

## Gender Differences in Conflict Resolution Styles (CRS) in Different Roles: A Systematic Review

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A systematic review aimed at bringing together empirical evidences of conflict resolution styles used by men and women was carried out. It consisted of 28 published studies as well as four indigenous dissertations obtained from searching relevant databases. The review suggested that in home setting, women and men both collaborated while resolving conflicts, with men being more competitive. At workplace, gender differences diminished, with men or women being more dominating as managers, and more accommodating as subordinates. This is indicative of the significance of the power, role and setting in determination of the conflict resolution style. Unexplained directions of the empirical research (i.e., situations, types of conflicts, functions, effects and personality traits) as determinants of CRS have been discussed. Moreover, the outcome (i.e., satisfaction or distress, effectiveness and hostility) can particularly be assessed to ascertain constructive or destructive conflict resolution styles.

*Keywords:* Conflict resolution, compromising, avoiding, constructive, destructive

Conflict is unavoidable phenomenon in the form of disagreements, dislikes, and arguments that prevails at all levels of human interactions: personal, professional, family, and social relationships. Conflicts occur at homes, public places and workplaces; between family member, spouses, coworkers, and peers and even between nations (Straus, 1980). Conflict is referred to as a state of opposition between two or more individuals and can be a difference over objectives, expectations or goals between persons or groups (Rahim, 2003). Conflicts at the work place decreases productivity as well as personal relationship quality associated with distress (Gauhar & Amjad, 2004). Conflict is an independent variable of organizational behavior and a significant determinant of productivity, efficiency, performance and job satisfaction (Turkalj, Fasic, & Dujak, 2008). Every organization goes through many conflicts between various employees on daily basis. Even though conflicts cannot be avoided, it can be managed timely. Conflict management means to design effective strategies to minimize the dysfunctions and enhance the constructive functions of organizational conflicts in order to increase performance of organization and its members (Rahim, 2002).

Diverse models of handling interpersonal conflict have been proposed in literature. Deutsch (1949) first suggested the two factors cooperative– competitive model of conflict management. Putnam and Wilson (1982) identified three styles of conflict resolution i.e., non-confrontation, solution-orientation, and control.

Lawrence and Lorsch (1967) suggested different styles i.e., confrontation, forcing and smoothing to manage conflict. Rahim evaluated these models and identified limitations regarding clarity of methods and analyses.

Three category conflict styles are not reliably and comprehensively investigated. Pruitt (1983) suggested a four style model of handling conflict based on the dual concern model for self (high or low) and for others (high or low), resulting in the following styles: yielding, problem solving, inaction, and contending. Blake and Mouton (1964) proposed five types of CRS which were forcing, withdrawing, smoothing, compromising, and problem solving. Thomas and Kilmann (1976) identified five main styles of dealing with conflict that vary in their degrees of cooperativeness and assertiveness. These include competitive, avoiding, collaborative, compromising, and accommodating (Enact: Life Long Learning Programme, n.d.).

Similarly, Rahim (2002) put forward conflict management styles i.e., domination, avoiding, integrating, obliging, and compromising. Competitive style (Dominating/Disregarding: I win, you lose) is forcing one's will over the other to achieve one's objective, ignoring the needs of other party. It shows high self-concern (Rahim, 2002). Avoiding style (I lose, you lose) refers to withdrawal from the issue and suppress it. This is considered as a weak and ineffective style (Lim, 2000). It involves least concern for self and others normally termed as withdrawal or sidestepping (Rahim, 2002). Collaborative style (integrating /problem-solving style: win-win situation) is achieved through cooperation between parties which reflect high concern for both self and others and leads to problem solving and creative solutions which are efficient and wise (Fisher & Ury, 1991). Compromising style (I win some, you win some) reflects moderate concern for both ends and it is based on sharing as well as give and take to reach at mutually acceptable solution. Both the parties lose some of their interest and seek middle ground position to achieve their goal. Accommodating style

(Obliging/Yielding: You win, I lose) is nonassertive style where individuals disregards one's own needs and accedes to other individual/partner's desires. It is self-sacrifice style which reflects selfless generosity obedience to another person. It is a style involving low concern for self and high concern for others.

The most documented model by Rahim regarding different CRS have been dominantly identified in relation to gender differences in handling interpersonal conflicts at home or organizational settings. Previous research in the 1980s focused on the importance of gender differentials in socialization and gender role expectations (Gilligan as cited in Brahnma, Margavio, Hignite, Barrier, & Chin, 2005). That is, women are socialized to abandon personal goals for the benefit of others; while men are socialized as dominant, more assertive, aggressive, and independent (Greeff & de Bruyne, 2000). There are gender differences in how men and women handle conflicts. For example, most of the time men avoid conflict as compared to women, and if men are engaged in conflict, they tend to use more coercion, aggression, and control tactics compared to women (Cahn as cited in Helegeson, 2005; Feldman & Gowen, 1998). Demand/Withdraw behavior is linked to gender. Women are more likely to demand and husbands are more likely to withdraw. The demander is more likely to initiate problem discussion, whereas the withdrawer is more likely to avoid problem discussion (Christensen & Heavey as cited in Helegeson, 2005). There are several explanations for this pattern. In conflict, women want cooperation from husband and men want autonomy. Women identify more problems in a relationship than men do. To resolve problems, confrontation and demanding behavior is required. Demand-withdraw is related to power structure in relationships and lower status of women. Women are more negative than men during discussion of conflict (Carstensen, Gottman, & Levenson as cited in Helegeson, 2005). This is due to the reason that women are more emotionally expressive and called the emotional barometer of relationships (Floyd & Markman; as cited in Helegeson, 2005).

Studies involving managers contradict the findings of gender role expectations, with little or no difference in conflict management. Management is a symbol of status and power, and hence, both men and women who make it to that position tend to handle conflicts in a more dominating manner (Eagly & Johnson as cited in Brahnma et al, 2005). The variation of being androgynous and gender typical indicates variation of employment of styles to manage conflicts. There is strong empirical evidence that male and female managers who are more androgynous are willing to use the more constructive collaborative strategies (Brewer et al.; Portello & Long as cited in Brahnma et al, 2005). Managers perceived by subordinates as being androgynous are considered more skillful in resolving conflict than managers who believe in gender role expectations (Jurma & Powell as cited in as cited in Brahnma et al., 2005).

## Objective

To find out the pattern of gender differences in conflict resolution styles generally and specifically in relation to roles (husband/wife, manager/subordinate) within settings of home and work.

## Methodology

Systematic Review is a review that is conducted to comprehensively identify, evaluate, and synthesize all the relevant studies on a given topic. Systematic reviews are often used to test just a single hypothesis (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006).

## Data Sources

Articles were identified with the assistance of relevant database sources i.e., Science Direct, Jstore (1989-2013), Google Scholar, Library database, with a key word manual searching like gender differences in conflict resolution styles (CRS), CRS at home, CRS at work using AND & OR against the inclusion criteria. Full text versions of studies were analyzed thoroughly for detailed information. The inclusion criteria included studies regarding gender differences in conflict resolution styles. The abstracts found were screened; all research dealing with "gender differences in conflict resolution styles" other than the targeted contents was omitted. After screening from 80 papers, 28 studies meeting the inclusion criteria were considered suitable for inclusion in the review. However, the scant indigenous literature published in relation to conflict resolution styles, four available Masters (n=2) and M.Phil (n=2) theses were also included to compare the indigenous findings on the use of conflict resolution styles. This may hinder the quality of literature but the focus was to comprehensively assess the most recent available as well as indigenous findings on the intended review.

## Research Design:

Cross sectional, cohort studies, observational and longitudinal studies on gender differences in use of conflict resolution styles were included. Abstracts of relevant studies were studied to determine eligibility of the study to be included. Studies were eligible for inclusion if: (1) gender and conflict resolution (2) published between 1989 and 2013; and (3) focused on home or work settings. The reason for specifying the duration of time for studies between 1989 and 2013 was the maximum variation of articles in these twenty four years.

## Demographics:

Overall demographics of the different studies were male and female managers, directors, subordinates, peers, students, employees of different kinds of organizations (i.e., national and multinational, agricultural, information system, insurance agencies, educational institutions, banks, and industries), and cross-cultural samples (i.e., Pakistan, Sweden, Iran, Turkey, China, Canada, Turkey, Malaysia, USA, Nigeria, and Croatia), national representative samples and married couples. The sample size varies from minimum 10 to 984 with diverse methodologies like qualitative, controlled experimental, longitudinal and cross sectional studies.

## Results and Discussion

Generally, the results confirm that women are highly compromising as compared to men in terms of conflict resolution styles. Men are generally competitive, compromise and accommodate least. Both men and women are equally avoiding and collaborating.

At home, women are highly compromising and men highly competitive. Both equally collaborate and avoid conflict resolution discussion. Men compromise and accommodate least.

At workplace, regardless of gender, managers are highly collaborating and competitive. They avoid and compromise least. Whereas subordinates, highly accommodating and avoiding. They

Tables 1

*Gender Differences in Conflict Resolution Styles (n = 30)*

Gender	Compromising	Accommodating	Collaborating	Competitive	Avoiding
Men	2 (8%)	1 (4%)	7 (27%)	11 (42%)	5 (19%)
Women	12 (40%)	2 (7%)	8 (26%)	2 (7%)	6 (20%)

Note: total 30 studies out of 32 reported presence of gender differences in CRS.

Tables 2

*Gender Differences in Conflict Resolution Styles at Home (n = 10)*

Gender	Compromising	Accommodating	Collaborating	Competitive	Avoiding
Men	1 (10%)	0 (0%)	2 (20%)	5 (50%)	2 (20%)
Women	4 (40%)	1 (10%)	2 (20%)	1 (10%)	2 (20%)

Note: total 10 studies out of 32 reported presence of gender differences in CRS.

Tables 3

*Conflict Resolution Styles at Workplace (n = 21)*

Gender	Compromising	Accommodating	Collaborating	Competitive	Avoiding
Managers	2 (10%)	0 (0%)	9 (45%)	7 (35%)	2 (10%)
Subordinates	2 (18%)	4 (37%)	1 (9%)	1 (9%)	3 (27%)

Note: out of 32 some studies (n=7) consisted of only managers and some (14) subordinates and managers.

use compromising and collaborating styles infrequently.

***Gender Differences in Conflict Resolution Styles***

Overall very few studies (n = 2) reported no significant gender differences in conflict resolution styles. However, the majority of studies found significant gender differences in conflict resolution styles in general and specifically at home setting. Moreover, roles at workplace diminish such gender differences. The review suggests that generally, women, regardless of roles within different settings of home as well as work, are highly compromising as compared to men in the context of conflict resolution. Men are highly competitive and compromise less. Both men and women are equally avoiding and collaborating. Men do not use accommodating way of handling conflicts. The analysis of gender differences in conflict resolution styles suggests that women are intermediately cooperative and assertive considering their own and as well other's needs. Men are highly assertive and uncooperative considering their own needs only indicating the dominating CRS. Being collaborative indicates that both are cooperative as well as assertive in some conflicting situations, considering each other's needs. However, the avoiding conflict resolution style suggests that sometimes both men and women are uncooperative and unassertive, not considering even their own needs.

***Gender Differences in Conflict Resolution Styles within the Home Setting***

The manifestation of gender differences at home setting suggests women are highly compromising and men highly competitive in terms of conflict handling. Both equally collaborate and avoid conflict resolution discussion. Men compromise and accommodate least in the same context. Few studies indicate that men used compromising and/or accommodating styles (Chusmir & Mills, 1989; Chaudhry, Shami, Saif, & Ahmad, 2008; Sadia & Khalid, 2009). Avoiding in men has been demonstrated particularly regarding the home setting where wife indulges in demanding behavior and husband withdraws (Cingoz-Ulu, & Lalonde, 2007; Dildar & Yasin, 2012; Katz & Gottman, 1993; Stets & Henderson,

1991). It is inconsistent with the findings of meta-analysis of cross-cultural comparison of studies that women use compromising more than men, regardless of culture; men are more likely to report using forcing than women in conflict resolution. Regardless of organizational roles, women choose problem-solving more than men; and men preferring forcing more than women is maintained in conflict management (Holta & DeVoreb, 2005, Havenga, n.d.). Kausar and Khalid (2001) found that compromising style of wives determines marital adjustment. Another meta-analysis suggests that women are more forgiving than men (Andrea et al., 2008).

***Gender Differences in Conflict Resolution Styles at Workplace***

Evaluating gender, in relation to workplace, men used integrating, avoiding and dominating styles. It is inconsistent with the empirical evidence that male managers tend to use more aggressive, assertive, pro-task strategies more than female managers (Akintayo as cited in Brahnam et al., 2005). On the other hand, women used integrating, accommodating, compromising, and avoiding styles. It is consistent with the findings of Omole (2004), and Sorenson and Hawkins (1995) who reported that male managers use more competitive conflict resolution strategy than female managers. While female managers use more compromising conflict resolution strategy (Shadare, Chidi, & Owoyemi, 2011). The literature suggests that the gender differences in workplace remain stable and vary only in relation to the role of manager or subordinate (e.g. Islamoğlu et al., 2008; Slabbert, 2004). It is evident from the synthesis of empirical evidence that, at workplace, regardless of gender, managers are highly collaborating and competitive. They avoid conflicting situations least and compromise rarely. Whereas subordinates, highly accommodating and avoiding. They use compromising and collaborating styles infrequently. It is consistent with the reported findings where little or no difference in conflict resolution style between male and female managers (Watson & Hoffman as cited in Brahnam et al., 2005). It has also been evidenced in literature that men are accommodating, while women are avoiding of conflict when there is a matter of power rather than any gender difference (Brewer et al. as cited in Brahnam et al., 2005). Women managers are socialized within the

organization to become more like men. It is argued that advancement within an organization is associated with the possession of masculine traits and that women who want to advance are encouraged to adopt masculine characteristics (Brenner et al. as cited in Brahnam et al., 2005). Competitive, avoiding as well as collaborating styles are used by managers. At workplace, no gender differences were found (Khalid & Amjad, 2010).

A contradictory finding regarding the female using force and aggressive behavior resolving conflicts in intimate relations (Stets & Henderson, 1991). However, the context of aggressive behavior has been identified as drinking before an incident of aggression in men (Stets & Henderson, 1991). However, it has been found that men behave competitively against their immediate supervisors where as women behave competitively with their spouses (Tezer, 1996)

### Synthesis

Overall, the review suggests that some conflict resolution are gender specific such as compromising, collaborating in women and competitive (dominating) and collaborating in men. It also highlights that the role differences in terms of power determine the use of specific conflict resolution styles at home or workplace. At workplace, roles dominantly determine CRS. The review also highlights that the determination of constructive and destructive conflict resolution styles depends on the likely positive or negative outcomes which include satisfaction, effectiveness, efficiency or dissatisfaction. Although some conflict resolution styles are considered best or worst for organization or relationship because of its likely worst or best outcomes, yet roles suggest the use of specific styles of conflict resolution. Collaborating style is considered a constructive style in interpersonal relations of marriage and friendships because there is a need for trust and power equality (Greeff & de Bruyne, 2000). Compromising and accommodating are also considered constructive styles than avoiding and competing (Greeff & de Bruyne, 2000). Avoidance and dominance decreases satisfaction in relationships (Greeff & de Bruyne, 2000). Husbands, in dissatisfied marriages used competitive styles more, while both spouses used avoiding styles. In satisfied marriages, men and women used collaborating style; women used compromising more than men (Dildar & Yasin, 2012). Further the constructive or destructive conflict resolution styles may be investigated in relation to the specific and diverse situations and roles with related outcomes. This suggests a need for evaluating the consequences of using any CRS in any relationship (i.e. marriage, friendship or workplace) or specific role concerned (husband/wife, friend, manager, subordinate). This strategy may facilitate improved conflict interaction patterns to ward off the increasing anxiety, anger, dissatisfaction or distress in any relationship. According to Davis, Myers, and Cummings (1996), constructive communication can also be best utilized in conflict resolution. The current synthesis highlights the concern for relationship or personal needs determines which conflict resolution style will be used. Considering the high concern for the relationship need, compromising, avoiding is frequently used. However, no conclusive answer can be drawn as the current review did not focus on this aspect.

### Conclusion

The review reflects the gender specific conflict resolution styles regardless of culture and roles, which are compromising and

accommodating in women, dominating in men. Whereas collaborating and avoiding is equally used by men and women when resolving conflicts. And this is generally applied at the home setting. Gender differences remain less evident at workplace. Superior role of manager or director indicates the use of dominating and collaborating style, while those in the role of subordinate prefer using avoiding style and accommodating style. The use of conflict resolution strategies also vary according to the status of the opponent as being high or low; manager or subordinate. Avoiding and obliging styles are more used in case of opponent is manager or director. Integrating and dominating styles are less used in this case. When the opponent is subordinate, competitive style is used more and collaborative/integrating style is used less.

This is indicative of the significance of the power, roles and setting in determination of conflict resolution style. There is a need to design comprehensive researches where diverse situations, personality, cognitive, affective determinants of conflict resolution styles can be explored. Hanvenga (n.d.) reported that the increase in old age lead towards less use of dominance. Considering the age impact on conflict resolution, the different conflict resolution styles may be explored in relation to age differences across men and women. Moreover, systematic review can also be carried out in relation to whether the men and women differ in use of constructive and destructive conflict resolution styles? This phenomenon can be explored in context of the studies which have the outcome variables like satisfaction, productivity, efficiency, distress, dissatisfaction, anger, hostility or stability. The review findings suggested that use of avoiding conflict resolution style indicates that sometimes both men and women are uncooperative and unassertive, not considering even their own needs. This may be explored as well in relation to diverse situations when they are mutually collaborative and avoiding during conflict discussion.

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