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Effect of Personality on Conflict Resolution Styles

Shabnam Priyadarshini
Assistant Professor, Institute of Management Technology, Hyderabad, India.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the present study was to examine the relationship between personality and conflict handling styles. The study was conducted using a sample of 270 post graduate business students in the Chandigarh region. While NEO-FFI was used to measure the big five dimensions of personality, ROCI II was used to measure the scores of students on the five conflict handling styles. The findings show a strong relationship between the big five personality dimensions and the five conflict handling styles.

Keywords: Big Five Model, Personality, Conflict Management, Conflict resolution

Introduction

Interpersonal conflicts occur when individuals perceive that others are preventing them from attaining their goals. Most serious conflicts in life probably involve people you are closely connected to, such as your friends and family, and the people you work with. If a conflict isn't resolved or is allowed to escalate too far, it can damage the relationship. If you can handle the conflict successfully, you can make your relationship with the other person stronger and more resilient by improving your understanding of each other. Conflict is defined as an "interactive process manifested in incompatibility, disagreement, or dissonance within or between social entities" (Rahim, 1992). The main reasons for such situations are when individuals perceive others as hurdles that prevent them from attaining their goals or when parties working together have opposing needs or interests to be fulfilled. For organizations as well as employees, conflict handling has become vital. Along with better utilization of resources and improved work environment, efficient conflict management is important for organizations to achieve best returns.

From employee's perspective, efficient conflict handling makes it possible for them to interact with each other in harmonious way and to get work done by gelling up with others properly in efficient manner and hence having better work life in the organization. Individuals have varying styles to handle conflicts depending upon their personality, thus personality traits are one of the most important determinants of conflict management.

Employees are considered as the backbone of any organization and its success largely depends upon the harmony among the workers of the organization. At some point in professional lives, everyone has to deal with people they just can't seem to get along with. Personality clashes are the root cause of these conflicts. Things don't seem to work despite several efforts. As a consequence, the quality of work suffers which ultimately shoots up the stress levels. In most cases, because of this entire team is disrupted. While working in an organization personality conflicts are highly likely to arise, causing great deal of tension and anxiety. Being in a constant state of alert can cause both physical and mental strain to employee. Sometimes the stress levels are so unbearable that they cause workers to leave their jobs and investment done by the company in terms of time and money goes for a toss. Conflict within a team affects the morale of individual team members and impacts the entire project. It leads to decrease in efficiency which in itself is a huge cost for the employer.

Various researchers have identified different reasons behind the problem of conflict management and have even suggested recommendations to tackle it. Many researchers have also worked on personality types of individuals.

The present research aims to associate different personality types in an organization to conflict resolution styles and suggesting strategies for managing it. It would be possible for the management of any

organization to take necessary action to minimize the conflict levels, once the major factors for the same are identified on the basis of personality.

Conflict Handling Styles

Researches carried around the world over the years have found that there are two basic dimensions of dealing with interpersonal conflicts: Concern for self or Assertiveness & Concern for others or Co-operation. The dual concern model of conflict resolution is a conceptual perspective that assumes individuals' preferred method of dealing with conflict is based on two underlying themes or dimensions: concern for self (assertiveness) and concern for others (empathy). According to the model, group members balance their concern for satisfying personal needs and interests with their concern for satisfying the needs and interests of others in different ways. The intersection of these two dimensions ultimately leads individuals towards exhibiting different styles of conflict resolution. According to Anderson (2009), different combinations of these two dimensions result in five different conflict handling styles as displayed in Table 1.

Table 1: Conflict Handling Styles

Style	Description
Avoiding	An avoiding style is always associated with a low concern for both self and others, and individuals exhibiting this style of handling conflict try to escape or ignore conflict instead of dealing with it directly.
Obliging	An accommodating style couples a high concern for others and low concern for self, and individuals exhibiting this style attempt to modulate in consistencies in order to satisfy the concerns of the other party.
Integrating	A collaborating style consists of a high concern for self along with a high concern for others, and parties exhibiting this style attempt to achieve collaboration and reach solutions satisfactory to both the parties.
Dominating	A competing style involves a high concern for self and low concern for others, and goal of individuals exhibiting this style is to win relative to the other party.
Compromising	A compromising style combines a moderate concern for self with moderate concern for others, in which both the actors attempt to give up something in order to reach a mutually acceptable resolution.

Personality

Personality is a set of individual differences that are affected by the development of an individual: values, attitudes, personal memories, social relationships, habits, and skills (McAdams & Olson, 2010; Mischel, Shoda, & Smith, 2004). Different personality theorists present their own definitions of the word based on their theoretical positions. The term "personality trait" refers to enduring personal characteristics that are revealed in a particular pattern of behaviour in a variety of situations.

Big Five Frame work of Personality

An impressive body of research supports the Big Five Model –five basic dimensions underlie all others and encompass most of the significant variation in human personality (Goldberg, 1993; Costa, & McCrae, 1992). Test scores of these traits do a very good job of predicting how people behave in a variety of real-life situations (Fleeson&Gallaghar, 2009).

Table 2 gives the five basic personality dimensions of the Big Five Model of Personality.

Table 2: Big Five Personality Dimensions

Dimension	Description
Neuroticism	Neuroticism is related to being tense and irritable while emotional stability describes individuals who are calm and patient.
Extraversion	Extraversion reflects the extent to which individuals are sociable and assertive while Introversion reflects extent to which person is associated with being reserved, timid, and quiet.
Openness to Experience	Openness to experience defines individuals who are reflective and creative while closeness is associated with being conservative in opinions.
Agreeableness	Agreeableness is concerned with the degree to which individuals are cooperative and understanding while antagonism is related to being rude and unsympathetic.
Conscientiousness	Conscientiousness measures the extent to which individuals are hardworking and organized while undisciplined is related to being disorganized and unreliable.

The Big Five personality traits are assumed to affect conflict resolution styles principally as they affect levels of concern for self and others which have implications not only for the resolution of conflict, but also for likelihood of emergence of conflict and its nature. Earlier researchers did not have the Big Five-factor model of personality available to them. Using the Big Five, this exploratory study intends to determine whether strong relationships exist between categories of personalities and styles of handling conflict.

Researches have demonstrated a stable existence of the five main personality factors mentioned above. Each of the factors is bipolar in nature and the alignment is as follows: Extraversion-Introversion, Agreeableness-Antagonism, Conscientiousness-Undisciplined, Openness-Closeness, and Neuroticism-Emotional Stability.

Conflict Handling Styles and Personality Types
The primary question for the present research was to determine whether the style an individual will use is influenced by his personality. Several researchers have attempted to expose the nature o relationship between personality and conflict handling style. The findings of these studies have been inconsistent, where some found a weak relationship between personality and style of conflict handling, while others have found a strong relationship. Some scholars suggest that the suitability of using a specific conflict resolution style depends on the conflict situation (Rahim, 1992). However, individuals are not flexible enough to adapt themselves to use the conflict resolution style according to a situation and thus contingency approach fails to acknowledge the above fact. An earlier study conducted on relationship between the Big Five Personality Factors and Conflict Management Styles on a sample of around 500 students and managers shows that extraversion, conscientiousness, openness and agreeableness have a positive relationship with integrating style and extraversion has a positive relationship with dominating style. Agreeableness and neuroticism have negative relationship with integrating style while Extraversion, openness and conscientiousness have a negative relationship with avoiding style. Agreeableness and neuroticism have a positive relationship with avoiding. (Antonioni, 1998). Another study suggested that all the five personality dimensions are related to interpersonal conflict and it suggested that there is a moderating role of personality for conscientiousness and neuroticism whereas insignificant for extraversion. (Anwar, Shahzad, &Ijaz-ul-Rehma, 2012). Wang (2010) found a correlation between the five-factor model and conflict management styles. His study showed a positive relationship between integrating conflict style and openness to experience, but a negative one between integrating style and neuroticism. In addition, the obliging conflict style was positively associated with neuroticism, but negatively with extroversion. Furthermore, the avoiding conflict style was positively correlated to neuroticism, but negatively correlated to extroversion. Wang (2010) also established the existence of a positive correlation between the compromising style and agreeableness, and a negative correlation between the dominating style and agreeableness. Ejaz, Iqbal, & Ara (2012) conducted a study to investigate the relationship between the different conflict handling styles and personality traits. Their study comprised call centre representatives in Pakistan and revealed significant connotations among the diverse conflict handling styles and the Big Five traits. The results displayed that both the integrating and obliging conflict styles were positively correlated to openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness, while the compromising and dominating conflict styles, were positively linked to openness and extroversion. Additionally, the avoiding style was positively associated with neuroticism. Messarra, Karkoulian, & El-Kassar (2016) found a strong positive relationship between integrating style and openness, conscientiousness, extraversion and agreeableness while a strong negative association with neuroticism. The findings on another research on testing relationships between personality, conflict styles and effectiveness indicated that an integrating conflict management style fully mediates the relationship between neuroticism and leadership effectiveness and partially mediates the relationship between conscientiousness and leadership effectiveness. Also it indicates that conscientiousness is the best predictor of effectiveness among all the personality variables studied and accounted for around 10% of variance (Barbuto Jr, Phipps, & Xu, 2010). A research on the relationship between the five-factor

personality and conflict management styles in a manufacturing setting surveyed the employees at manufacturing facilities of fortune 200 company and suggests that the five-factor personality was significantly related to preference of conflict management styles in a manufacturing setting and gender had significant correlations with two of the five conflict management styles, the Integrating style and the Dominating style (Wang, 2010). In a study on student teams, the effects of five personality dimensions on five conflict resolution styles suggested that agreeableness, openness, conscientiousness and extroversion have an impact on conflict resolution styles whereas neuroticism did not (Forrester &Tashchian, 2013). Based on the various studies on the relationship between big five personality traits and conflict handling styles available in the literature, the following hypotheses were formulated for the present research:

Hypotheses for predicting an Integrating Style

*H1a:*High extraversion scores will predict a strong preference for using the integrating style with peers.

*H1b:*High agreeableness scores will predict a strong preference for using the integrating style.

*H1c:*High conscientiousness scores will predict a strong preference for using the integrating style.

*H1d:*High openness scores will predict a strong preference for using the integrating style.

*H1e:*High emotional stability scores will predict a strong preference for using the integrating style.

Hypotheses for predicting an Avoiding Style

H2a: Low extraversion scores will predict a strong preference forusing the avoiding style.

H2b: High agreeableness scores will predict a strong preference for using the avoiding style.

H2c: Low conscientiousness scores will predict a strong preference for using the avoiding style.

H2d: Low openness scores will predict a strong preference for using the avoiding style.

H2e: Low emotional stability scores will predict a strong preference for using the avoiding style.

Hypotheses for predicting a Dominating Style

H3a: High extraversion scores will predict a strong preference for using the dominating style.

H3b: Low agreeableness scores will predict a strong preference for using the dominating style.

H3c: High conscientiousness scores will predict a strong preference for using the dominating style.

H3d: Low openness scores will predict a strong preference for using the dominating style.

H3e: High emotional stability scores (low neuroticism) will predict a strong preference for using the dominating style.

Hypotheses for predicting an Obliging Style

H4a: Low extraversion scores will predict a strong preference for using the obliging style.

H4b: High agreeableness scores will predict a strong preference for using the obliging style.

H4c: Low emotional stability scores will predict a strong preference for using the obliging style.

Hypotheses for predicting a Compromising Style

H5a: High extraversion scores will predict a strong preference for using the compromising style.

H5b: High openness scores will predict a strong preference for using the compromising style.

H5c: Low conscientiousness scores will predict a strong preference for using the compromising style.

H5d: High agreeableness scores will predict a strong preference for using the compromising style.

H5e: Low emotional stability scores will predict a strong preference for using the compromising style.

Method
Participants
Participants in this study included a sample of post graduate management students. A total of 270 business students from five B schools in the Chandigarh region agreed to participate in the study. Sixty one percent of the student participants were male. The average age of the students was 21.4.

Instruments
The measure used to assess the conflict management style of the respondents was Form C of the Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory–II (ROCI–II). This inventory is a 28 item questionnaire measuring conflict management styles. It is designed to measure five independent dimensions of the styles of handling interpersonal conflict: Integrating, Obliging, Dominating, Avoiding, and Compromising. The instrument measures how an individual handles her (his) conflict with her (his) peers. The five styles of handling conflict are measured by 7, 6, 5, 6, and 4 statements. An individual responds to each statement on a 5–point Likert scale. A higher score represents greater use of a conflict style.

The Revised NEO-FFI developed by Costa and McCrae (1992) was used to measure the individual's score on the five dimensions of personality. The inventory is a short form of the NEO-Personality Inventory. Each of the five factors was measured using 12 items for a total of 60 items. The inventory uses a five-point scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Procedure
Post graduate management students attending various management colleges in the Chandigarh region were asked to participate in the study. A total of 270 students responded or the study by completing the two inventories.

Analysis
A regression analysis was computed for each of the five conflict management style by entering the scores of the respondents on the five big personality dimensions as the independent variables.

Results
Table 3 shows gender wise means and standard deviations of the big five personality dimensions and the five conflict resolution styles.

As can be seen males and females differed in their scores on three of the big five personality dimensions two of the five conflict management styles. Statistically significant differences were found in their scores on Extraversion, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness. Female students were found to be scoring significantly higher than the male students on Extraversion, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness dimensions of the Big Five traits. No statistical gender differences were found in the Neuroticism and Openness scores. The results are in line with the existing body of literature (Costa, Terracciano, & McCrae, 2001). A study of gender differences in 55 nations using the Big Five Inventory found that women tended to be somewhat higher than men in neuroticism, extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness (Cavallera, Passerini, Pepe, 2013).

Table 3: Means and Standard Deviations of the Variables

	Male Students (N=165)		Female Students (N=105)		t
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Neuroticism	22.60	8.24	22.86	7.76	-0.26
Extraversion	28.20	6.78	30.11	5.29	-2.61**
Openness	28.07	5.18	27.23	5.80	1.26
Agreeableness	26.98	6.43	29.97	6.30	-3.80**
Conscientiousness	32.16	6.73	34.17	5.48	-2.70**
Integrating	29.02	4.21	29.54	4.45	-0.97
Avoiding	23.04	6.26	23.69	5.06	-0.94
Dominating	22.27	5.09	20.20	4.70	3.44**
Obliging	25.42	3.80	24.69	3.35	1.67
Compromising	25.35	4.80	26.77	4.22	-2.59**

Statistically significant gender differences were found on the use of two conflict handling styles. Female students were found to be less likely to use the dominating style of conflict handling as against male students. Female students were found to be more likely to use compromising style of conflict management. These findings are consistent with the earlier studies. Conflict handling styles such as competing and collaborating have been found to be the popular choices for the males on conflict resolution self-report instruments (Mills &Chusmir, 1988). Females on the other hand, typically engage in obliging or avoidance strategies (Ting-Toomey, 1986).

Table 4 shows the results of a regression analysis on integrating style of conflict handling.

Table 4
Results of Regression Analysis on Integrating Style

	β	t	Sig.
Neuroticism	-.011	-.170	0.865
Extraversion	.052	.728	0.467
Openness to Experience	**.175**	**2.583**	0.010
Agreeableness	**.215**	**3.033**	0.003
Conscientiousness	**.171**	**2.624**	0.009
R²	0.11		
Adjusted R²	0.093		

Openness to Experience (β = .175, p < .01), Agreeableness (β = .215, p < .01) and Conscientiousness (β = .171, p < .01) were found to have a significant and positive association with the use of integrating style of conflict handling. When individuals collaborate, they need to engage in mutual problem solving and they need to be open to hear other people's points of view. Antonioni (1998) found a significant positive correlation between openness and integrating style of conflict handling. Agreeableness is an indicated by one's tendency to cooperate and cooperation is required for collaborating with others. Previous studies have shown a strong positive correlation between agreeableness and integrating style of conflict handling (Grazziano, Jensen-Campbell, & Hair, 1996; Antonioni, 1998). A positive correlation between conscientiousness and using an integrating conflict handling style has been supported by earlier studies (Utley, Richardson, & Pilkington, 1989; Antonioni, 1998). Three of the five hypotheses for the integrating style have been substantiated.

Table 5
Results of Regression Analysis on Avoiding Style

	β	t	Sig.
Neuroticism	0.68	1.013	.312
Extraversion	0.038	0.520	0.604
Openness to Experience	-0.111	-1.597	0.111
Agreeableness	0.167	**2.310**	0.022
Conscientiousness	-0.194	**-2.909**	0.004
R^2	0.068		
Adjusted R^2	0.05		

Table 5 reports the results of regression analysis on avoiding style of conflict handling. The results show that agreeableness (β= 0.167, $p < .05$) had a significant and positive association with avoiding style, whereas conscientiousness was found to have a significant negative relationship with avoiding style of conflict handling. Individuals who score high on agreeableness tend to be tolerant, trusting, accepting, and easily moved (McCrae & John, 1992). Perhaps, this characteristic in agreeable people sometimes makes them more likely to use an avoiding style rather than an integrating style. Some support or this view has been found in the literature (Antonioni, 1998). Low conscientiousness includes traits like laziness and being irresponsible (McCrae & John, 1992). Thus, individuals who score low on conscientiousness may procrastinate when dealing with interpersonal conflicts. Antonioni (1998) also found negative association between conscientiousness and avoiding style of conflict handling. Thus, two of the five hypotheses for avoiding style stand substantiated in the present study.

Table 6 reports the results of regression analysis on dominating style of conflict handling. All the five personality dimensions were found to have a significant relationship with the dominating style. While Neuroticism (β= -0.231, $p < .01$) and Agreeableness (β= -0.382, $p < .01$) were found to have a significant negative relationship with dominating style, while openness (β= 0.184, $p < .01$), Extraversion (β= 0.157, $p < .05$), and conscientiousness (β= 0.176, $p < .01$) were found to have a significant positive relationship with dominating style. High levels of emotional stability would be required when using a dominating style. Antonioni (1998) reported similar results in a sample of students. Low agreeableness is a trait indicated by tough, persistent and aggressive. Previous research studies have reported participants low on agreeableness have been more likely to rate power tactics as their preferred method of managing conflict (Grazziano, Jensen-Campbell, & Hair, 1996; Antonioni, 1998). Individuals using a dominating style would not be open to new experiences. Previous studies report similar results and support the hypothesis that an individual practicing a dominating style would like to use information like a source of power and would not like to share it with others (Antonioni, 1998). Extraverts by nature are assertive and to force or influence others to resolve a conflict in one's favour would require an outspoken and a forceful personality. Studies have found a relationship between the need for aggression and a dominating style o handling conflict (Jones & White, 1985; Schneer& Chain, 1987; Utley, Richardson, & Pilkington, 1989; Antonioni, 1998). Conscientious individuals tend to be organized, and achievement oriented (McCrae & John, 1992). Highly conscientious people would be better prepared to negotiate when in conflict and thus would have a tendency to dominate (Antonioni, 1998). For dominating style of conflict handling, all the five hypotheses were strongly substantiated.

Table 6
Results of Regression Analysis on Dominating Style

	β	t	Sig.
Neuroticism	-0.231	**-3.819**	0.000
Extraversion	0.157	**2.394**	0.017
Openness to Experience	-0.184	**-2.950**	0.003
Agreeableness	-0.382	**-5.871**	0.000

Conscientiousness		0.176	**2.923**	0.004
R²	0.245			
Adjusted R²	0.231			

Table 7 reports the results of regression analysis on obliging style of conflict handling. It was found that neuroticism (β= 0.193, p < .01) and agreeableness (β = 0.294, p < .01) had a significant positive relationship with the obliging style of conflict handling, while extraversion (β= -0.181, p < .01) was found to have a significant negative relationship with the obliging style. These results are in line with the results of a previous study conducted by Antonioni (1998). Previous research has found that a positive relationship exists between the need for affiliation and the tendency to use an obliging style in handling interpersonal conflict (Jones & White, 1985; Schneer& Chain, 1987). An earlier study found a negative relationship between extraversion as measured by the MBTI and the obliging style (Mills, Robey, & Smith, 1985). Highly agreeable individuals are generally trusting and accepting in the interactions with others and tend to be easily moved; these qualities seem to have a logical connection to the obliging approach. Empirically, Van de Vliert and Euwema (1994) found an overall positive correlation between agreeableness and obliging. All three hypotheses for obliging style were thus substantiated in the present study.

Table 7
Results of Regression Analysis on Obliging Style

		β	t	Sig.
Neuroticism		**0.193**	**2.934**	0.004
Extraversion		**-0.181**	**-2.764**	0.006
Openness to Experience		-0.103	-1.513	0.131
Agreeableness		**0.294**	**4.127**	0.000
Conscientiousness		0.079	1.111	0.267
R²	0.106			
Adjusted R²	0.089			

Table 8 reports the results of regression analysis on compromising style of conflict handling. As can be seen only conscientiousness (β= -0.157, p < .05) was found to have a significant negative relationship with the compromising style of conflict handling. Low conscientiousness has been found to predict a compromising style of handling conflicts because individuals with this personality characteristic may have a casual view of conflicting situations. Thus for the compromising style of conflict handling, only one of the five hypothesis could be substantiated in the present study.

Table 8
Results of Regression Analysis on Compromising Style

		β	t	Sig.
Neuroticism		0.118	1.739	0.083
Extraversion		0.125	1.708	0.089
Openness to Experience		0.069	0.992	0.322
Agreeableness		0.064	0.872	0.384
Conscientiousness		**-0.157**	**-2.330**	0.021
R²	0.054			
Adjusted R²	0.037			

Conclusion

Previous studies that examined the relationship between personality and conflict handling styles found varying degrees of relationship. The present study has found a strong relationship between the big five dimensions of personality and the five styles of conflict management. The understanding of how personality influences an individual's choice of which conflict handling style he/she choses would be of great use for managers. The present study has used student sample and it would be fruitful to replicate the

study on practicing managers in order to get a deeper understanding of the relationship between personality and conflict management styles.

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