



Culture, gender, organizational role, and styles of conflict resolution: A meta-analysis[☆]

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Abstract

The popularity of self-report five-style conflict resolution instruments, spawned by Blake and Mouton's [(1964). *The managerial grid*. Houston, TX: Gulf Publishing] dual concerns theory, resulted in a plethora of research studies examining possible differences in culture, gender and organizational role. Using the Managerial Grid, dual concerns theory postulates that conflict involves balancing the desire to meet production goals (x) versus concern for personal relationships (y). Five styles of managing conflict are then revealed: smoothing, withdrawing, compromising, problem-solving, and forcing. Numerous studies using instruments derived from this theory validate its basic premises, but results have provided confusing results.

Given the disparity of results, a meta-analysis was conducted to provide a clearer overall picture for the variables of culture (individualistic versus collectivistic), gender, and organizational role (superior, subordinate, and peer). Based upon 123 paired comparisons within 36 empirical studies, the results of the meta-analysis indicate: (1) individualistic cultures choose forcing as a conflict style more than collectivistic cultures; (2) collectivistic cultures prefer the styles of withdrawing, compromising, and problem-solving more than individualistic cultures; (3) in individualistic cultures, compromising is endorsed more frequently by females; (4) females are more likely to endorse the use of compromising than males, regardless of culture; (5) males are more likely to report using forcing than females in individualistic

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cultures; and (6) with regard to organizational role, males are more likely than females to choose a forcing style with their superiors.

Further research is needed, particularly on the variable of cultural status.

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1. Introduction

Multiculturalism, to flourish, relies on effective, expedient management of disputes. Addressing conflict effectively becomes more urgent as social change accelerates. (Duryea, 1992, p. 1)

On a global level, people are increasingly concerned with creating and maintaining peace. Understanding conflict and how to resolve it are two issues directly related to accomplishing this goal, given that resolution of conflict helps to sustain peaceable relations (Blumberg, 1998). Cultural differences both within and across countries can result in conflictive communication; therefore, communication strategies such as conflict resolution may provide an important means of bridging diverse cultural perspectives (Dubinskas, 1992; Gabrielidis, Stephan, Ybarra, Pearson, & Villareal, 1997; Hofstede, 1983; Holt, 2000; Ting-Toomey et al., 1991; Ting-Toomey et al., 2000). Goodall (1996), for example, states:

Professionals and academics are being called upon to articulate some new revolutionary ‘communication’ breakthrough capable of teaching us how diverse peoples can learn to live together meaningfully without destroying each other and—in the process—the planet itself. (pp. 1–2)

Perhaps never before has this been more important, given the September 11, 2001 attack on the United States’ World Trade Center and Pentagon and its consequences (Kliman & Llerena-Quinn, 2002; Schuman, 2002). Clearly, conflict and violence are at the heart of the world’s problems, on both microcosmic and macrocosmic levels; thus the study of conflict resolution vis-à-vis culture is an important endeavor. In addition, gender would appear to be a significant way that human beings differ in relationship to conflict resolution style. Similarly, within the workplace, how one chooses to resolve a conflict may be affected in large part by the status of the other party—whether superior, subordinate or peer to oneself. Despite the fact that intuitively, individuals from various cultural backgrounds, of different genders, and within the workplace would appear to solve conflicts in very different ways, there are no conclusive findings. In fact, the results of myriad studies using one of the many five-style conflict resolution instruments and measuring the variables of culture, gender, and organizational role, whether alone or in combination, yield confusing results. Therefore, this study used meta-analytic techniques to contribute a more

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