

# Leadership and Conflict Management Style among Indian Managers

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**Abstract** - Leadership style of a manager may have an influence on the choice of conflict management strategy. It has been reflected in the literature but no significant effort has been put to examine this issue in Indian context. The present study explores the relationship between the six styles of leadership: pioneering, strategic, management/administration, and team, pastoral and encouraging styles and five styles of conflict management: problem solving, asserting, avoiding, compromising and accommodating. The findings support the claim of positive impact of leadership on conflict management.

**Keywords** – Leadership, conflict management, pioneering, strategic, pastoral, problem solving, asserting, avoiding, compromising and accommodating.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Conflict is inevitable in social and professional life of every individual. Different types of conflicts exist in interpersonal relationships and among the group or team members. In addition to this, merger and acquisition at global level, growing number of MNC's and rapid technological changes have increased the pace of organizational change and cultural diversity. Organizational changes are frequently associated with emotional conflicts or interpretative conflict [1]. Conflicts in social or professional life occur when an individual or a group feels negatively affected by another individual or group [2]. The term conflict has been used in different ways reflecting the different levels at which conflicts exist [3], [4]. Marquis and Huston define conflict as the internal discord that results from differences in ideas, values or feelings between two or more people [5]. Fisher defines destructive conflict as a social situation in which there are perceived incompatibilities in goals or values between two (or more) parties, attempts by the parties to control one another, and antagonistic feelings towards each other [6]. Whenever there are significant differences between individuals or groups, there is a potential for destructive conflict between individuals or groups. Conflict resolution is not only a mechanism for dealing with difficult differences within an existing social system, but also as an approach that can facilitate constructive social change towards a responsive and equitable system [6]. Thomas has given two broad uses of the term conflict. The first use refers to incompatible response tendencies within an individual, e.g., behavioral conflicts where one must choose whether or not to pursue a particular course of action or a goal, or role conflict where one must choose between several competing sets of role demands. The second use refers to conflicts that occur between different individuals, groups, organizations, or other social units [4]. Putnam and Poole and Thomas

on the basis of their analysis of numerous conceptualizations and definitions of conflict identified three characteristics: interdependence, disagreement, and interference [7], [4], [8]. Interdependence refers to a situation when each party involved depends, at least partly on the actions of the other for the attainment of their goals. Without Interdependence, the actions of each party have no impact on the outcomes of the other party. Therefore, interdependence is an essential pre-condition of any conflict situation, providing an interpersonal context in which conflicts may arise. Disagreement refers to a situation when parties involved think that different values, needs, interests, opinions, goals, or objectives exist. In inter-personal conflict, disagreement is a key component. However, disagreeing parties will not experience conflict when the point of disagreement is irrelevant or unimportant (for e.g., when there is no interdependence, or when the issue of disagreement is minor). Interference refers to a situation when one party interferes with or opposes the other party's attainment of its, objectives, goals or interests. Researchers believe that the core process of interpersonal conflict is the behavior where one or more disputants oppose their counterpart's interests or goals [2]. Negative emotions (jealousy, anger, anxiety, or frustration) also play an important role in conceptualizations of conflict [9],[10], [11], [12], [4], [8]. These emotions emerge major disagreements exist between parties, or when parties interfere with the attainment of each other's important goals. Therefore, a fourth property, negative emotion, can also be added.

Conflicts in organizations may occur among individuals, within a group and work team, or between groups or teams [13]. Conflicts in organizations may be associated with organizational goals, values, and norms or related to structural aspects of organizations such as decentralization, heterogeneity or ambiguity of tasks [14]. Other possible

organizational characteristics related to conflicts in groups and organizations are power differentials, competition for scarce resources, tendencies to differentiate rather than converge, negative interdependence between work units, ambiguous responsibility or jurisdiction, and a denial of one's self-image or characteristic identifications. People fear negative consequences, therefore, conflicts in groups and organizations are generally avoided and suppressed and consistency, stability and harmony within the organization are emphasized [13],[15].

Conflict management has emerged as a major research field in organizational behaviour. Researchers argue conflicts in groups and organizations have a positive effect on group identity, development and function [16], [17]. Cooperative styles (problem solving, accommodating and compromising) are positively associated with constructive conflict management and with individual and organizational outcomes [18] and show substantial concern for the other party. Particularly, problem solving style is considered as the most appropriate, most effective, and highly competent style in managing conflicts [19], [20]. Weider-Hatfield and Hatfield found problem-solving positively related to interpersonal outcomes [21]. Burke suggests that problem solving style is related to the effective management of conflict and asserting and avoiding are related to the ineffective management of conflict [22]. Lawrence and Lorsch suggest that a confrontation style dealing with intergroup conflict is used to a significantly greater degree in higher than lower performing organizations [23]. Leadership style and choice of conflict management style may have a relationship and influence the outcomes of a conflict. The present study aimed at exploring relationship between Indian manager's leadership and conflict management style. The ability to manage conflict is probably one of the most important social skills and has become a necessity in the organizations. Organizations are required to develop the processes, cultures and behaviours capable of accommodating and resolving conflicts in ways that benefit the customers and employees [15].

## 2 Leadership and Conflict Management in Organizations

The effective management and success of an organization depends on the integration of employees who may vary in scale and influence, who may have diverse cultural backgrounds,

and who may be dominated by professionals coming from different disciplines based upon conflicting paradigms [24]. Culture and leadership interplay constantly. The existence of personal and emotional tensions among the workers is one dimension of organizational culture. How leaders respond to problems, resolve conflicts and crises, reward and punish followers is important for an organization's culture. Leaders who are considerate to organizational renewal foster organizational cultures that are conducive to innovation and creativity, problem solving, risk taking and experimentation. How leaders perceive power tend to influence their conflict resolution strategies and enhancing effective team work. Leader's orientation towards employee relationship has a positive correlation with trust and a negative correlation with conflicts [25], [26].

The role of leader in intergroup conflict is very important. The leader influences and directs individuals and groups, and requires many qualities and skills for effective handling and resolution of conflicts. An effective leader has the ability to motivate the conflicting groups by fostering a cooperative and collaborative environment to work together towards their shared goals. He encourages mutual support, defuses tensions, harmonizes misunderstanding and deals with disruptive or aggressive behaviour that hinder productivity effectively [27], [6]. Multiculturalism influences communications and hampers interactions and performance in today's work environment [28]. The changing and turbulent work environment in which managers perform demands skills and abilities to manage conflicts constructively. In such a situation awareness of the style leaders use to handle conflicts would be helpful [29],[30], [31].

Conflict management refers to the measures used by either or both parties to cope with a conflicting situation. Adler and Towne proposed three possible approaches to deal with a conflict: (1) accepting the status quo (i.e. living with the problem); (2) using force and mandating change; (3) reaching an agreement through negotiation [32]. Three types of outcomes: Win-Lose approach, where one party gains at the cost of other; Lose-Lose approach, where both the parties lose and Win-Win approach, in this situation both the parties gain result from these approaches to conflict management. Similar approaches to measuring individual modes of managing interpersonal conflict have been developed by others [33], [34], [35]. Traditionally, five different styles of conflict management: asserting, accommodating, compromising,

problem-solving, and avoiding are classified. These styles are seen as general strategies or behavioral orientations that individuals adopt for managing and resolving conflicts.

Asserting style occurs when individuals strive to win. In this style of conflict management one party gains and the other party incurs loss. Conflict, therefore, is considered a win-lose situation. Like asserting, accommodating style occurs when one party sacrifices its own needs and desires in order to satisfy the needs of the other party. This occurs as individuals oblige or yield to others' positions, or cooperate in an attempt to resolve conflicts. Compromising style frequently splits the difference or involves give and take behaviours where each party wins some and loses some. Problem-solving style occurs when individuals involved in conflict try to fully satisfy the concerns of all parties. In this style, actions are aimed at the achievement of goals and objectives of all parties. Hence, it results as a win-win solution. At last, avoiding style occurs when individuals are indifferent to the concerns of other party and refuse to act or participate in conflict. Here, one party withdraws, physically or psychologically, abdicating all responsibility for the solution. Successful conflict resolution removes frustration and leads to higher effectiveness, trust and openness [14].

### 3 Contemporary leadership styles

Leadership style plays an important role in shaping attitudes and behaviour of workers in an organization. Within the increasingly competitive and hectic environment the managers work leadership style is more critical than ever [36]. Researchers in this field have given many different theories and approaches to leadership. Bass applied the concepts of transactional and transformational leadership to business organizations [37]. He identified a range of components representing transformational, transactional and laissez-faire leadership. The five transformational leadership components are: (1) charisma - the leader admired; (2) idealized influence - followers emulate their leader; (3) inspirational motivation - provides meaning and challenge to the work; (4) intellectual stimulation - questions assumptions and (5) individual consideration - individually mentor staff based on their needs. Charismatic leadership has been associated with increased organizational effectiveness [38], subjective and objective performance [39], organizational financial performance [40], subordinate ratings or effectiveness [38]. Similarly, transformational leadership has also been associated with higher follower attitudes, organizational commitment,

and performance [41], [42] increased organizational financial performance [43], [41]. According to Hersey & Blanchard's Situational Leadership Theory, effective leadership style is based on the followers' characteristics, in terms of willingness and ability to do the job [44]. Other theories incorporate both situation and follower characteristics. For example, according to Fiedler's Contingency Theory [45], [46], [47] the orientation of leadership style (i.e., relationship vs. task-oriented) used is dependent on the favourability of the situation. The impact that leaders have on their followers is influenced by the characteristics of these followers [48].

Leadership style depends upon characteristics of the organization and environment in which people work. In the present study six styles of leadership-pioneering, strategic, management/administrative, team, pastoral and encouraging are considered. Pioneer leaders are those who stretch themselves, and are willing to take appropriate risks in striving to move forwards to discover and reach long term goals. Pioneering leaders are passionate about the vision, and are wholly committed to it. Pioneering leaders are at their strongest in the early stages of a vision or project. However as time passes they may lose interest in implementing a vision and start looking to next challenge. Strategic Leaders can break down visions and large aims into manageable chunks that are vital for the project. Strategic leaders have the insight and focus to work out ways of achieving the vision, the "how", and are able to persuade the rest of the group to accept this plan. Strategic leaders can put common sense to a difficult task and are able to help people see how the seemingly impossible can be achieved. However, they may be less interested in the implementation of a task and prefer to leave this to others. Any vision or change need people be able to plan and solve problem, delegate and organize tasks. Without this gift, the best plans may not get implemented well. Managers having a leadership style which is less "up-front" than some of the other styles are often under appreciated. However, much of the work would not get done without Management/Administration leaders. They are able to organize and follow up all the necessary tasks and activities to ensure that the project is completed on time. They may find it difficult to relate to the visionary pioneers - dreaming of achieving the impossible is not their home ground. Team Leadership refers to leadership in a group context in spite the fact that the leader has a formal leadership role in a group or not. The ability to work with others and trust them is

the strength of a team leader. The sole aim of team leaders is to ensure that the team achieves its goals and what they as individuals achieve is secondary. Team leaders are invaluable - if the organization is truly to function as a body, team leaders are needed for harmony and effectiveness in the team work. Pastoral leaders are real "people's people", who play an important role in supporting the pioneers, strategists, team leaders and the rest of the workforce, particularly when times are difficult. Vision and implementation of vision seem less important to pastoral leaders, therefore, they are often unappreciated publically. These leaders are sometimes threatened by the pioneers and strategists - and at times are irritated by the attention to detail shown by the managers. Yet their contribution to a team is invaluable and generally they command huge respect and support. Encouraging leaders have the ability to motivate teams and individuals. They have great discernment into people's talents, feelings and what motivates them and are able to release them into fulfilling their goals. Encouraging leaders know when to challenge and when to support, when to coach and when to give space to people. Sometimes they may appear less "involved" than other leadership styles when people want more than just encouragement.

#### 4 METHOD

##### 4.1 Objectives of the study

This study aims to examine the choice of conflict management style among managers in north India in relation to their leadership style. The specific question addressed in the study:

Does a correlation exist between leadership style and choice of conflict management style?

##### 4.2 Sample

A sample of 100 working mid-level managers from different organizations of north India was selected. The subjects thus covered in the study were the willing participants drawn from a mix of socio-economic backgrounds in the 28-45 years age range.

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of the Data N=100**

Variable	Min score	Max score	Mean score	Std. Dev.
Pioneering Leadership	15	35	25.57	4.19
Strategic Leadership	15	35	24.82	3.45
Management Leadership	14	34	25.18	4.04
Team Leadership	6	34	25.11	4.28

The Pearson product-moment correlations and associated significance between leadership styles

#### 4.3 Data Collection

The study was limited to organizations established in North India. The managers were contacted personally with each organization and requested to complete the survey questionnaire in 30 minutes. All participants completed the surveys in their scheduled time.

#### 4.4 Instrumentation

The Teal Trust leadership style indicator was used. In this questionnaire, 30 items were used to assess six different styles of leadership-pioneering, strategic, management/administration, and team, pastoral and encouraging. For each style, five items inquired respondent's own behaviors. Conceptually, these indices measure the overall usage of each style by respondent. The style items assessed these behaviors on 7-point scales ranging from 1 (never) to 7 (always).

A questionnaire measuring Interpersonal Conflict and Conflict Management Styles adapted by Barki and Hartwick was used [49]. In this questionnaire, twenty items, adapted from previous measures [50, 35] were used to assess the extent to which students employed five styles (problem-solving, asserting, avoiding, compromising, and accommodating). For each style, two items inquired respondent's own behaviors, and two items asked about the behaviors of the other party(ies). Conceptually, these indices measure the overall usage of each style by everyone involved, and not only the respondent's own usage of the style. The style items assessed these behaviors on 7-point scales ranging from 1 (never) to 7 (always).

#### 5 RESULTS

First of all, the reliability of the data is computed by using Cronbach's Alpha Model. The variable wise reliability coefficients are leadership  $\alpha = .762$  and conflict management  $\alpha = .673$ . The descriptive statistics of the data are given in table 1

Pastoral Leadership	14	30	23.45	3.29
Encouraging Leadership	11	35	23.41	3.53
Problem Solving	4	28	20.43	4.16
Asserting	4	28	18.93	4.43
Avoiding	2	27	14.04	5.43
Compromising	4	28	18.61	4.26
Accommodating	5	27	17.48	4.07

and different conflict management styles are explored in order to investigate the nature and



significance of the relationship between these variables. Table-2 Summarizes the correlation between the leadership styles and different conflict management styles.

**Table 2: Correlation between leadership styles and styles of conflict management**

Variables	Problem Solving	Asserting	Avoiding	Compromising	Accommodating
Pioneering	.140*	.210**	-.119	.143**	-.069
Strategic	.221**	.155*	-.157*	.028	.081
Management	.293**	.218**	-.013	.261**	.225**
Team	.149*	.200**	-.161*	.162*	.206**
Pastoral	.181**	.192**	-.023	.132*	.139*
Encouraging	.222**	.236**	.042	.151*	.138*

p < 0.05 \* p < 0.01\*\*

The analysis of table 2 reflects that pioneering style of leadership has significant positive relationship with problem solving, asserting and compromising styles. It has no relationship with avoiding and accommodating styles of conflict management

Strategic leadership style is positively correlated with problem solving and asserting styles of conflict management it is negatively correlated with avoiding style of conflict management. It has no relationship with compromising and accommodating style of conflict management.

Management style of leadership has positive correlation with problem solving, asserting, compromising and accommodating styles of conflict management. It has no relationship with avoiding style of conflict management.

Team leadership is positively correlated with problem solving, asserting, compromising and accommodating styles of conflict management. It is negatively correlated with avoiding style of conflict management

Pastoral leadership is positively correlated with problem solving, asserting, compromising and accommodating styles of conflict management. It has no correlation with avoiding style of conflict management

Encouraging leadership is positively correlated with problem solving, asserting, compromising and accommodating styles of conflict management. It has no correlation with avoiding style of conflict management.

## 6 DISCUSSIONS

The use of appropriate conflict-handling style in daily decision-making is one of many challenges managers face and the selection of appropriate conflict-handling style is influenced both by the individual and the work environment.

The results of this study suggest that managers preferred problem solving style of conflict resolution. It has a positive relationship with all styles of leadership. The next preferred style of conflict resolution is assertive style; it also has a positive relationship with all styles of leadership. Compromising and accommodating styles are also used by leaders for conflict management. Avoiding style either has no relationship or has negative relationship with leadership.

Research has emphasized that the optimal goal in resolving conflict is creating a Win-Win solution for all involved. However, a win-win outcome is not possible in every situation. The choice of the most appropriate resolution of conflict depends on many factors, such as the situation, the time urgency needed to make the decision, the power and status of the parties involved, the importance of the issue to involved parties, and the maturity of the individuals involved in the conflict [5].

Constructive management of conflict is seen as a creative, cooperative problem-solving process, in which the conflict is defined as a mutual problem to be solved [51]. The preferred styles, as reflected in the literature, are Collaborative styles. It means creating a Win-Win solution for all involved by openly and freely discussion of the issues and sharing views about which there is a disagreement. Intervention aimed at maximizing assertive, cooperative behaviours, to promote collaboration vs. Compromising would benefit managers and the environments in which they work [52, 5].

The results suggest that the manager's leadership style influence significantly conflict-handling behaviour. A leader should recognize which conflict management qualities and skills or solutions strategy is most appropriate for each situation [5]. The literature emphasizes the importance that individuals and/or groups avoid becoming chronically committed to any one strategy, instead remaining skilled at each of them, particularly when trying to achieve enhanced environment or personal power [53].

## 7 IMPLICATIONS

Managing conflict effectively requires many professional qualities and skills, and changing organizations to be conflict-positive require on-going, persistent action. To become effectively and for appropriately managing

conflict, head nurses must understand the causes, theories, approaches and strategies of conflict management. The question is when, and what kind of experiences in conflict management, is adequate in preparing for conflict situations facing today's head nurses? Training for managers for problem-solving and decision-making approaches to cooperative conflict resolution should be done in an integrated manner. Skill and comfort in using a variety of conflict-handling modes may help to develop a repertoire of conflict resolutions skills that is essential in effectively managing the variety of conflict situations [27]. Learning in the work environment can also be done through observations. Superiors may serve as role models. Role modelling can be an effective teaching-learning strategy, providing nurse managers have the skills and abilities required.

Managing effectively conflicts in a unit/ward requires using strategies as urging confrontation to encourage subordinates to attempt to handle their own problems, communicating honestly and openly, ensuring clarity of responsibility of roles, creating policies and changing if needed, and being sensitive to others and offer support.

Further research on individual's and environment characteristics could contribute significantly to our understanding of how conflict management strategies are determined. Other variables rather than leadership style may influence choice of conflict-handling mode. More research is necessary on the effects of personality and characteristics of the organizational environment on conflict management.

## 8 LIMITATIONS

The limitations of the present study are: In assessing managers' conflict management style, it is not possible to control all those factors which may influence individual's style. The influence of variables such as organizational climate, organizational structure, relations with peers and subordinates, level of authority and opportunities for continuous professional development are not examined in this study. Furthermore, the actual behaviour is not observed in the study. The results consist of subjects self-reports on what they would be inclined to do.

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