

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON GROUP DECISION MAKING: DOES TIME PRESSURE ACT AS A MODERATOR?

Saman Javed

Lecturer, Department of Management Sciences, BAHRIA University, Islamabad

ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between conflict management styles and decision-making effectiveness of individuals working in groups. Data for the survey was derived from a sample of 120 people from education and corporate sectors of Rawalpindi and Islamabad Region. The major postulation of the study was that how individuals manage conflicts that also profoundly affect their other activities such as decision making. To further understand behavioral dynamics behind conflicts and related variables, time pressure was considered as possible moderating variable. A cross sectional analysis of the data showed that those who adopt integrating and compromising conflict management styles make more effective decisions than those who use dominating and avoiding styles. Also, moderating effect of time pressure was found to be positive and significant. The study contributes to the existing literature on conflict management, decision making effectiveness and time pressure among people in developing countries.

Keywords: *Conflict, Conflict Management Styles & Decision Making Effectiveness*

INTRODUCTION

In today's global business environment where managers and leaders are faced with challenges of running international businesses, managing virtual teams and handling workforce diversity, it is inevitable to take into the consideration how workplace conflicts affect organizational working. Conflict arises as a result of possessing or articulating opposing viewpoints on a variety of issues. It may involve people/organizations (Rahim, Megnar & Shapiro, 2000). A conflict is usually born when people feel threatened or dubious as to the acceptance or fulfillment of their individual perceptions and standpoints, against other people or groups (Wall & Callister, 1995). The conflict helps in fostering the creativity and newness. Without having the dissenting views and ideas, the organization would adhere to the status quo and eventually impede its progress (Ozkalp, Sungur & Ozdemir, 2009). Moreover, it has been cited by various researches that conflict is unavoidable, especially in projects involving stress factor which usually leads to conflict (Cheung & Chuah, 1999).

Groups are said to increase the probability of functional conflict since people working in groups or teams use conflict and dialogue to strengthen their ability to work together. Most studies of conflict within groups focus on the direct outcomes of conflict like decision quality, satisfaction or commitment of the solution. However, when groups face conflicts, they not only resolve them to acquire a direct outcome but also establish the patterns of behavior that may apply in the

future. Decisions also involve considerable time pressure (Simon, 1997) and situations that are highly complex and ambiguous (Weick, 2001). Where there is a lack of affluence of information, the resulting uncertainty leads to time stress. It is a logical assumption that time pressure has a detrimental effect on performance. However, research suggests that there is not enough empirical proof as to how it affects performance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conflict

Despite of having a negative connotation, conflict can assist in the process of crafting new and creative ideas. Conflict leads to brainstorming which in turn results in not only developing good work relationships with the coworkers, but also heightens employee morale (Chan, Huang & Ng, 2007). The two basic approaches that demonstrate conflict include traditional approach and modern approach. Traditional approach is of view that conflict is detrimental and dysfunctional thus it must be avoided. Conversely, modern approach states that conflict is unavoidable and should be dealt with accordingly (Slabbert, 2004).

Conflict Management Styles

Based on the combinations of the dimensions of Concern for Self (extent to which individual tries to meet his own interests) and Concern for Others (extent to which individual tries to satisfy other people's interest), Rahim and Bonoma (1979) developed five conflict management styles i.e. integrative, dominating, avoiding, obliging, and compromising. Integrative/collaborative conflict management aims at coming with the best possible solution to end a conflict. It encourages employees to freely communicate and interact with each other. It is helpful in building employee trust and ensuring positive organizational environment (Chan, Huang & Ng, 2007). Obliging or accommodating style seeks to fulfill needs and demands of others without paying heed to self-motive and priorities. This is where manager obsequiously put up others (Aritzeta, Ayestaran & Swailes, 2005, Kuhn & Poole, 2000). Compromising style is employed to arrive at a settlement perceived reasonable by both sides (Slabbert, 2004). In avoiding style, the manager deliberately ignores conflict situation and remains neglectful to its solution. Dominating or competing style takes forceful and autocratic decisions through resorting to coercive tactics or simply exerting one's viewpoint by seniority (Cheung & Chuah, 1999).

Decision Making

Decision making entails selecting the best alternative from many available ones in order to achieve the desired goals (Radford, 1975). Tohidi & Jabbari (2012) stated that decision making is a process of forecasting a specific problem, weighing the options available to solve the problem, estimating the probable results of each option and selecting the most appropriate solution to the problem. Cohen & Bailey (1997) defined group decision making as *"a collection of individuals interdependent in their tasks, who share responsibility for outcomes, which see themselves and*

are seen by as a social entity embedded in one or more larger social systems, and who manage their relationships across organizational boundaries” (pp. 23, 1997). According to Gladstein (1984), group members might judge the effectiveness of group’s decisions based on certain group norms and processes. If the group process is in sync with the desirable outcomes than the group regards the decision-making process as effective. This enables the decision maker to get mature according to the degree of difficulty of situation (Parkin, 1996). Effective decision making is a prerequisite for managers, especially in extra ordinary situations. It requires the manager to intelligently and successfully cope with time pressure, lack of information and decision load (Cosgrave, 1996).

Relationship amid Conflict Management and Decision Making

While encountering explicit conflicts, employed conflict management style has a direct impact on the group decisions. It may also affect relationship between the group members which in return could hinder or foster decision-making process (Kuhn & Poole, 2000). However, contemporary view of conflict suggests that it is vital to have conflicts so that high-quality decisions can be made through dialogue. Yet conflict also appears to be a hurdle in way of consensus and mutual acceptance. This discrepancy can be explained by conflict being multidimensional. Thus, it is possible that one dimension of the conflict perhaps cognitive, enhances decision quality while another dimension (affective) attenuates agreement and decision-making effectiveness (Amason & Schweiger, 1996). Effective and timely conflict management has positive implications for decision making. According to Kuhn & Poole (2000), integrating style help the group establish interactional norms that promote mutual goal setting and ability to analyze problems and propose solutions through a critical discussion that incorporates several perspectives, and therefore fosters positive performance outcomes. In contrast, dominating style inhibits healthy dialogue and the collaborative goal setting, subsequently resulting in “win-lose” solutions. At last, avoiding style suppresses all the differences and produce unreflective decisions or indecisiveness. Based on the above discussion, following hypotheses are proposed.

H₁: Groups with an integrating and compromising conflict management styles will have high level of effectiveness in decision making behavior.

H₂: Groups with a dominating and avoiding conflict management styles will be having a negative impact on their group decision making effectiveness.

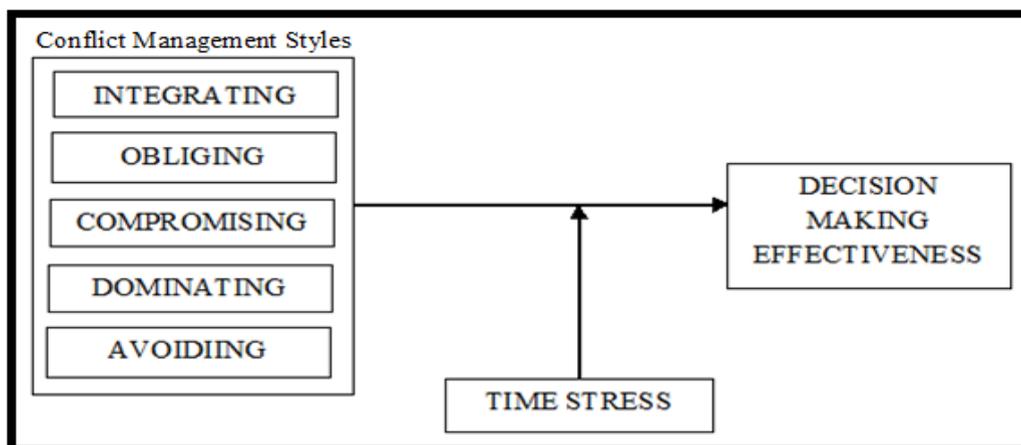
H₃: Moderating Effect of Time Pressure:

Escalating time pressures and demand for fast and steady task completion within a tight schedule is growing concern for modern workforce. Impending deadlines lengthens the working hours and results in employee restlessness and increased need for sleep. Moreover, assigning deadlines may speed up the tasks but do not ensure effective performance (Rugulies et al, 2015). Time pressure is not only limited to deadlines, but been considered as perception by researchers. An employee

perceiving a sense of limited time to complete a job results in stress and feeling pressurized (Ordonez & Benson, 1997). Apart from the adverse effects of time pressures and impending deadlines, they can sometimes be helpful in speeding things up. Deadlines play a major role in the development of new products. In industries like media and information technology, deadlines help in staying abreast of market developments, keeping the company ahead of competitors and retaining customers by producing technologically advanced and up to date products and services. Moreover, tools and techniques used by the employees to keep up with market trends are also influenced by impending deadlines and time pressure (Greenbaum & Stuedahl, 2000).

Several theorists have associated notion of time pressure with psychological factors. Kruglanski and Freund's (1983), found that time pressure prevents the employee to deeply understand the situation before making decisions, which can lead to wrong decision. Furthermore, a rigid time range for completion of a task may also result in compromising the decision quality (Kocher & Sutter, 2006). Time pressure has its effects on both individual and group decision makers. The major reason for time pressure is excessive amount of information that is to be processed to take a decision. Both individuals and groups are bombarded with wide arena of data to arrive at a decision. Information overload is experienced differently based on its intensity, thus creating various levels of time pressures (Paul & Nazareth, 2010).

Figure 1 Theoretical Framework



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Sample

Participants in the study consisted of employees of both manufacturing and services sector of Pakistan. Out of 200 questionnaires distributed, only 120 sets were returned, yielding a response rate of 60%.

Scales

The conflict management styles; namely integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding and compromising were measured using Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory-II, a 28-item questionnaire developed by Rahim (1983). Decision making Effectiveness was measured using 12 items from the 29-item Group Reaction Questionnaire (GRQ) developed by Kuhn & Poole (2000). Time pressure was measured by using six items from the "Time Stress Scale" developed by Schafer (1996). Cronbach's alpha values for ROCI-II, GRQ and TSS were found to be 0.71, 0.87 and 0.82 respectively.

FINDINGS OF STUDY

Correlations

Below is correlations table, depicting the one to one relationships between conflict management styles, group decision making effectiveness and time pressure. Looking at the R values, it is evident that all five conflict management styles have significant relationships with group decision making effectiveness. Both integrating and compromising styles are significantly related to group decision making effectiveness and the association is positive (IN- R=0.61: COM- R=0.60). On the other hand, results for avoiding and dominating styles are also significant but the relationship is inverse (AV- R=-0.43: DO- R=-0.37). Moreover, obliging style is also found to have positively significant association with group decision making (OB- R=0.35). Moreover, time pressure has been found to have inverse relationships with cooperative styles of conflict management i.e. integrating (R= -0.62), compromising (R= -0.57) and obliging (R= -0.36), whereas, direct and positive correlations with uncooperative conflict management styles i.e. dominating (R= 0.29) and avoiding (R= 0.47).

Table 1 The Correlation Analysis

		IN	AV	DO	OB	COM	GE	TS
IN	R	1	-.224*	-.244**	.435**	.475**	.611**	-.621**
AV	R	-.224*	1	-.099	.013	-.232*	-.435**	.470**
DO	R	-.244**	-.099	1	-.261**	-.270**	-.377**	.293**
OB	R	.435**	.013	-.261**	1	.486**	.351**	-.368**
COM	R	.475**	-.232*	-.270**	.486**	1	.600**	-.579**
GE	R	.611**	-.435**	-.377**	.351**	.600**	1	-.790**
TS	R	-.621**	.470**	.293**	-.368**	-.579**	-.790**	1

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Regression Analysis

Having examined the correlation results, a simple linear regression has been utilized to determine the individual and collective relationship between independent and dependent variables. The table below shows the value of R-Square to be 0.61 with significance level of 0.000. This means that the collective impact of all conflict management styles on group decision making effectiveness is about 61% and the relationship is significant.

Table 2 The Regression Analysis

R-Square	Sig
0.616	0.000

Predictors: IN, AV, DO, OB, COM

The beta values below are displaying the individual relationships between conflict management style and group decision making effectiveness. The intensity of association is strongest between integrating style and group decision making ($B= 0.28$ or 28%) and the relationship is positive. Same goes for compromising ($B= 0.25$). Results for Avoiding ($B= -0.28$) and Dominating ($B= -0.22$) styles are also significant but the nature of relation is negative. Thus, the first and second hypotheses are accepted. Obliging style was found to have insignificant impact on the dependent variable ($B= -0.004$; $Sig= 0.960$).

Table 3- Beta Coefficients

	B- Values	Sig
IN	0.286	0.000
AV	-0.286	0.000
DO	-0.226	0.000
COM	0.259	0.000
OB	-0.004	0.960

Dependent Variable: GE

Moderation

To assess the moderating effect of time pressure on the dependent variable i.e. group decision making, hierarchical regression function was run in SPSS. The moderation is shown in the table below.

Table 4 Hierarchical Moderation

Dependent Variable		R- Square	Sig
Group Decision Making Effectiveness	Model 1	0.616	0.000
	Model 2	0.704	0.000

Predictors: IN, AV, DO, COM, OB

Predictors: IN, AV, DO, COM, OB, IT

The “IT” value mentioned above is the interaction term determined by taking the product of independent variable and moderator. Model 1 represents before moderation results with R-Square of 0.061. After adding moderator, value of R^2 increases to 0.704, demonstrating an approximate increase of 9% in the relationship between conflict management styles and group decision making effectiveness. Significance remains at 0.000 in both the models. The above analysis clearly indicates that the presence of time pressure plays a significant role in the process of conflict management and its subsequent effects on group decision making effectiveness, thereby leading to the acceptance of the third hypothesis.

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

Keeping in mind the utmost importance and inevitability of conflicts in organizational life, the rationale of this study was to comprehend how individuals handle conflicts at work. Furthermore, occurrence of conflicts in groups is far more important to study as compared to individual conflicts. Through empirical examination of the variables, it was found that integrating and compromising styles have a significant relationship with group decision making effectiveness. The reason behind this is both these styles incorporate the elements of mutual understanding, listening and shared goal setting process, that ultimately leads to group cohesiveness. Thus, as a result of employing these styles whilst a conflict situation, overall group effectiveness increases. Similarly, both dominating and avoiding styles possess the idea of either imposing on the other party one’s own viewpoints or simply abandoning conflict situation. Understandably, the former leads to resentment on part of group members whereas the latter simply causes ambiguity and state of confusion as to how to pursue the situation. Hence, the results show that dominating and avoiding style has a negative impact on group decision making effectiveness.

The empirical results have also validated that the presence of time pressure whilst managing a conflict alters latter’s relationship with group decision making effectiveness. This research tells us that although conflicts are unavoidable, they can lead to healthy outcomes like brainstorming, creative thinking and consensus based decisions. When managed in consultative and collaborative fashion, they can leave positive impact on organizational performance, group productivity and decision making. Furthermore, moderators like time pressure adversely affect the conflict management and decision-making process. The study has several implications for managers. It provides ample evidence based on empirical results that managers should choose to employ cooperative conflict management styles while dealing with conflict situations, henceforth giving way to effective decisions. Managers can also enact certain rules that can help employees in time management and thus avoiding time pressures. Additionally, ensuring realistic job goals, role clarity and participative supervision would also help in lessening the adverse effect of time pressure or time stress on individual as well as group performance.

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