-	3.11**
D	-	-	-	-

P<0.01=*, P<0.05 = **

For further interpretation of the result Turkey Test was applied to find out the significance of differences among mean scores of the four groups. The interaction effect of gender role orientation on dominating conflict management style revealed that the group of undifferentiated employees (D-6.31) preferred to use the dominating style of conflict management the most whereas androgynous group of employees used this style the least as compared to other groups. The undifferentiated employees being low in masculine and feminine qualities would have low self esteem and hence would create a superficial social image by presenting a forceful dominating attitude to resolve conflicts. This style was also preferred by masculine employees (3.2) as compared to feminine employees (2.18) who would be tender and soft spoken. Masculine employees have high concern for self and low for others and due to their aggression, strong personality, self confidence, ability to lead and make quick decisions would be able to force followers/ subordinates to accept solutions to conflicting issues.

Style 4 Obliging Style

This style of conflict resolution has low concern for self but a high concern for others. It refers to giving up one's own interests for the sake of fulfilling others'. Characteristics like tenderness, tolerance, affection and sensitivity are feminine whereas masculine employees tend to be aggressive. These characteristics may lead to certain differences between male and female employees using obliging conflict management style. The results of F test proved there was no significant impact of gender role orientation on obliging conflict management style.

Style 5 Avoiding Style

People who are not fully aware of the problem or lack the skill to deal with it generally use this style. They are unable to devise effective solutions or alternatives to their conflict problem. To test the objective of examining gender role orientation among subjects of all four groups on avoiding style of conflict management F test was applied. The F – value was 82.91 which proved to be significant at 0.01 level revealing that there was impact of gender role orientation on avoiding conflict management style.

Table 5: Summary of Turkey Test for Avoiding Conflict Management Style with Reference to Gender Role orientation

Group	C (14.64)	B (20.63)	A (21.90)	D (23.63)
A	-	5.99**	7.26**	8.99**
B	-	-	1.27	3.05**
C	-	-	-	1.78
D	-	-	-	-

P<0.01=*, P<0.05 = **

On further analysis using the Turkey test it could be inferred that the group of undifferentiated employees preferred this style the most. The mean differences of group D (8.99) proved significant at 0.01 level of significance. This group of employees are unclear of the problem and lack the confidence to resolve any problem. They have weak personality and are neither good at communication nor decision making. They prefer to escape the situation rather than facing it so used the avoiding style. However this style was also used by masculine and feminine employees (7.26, 5.99 respectively) but the group of androgynous employees used this style the least as compared to the other three groups.

Conclusion

The study revealed that gender roles had an impact on compromising, dominating and avoiding style of conflict management. It could also be seen that compromising style was most preferred by masculine gender role whereas least in feminine role. In undifferentiated employees dominating style appeared to be most preferred style while least in case of androgynous gender roles. Further it could also be observed that persons of undifferentiated gender roles were tempted to use dominating and avoiding style the most so that they could easily escape the situation whereas this style was seen to be least preferred by androgynous employees.

These results suggest that gender role orientation is more powerful factor than biological sex in influencing conflict management. Any organization comprises of persons performing different roles and hence may need to use different gender orientations according to the situations and accordingly adopt the right strategy to resolve conflicts. Based on assessment of gender roles right persons could be placed for jobs which involve conflict resolution as a key task. Trainings can be imparted to employees to create awareness of their gender roles so that impact of gender role could be effectively managed while handling conflicts.

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