Personality Does Affect Conflict Handling Style: Study of Future Managers

Ishfaq Ahmed, Muhammad Musarrat Nawaz, Muhammad Zeeshan Shaukat and Ahmad Usman

Abstract—Conflicts are one of the indispensable parts of organizations life. Managing conflicts is an 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 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 & Kilmann, 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
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

![Research Model Diagram]

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extraversion</td>
<td>9.6196</td>
<td>2.63390</td>
<td>255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness to Ex</td>
<td>9.3608</td>
<td>2.20308</td>
<td>255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoiding</td>
<td>14.1804</td>
<td>2.60201</td>
<td>255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compromising</td>
<td>14.9529</td>
<td>1.90465</td>
<td>255</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Extraversion</th>
<th>Openness to Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R value</td>
<td>P value</td>
<td>R value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extraversion</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>.037*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoiding</td>
<td>-.058</td>
<td>.359</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compromising</td>
<td>.156*</td>
<td>.013</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*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 detailed insight of the students personality style and preferred conflict handling style.

REFERENCES