

# Effects of Gender and Work Experience on Conflict Resolution Ways in Service Sector

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## Abstract

The present study addressed the effects of two context variables, such as work experience and gender on conflict resolution ways of employees working in service sector. This was for the intention of ascertaining the relative impact of work experience and gender on conflict resolution ways towards ensuring sustainable peace and harmony in service organizations. A total of 151 respondents were selected for the study using convenience sampling technique and were asked to indicate their response in terms of the ten factors of conflict resolution. A set of questionnaire titled 'Conflict Resolution Questionnaire' developed by Marcus Henning based on the factors presented by McClellan (1997c) was used for data collection. The findings revealed that: there was no significant difference between male and female managers' conflict resolution ways. Further, work experience produced significant effect on conflict management. Experienced employees communicate clearly various conflict issues; control emotions; identify essential needs that have to be met by focusing on future relationship generate all possible alternatives to agreements when resolving conflict. The implications for the study are discussed.

## Keywords:

Gender, Conflict, Conflict Management and Work Experience Etc.

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## Introduction

Conflict in service sector is inevitable. The potential for conflict in this sector is usually high because it involves individuals from different backgrounds, high education level, expertise and orientations who work together to attain goal. The common cause(s) of conflict in this sector can be related to different thinking, working ways, different interpersonal skills level and oral and/or written communication skills, attitudes, expectations, and personalities. Learn to use appropriate and right skills in dealing with conflict can assist experienced managers and other organization members to handle and resolve conflicts effectively which further lead to a more productive organization as a whole.

Conflict resolution as a process of fostering industrial peace and harmony has in the recent times become the focus of human resource management practitioners. Conflict management skills are important if individuals are to be function effectively at any level within organizations. In the current study, researcher intended to investigate the effect of work experience and gender differences on conflict management styles. It was assumed that extensive

practical work knowledge and real world experience with strong academic basis can help managers to resolve conflict effectively. With increasing number of women occupying higher decision making positions in organizations encourages researchers to study the possible effects of gender differences in their ability to resolve conflict effectively (Powell, 1988). The purpose of this study, therefore, was to investigate the effect of gender differences and work experience on conflict management ways of managers in service sector.

### Conflict and Conflict Management

Conflict is a natural consequence of interaction with family members, business associates, peers and social groups, as well as between managers and their sub ordinates (Suppiah and Rose, 2006). In other words, conflict is unavoidable and quite certain wherever individual element is involved.

Conflict is inevitable in organizations and also desirable. Conflict can be understood as disagreement. The conflict may be intrapersonal (within an individual), interpersonal (between two or more individuals), intergroup or organizations. Conflicts refer to the existence of contrast or clash. Conflict may arise between two individuals when there is a high level of interdependence, having different goals, ideas, needs, incompatible personalities, value systems, inadequate communication, perceptions, expectations, or interests. These factors often ignite a conflict in workplace. It can help to understand various aspects of personal and professional life such as healthy disagreement (discussions), unhealthy arguments, competition, struggle, or unresolved differences. Conflict may rise and lead to hostility, frustration anxiety, tensions and nonproductive results or conflict can be functionally set on and lead to new idea, creativity, innovation and valuable final products. Therefore, it is good for all to learn how to manage conflict fruitfully by choosing appropriate style.

Olcum (2004) defines conflict as the process in which one party perceives that its interests are being opposed or negatively affected by another party.

While Rahim (1998) defines it as an interactive process which results in incompatibility, disagreement and difference between different individuals.

Growth of an organization also depends on number of conflicts it faces. It is usually not possible that there may be no conflict in an organization, so best way is to manage it constructively. The approach to handle it should be constructive and positive. Negative approach can cause destruction. Rahim (1998), states that a conflict is a positive indicator of health of an organization.

Blake and Mouton (1964), identified five management styles that are moderated by two variables concern for self and concern for others were later modified into five conflict management styles by (Rahim, 1985; Rahim and Bonoma 1979; Rahim et al. 2000), which are summarized as:

**Integrating:** It is linked to problem solving, collaboration, cooperation, win-win, positive-sum solution.

**Obliging:** It is associated with adjustment, no argument or the lose-win styles.

**Dominating:** It relates to use of power and seeks to satisfy one's own interest.

**Avoiding:** It may mean to ignore a conflict or suppress the issue(s) for unfavorable consequences.

**Compromising:** It means to find some convenient and mutually acceptable agreement to conflict which partially satisfies both parties' interest by negotiating ("give and take") strategy

**In this subsection, researcher used CRQ based on the factors presented by McClellan (1997c). These factors are:**

**View of conflict:** It refers to people view about conflict as a usual phenomenon of differences among people.

**Atmosphere:** It means the significant effect of generating helpful atmosphere that encourages integrative problem solving.

**Clarification of perception:** It is a need to create understandable statement about conflict issues, by not hiding their true feelings and react as per the other's perception

**Needs:** People must consider both parties' needs as important and willing to make self sacrifice for maintaining long term relationship.

**Power:** It refers to how people can use their power positively that will lead to enduring relationship and resolve conflict.

**Future orientation:** It requires people to learn from past and look towards the future for long term relationship by forgiving the other party.

**Options:** It is a need to create and discuss various options with broader perspective and try to find out a solution acceptable to both opposing parties.

**Doables:** It relates to the development of measurable and realistic goals to obtain something real.

**Mutual benefit agreement:** It may mean that groups to conflict have sense of partnership to meet every party's needs.

**Extra consideration:** It considers other factors like anger expression, emotional authenticity and alternatives to agreements of conflict management.

### Literature Review

A comprehensive review of available literature related to independent and dependent variables are carefully reviewed to explore the existing state of research.

The literature reviewed in this study focused on conflict management style with moderating effect of gender and working experience. These studies measured perceptions of differences in conflict management styles between the genders and working experiences of the managers. The findings of the previous studies need further empirical verification since the studies were conducted in different context and on different sample sizes. Thus, the current study is different from the earlier studies, as it is planned to examine the effect of gender and work experience on conflict management effectiveness in work organizations by analyzing ten factors.

Raven and Kruglanski, 1970; defined conflict as "tension between two or more individuals, an individual and a group, or two or more groups which arises due to incongruity between actual or preferred behavior". It is "a process in which one party perceives that its interest's are being opposed or negatively affected by another

party” (Wall and Callister, 1995). Conflict management skills are very significant for being able to function effectively.

The literature on the conflict management styles of male and female managers is not consistent. Brenner et al., 1989; Powell and Butterfield, 1979 were doubtful about women's ability to adjust to executive roles and responsibilities as the managerial role is perceived to be associated with masculine rather than feminine characteristics. However, McKenna and Richardson, 1995 studied Singaporean managers and reported that men tend to use the compromising style more than women, while women were more tending to use the avoiding style to manage conflict. But Rahim (1983) reported female executives were more inclined to use accommodating styles such as cooperative and integrating, on contrary Bedell and Sistrunk (1973) found reverse results women were more aggressive. On the other hand, Korabik, Baril and Watson, 1993; Eagly and Johnson, 1990; Powell, 1988 found no difference in conflict management styles of male and female managers occupying similar positions. Further, Rubin and Brown, 1975 suggested that women have a more cooperative approach to conflict than men. Furthermore, conflict handling ways varied according to different gender role. Female managers were more inclined to avoiding styles whereas male groups tend to apt dominating style, (Green et al. 2002), Similar results were obtained by Portello and Long (1994) and proved that gender roles play an important part in the choice of conflict resolution styles. Male executives were found to be more aggressive and prefer to use a dominating or competing style. On the other hand, (Baxter and Shepherd, 1978) reported that female executives more likely to be cooperative and thus, favor the avoiding style. Cole and Streeter, 2003; Korabic, Baril and Watson, 1993 do not agree with the fact that gender and experience significantly impact the choice of conflict resolution management style at all. They found that male and female managers prefer to choose similar conflict management style; but they do differ from their conflict resolution effectiveness. Moreover, Monroe, Disalvo, Lewis and Berzi, 1991 and Akintayo, 2006 have great interest is the interaction of heterogeneous (opposite gender) and homogeneous (same gender) dyads in managing subordinate conflicts. They investigated the effect of gender on conflict management style of supervisors in relations to tricky subordinates and found that male subordinates used confrontation more often with a female superior and female subordinates used avoidance more often with male superiors. However, the researchers also noted that in same gender superior – subordinate dyads, these differences significantly lessened. Both male and female subordinates were more likely to pursue their interests in a conflict with a female superior and less likely to use confrontation with a male superior (Carington and Charles 2001). This finding implied that managers of both genders do not possess innate conflict resolution style but that the interaction with opposite gender subordinate affects preferred style of conflict management. Moreover, (Adeyemo, 2005; Ajaja, 2004; Akintayo, 2004; Conrad, 2001; Sorenson and Hawkins, 1995; Gibbs and Lach, 1994; Lay, 1994) indicated that women managers tend to apt integrative approach such as shared, interpersonal, accommodating, co-operative, avoiding, compromising, pro-social and open methods to resolve conflict. In compare, male managers tend to apt coercive strategies such as aggression, confrontation, competition, confident, and pro-task very often and faster than female managers. Amos D. (1997), examined effects of

work experience and opponents power on the styles of handling interpersonal conflict and suggested that under the low-power opponent condition there was a higher preference for dominating and a lower preference for avoiding, obliging, and integrating. Inexperienced subjects did not change their choice of using the different conflict management styles in view of their opponent's power.

### Objectives of The Study

1. To determine the level of conflict resolution of employees in service sector.
2. To study the effect of gender on conflict management ways of employees in service sector.
3. To study the effect of work experience on conflict management in service sector.

### Methods and Procedures

The study was descriptive in nature. Statistical tool like mean analysis and t-test were applied.

### Sample

A survey instrument in the form of questionnaire was used for the purpose of collecting the main data for the study. The study was carried on 151 executives working in service industry in Indore and nearby geographical areas, who were selected on random basis. Of the total number of participants 58.3% were male and 41.7% were female and 47.7% had work experience of 1-10 years, 33.1% had 11-20 years' experience, 17.2% had 21-30 years, and 2.0% had above 31 years of work experience. The respondent belonged to the senior and middle level. The extraneous variables of age, education and other variables were controlled by randomization and elimination.

### Tools for data collection

The instrument used in this study is composed of 2 parts. The first part asks the individuals questions related to their demographics (age, designation, gender, salary, education and experience etc., Conflict management scale had 40-items. Respondents had to write their responses by using numbers corresponding to the scale in the brackets provided. Scores were reversed for the following 12 questions 1,3,13,18,22,24,26,27,31,32,33 and 35, means “5” was reversed to “1”. Higher the score means more effective in finding resolutions that meet everyone's real needs and that build long term relationship. The current study indicated satisfactory internal consistency of the conflict management measure (0.851).

### Findings and Discussion

#### Hypotheses

**H<sub>0</sub>-The level of conflict management is not high in service sector.**

**Table-1**

Statistics		
CM-Total		
N	Valid	151
	Missing	0
Mean		151.9
Percentiles	25	139
	50	162
	75	167

It can be seen from Table-1 that, mean value of conflict management in service sector is 151.90, which is greater than 139.00 but less than 167.00. So, it may mean that the level of conflict management of employees is moderate in service sector.

Therefore, null hypothesis namely  $H_{01}$  the level of conflict management is not high in service sector is not accepted.

**$H_{02}$  there is no significant difference between male and female executives in their conflict management styles in service sector.**

**Table-2**

Group Statistics					
	gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
CM-Total	Male 1	88	152.27	18.484	1.970
	Female 2	63	151.38	19.061	2.401

**Table-3**

Independent Samples Test										
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
CM-Total	Equal variances assumed	.023	.881	.289	149	.773	.892	3.090	-5.215	6.999
	Equal variances not assumed			.287	131.203	.774	.892	3.106	-5.253	7.037

It can be seen from Table-3 that result of t-test did not reveal significant differences between males and female employees for conflict resolution strategy preference and therefore, null hypothesis namely  $H_{02}$ -there is no significant effect of gender on conflict management, is accepted. In addition, (Table-2) mean score for male is 152.27 and female is 151.38. Therefore, it may be concluded that both male and female executive in

service sector handle conflict in a similar manner.

**$H_{03}$  there is no significant effect of work experience on conflict management styles of employees in service sector.**

**Table-4** Summary of Oneway ANNOVA Analysis on 10 dimensions of Conflict Resolution styles of employees with varying work experience.

ANOVA

Factors of conflict resolution		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
view of conflict	Between Groups	9.900	3	3.300	.503	.681
	Within Groups	965.120	147	6.565		
	Total	975.020	150			
atmosphere	Between Groups	14.536	3	4.845	1.187	.317
	Within Groups	600.166	147	4.083		
	Total	614.702	150			
clarifying perception	Between Groups	52.256	3	17.419	4.735	.003
	Within Groups	540.791	147	3.679		
	Total	593.046	150			
Needs	Between Groups	73.066	3	24.355	3.480	.018
	Within Groups	1028.868	147	6.999		
	Total	1101.934	150			
Power	Between Groups	27.147	3	9.049	1.399	.245
	Within Groups	950.521	147	6.466		
	Total	977.669	150			
future orientation	Between Groups	69.924	3	23.308	4.161	.007
	Within Groups	823.506	147	5.602		
	Total	893.430	150			
Options	Between Groups	45.728	3	15.243	1.962	.122
	Within Groups	1142.166	147	7.770		
	Total	1187.894	150			
Doables	Between Groups	56.627	3	18.876	2.361	.074
	Within Groups	1175.360	147	7.996		
	Total	1231.987	150			
mutual benefits	Between Groups	35.889	3	11.963	1.911	.130
	Within Groups	920.296	147	6.261		
	Total	956.185	150			
extra consideration	Between Groups	80.552	3	26.851	2.651	.050
	Within Groups	1489.025	147	10.129		
	Total	1569.576	150			

Table-5

Report										
Mean										
experience in year	view of conflict	atmosphere	clarifying perception	needs	power	future orientation	options	doables	mutual benefits	extra
1-10 years-1	15.4028	15.8194	15.3056	14.5972	14.2361	14.5139	14.5833	13.7083	14.8611	14.3472
11-20 years-2	15.5200	15.7000	16.4231	15.5400	14.4600	15.6400	15.0600	14.6200	15.0200	15.4000
21-30 years-3	16.1154	16.5769	16.5000	16.4615	15.2692	16.0000	16.0769	15.1923	16.1923	16.1923
above 31 years-4	15.6667	15.6667	16.6667	15.3333	16.0000	17.0000	16.0000	15.6667	15.6667	16.3333

It can be seen from Table-4 that work experience produced significant effect on clarifying perception, needs, future orientation and extra considerations, dimensions of conflict resolution. Table-5 shows gradual increase in mean differences with increased level of experience for clarifying perception, needs, future orientation and extra considerations, dimensions

of conflict resolution. Further, finding indicated that with increased experience, managers were found to be more effective and highly capable in managing industrial conflict as they clarify perception by not hiding their true feelings and react as per the other's perception, consider both parties' needs as important, learn from past and look towards the future and

willing to make self sacrifice with a hope of positive outcomes and can manage conflict with integrative approach. Furthermore, they control their anger and remain focused to resolve conflict. The result revealed that hypothesis four was not confirmed.

### Discussion

This research intended to ascertain the relative impact of work experience and gender on conflict resolution ways for maintaining and sustaining peace and harmony in service organizations. Overall, the study results indicated that there was no significant effect of gender on conflict-resolution styles of employees working in service sector. *This seems* to be in congruence with the findings of Akintayo, (2012); who examined influence of management style and gender on Conflict resolution effectiveness in work organizations and found a significant relationship between management style and conflict resolution effectiveness but no difference between male and female managers' conflict management style. Further, significant relationship was found between work experience and conflict management. This means employees with increased level of work experience create an effective atmosphere by clarifying perception about their own and of others needs and try to maintain long term future relationship by forgiving the other party and manage conflict with integrative approach. *This finding is supported* by the results of (Amos Drory, et al; (1997)) that inexperienced subjects did not change their choice of using the different conflict management styles. Moreover, the overall findings of the study corroborate Leah (2005) who reported that gender does not have as much impact as the experience of the managers have in conflict resolution and managerial effectiveness in work places.

### Conclusion

A clash of interests, values, actions or directions often sparks a conflict. Conflict in service organizations is not necessarily unfavorable when properly managed. New ideas, personal growth and enhanced morale, clear communication, and better teamwork etc are some beneficial outcomes of the functional conflict. However, conflict can be the decline of an organization if it is not effectively managed. All members of any organization need to learn ways of keeping conflict to a minimum and of solving problems before conflict becomes a major obstacle at workplace. It was found that gender does not affect conflict management styles. The challenge for organizational leaders is to try to maintain the right balance between male and female managers without hurting their egos. The finding further confirmed that experience is moderating force in the course of managing conflict. By utilizing experience of employees properly, understanding the dynamics of conflict and various learning approaches to conflict management, executives will be able to set up background in which creative and novel solutions to conflict can be encouraged.

### Limitations

The study included a limited number of respondents and a

limited number of organizations in Indore and nearby areas. The results cannot be generalized due to this limitation. Another limitation is that researcher excluded demographics such as age, place of birth, education, public or private organization and income level etc. These variables could be included in further studies with larger sample size. In addition to this, a convenience sample was used. The absence of randomization for control could affect the data.

### Implication

Findings from this study have important and practical implications. The study has revealed that gender does not affect conflict resolution styles. This becomes an important implication for organizations; management can place male or female managers to deal with other team members in unfavorable situations. In addition to this; these organizations can utilize experience of employees properly and help them to develop ability to maintain and sustain peace and harmony at global level.

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