Role of Big Five Personality Traits on Conflict Management Styles of Managers in Bangladesh: An Empirical Study

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Abstract: *This study investigates the relationship between personality factors and conflict management styles of managers/executives in Bangladesh. Earlier researchers have examined the influence of personality types of individuals on the choice of conflict management styles for managers. Findings of those researches are mixed. Therefore, the particular issue is yet to be fully investigated in the context of Bangladesh. This study used a questionnaire survey to collect data. A total of eighty executives, who are working in different organizations, were selected randomly for the survey. The Big Five Inventory has been used to determine personality of executives and how they solve workplace conflict has been measured by questionnaire developed from five types of conflict management styles. For data analysis purpose, various statistical tests were conducted on SPSS 15. Bi-Variate analysis of the data showed significant positive correlation between agreeableness and collaborative style of conflict management. Cross-Tab analysis identifies conflict management styles of different personality types; but the results were not statistically significant. One–way ANOVA substantiated that conflict management styles cannot be treated as a variable dependent on personality types.*

Keywords: *Personality traits, Big Five Personality, Conflict management styles.*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Managing organizational conflict continues to be a topic of concern to both academicians and practicing managers (Baron, 1989). Conflicts are defined as the process, which shows incompatibility or disagreement between two social entities (Rahim 2002), which can be classified as positive, negative, or balanced. The positive view claims that the conflict is a force, which proves to be helpful or motivating in achieving the organizational goals (Jameson, 1999; Rahim, 2001, Wall & Callister, 1995). Perceptions about conflict, positive or negative, depend on how conflicts are handled (Rahim,1986). Handling work conflicts in a positive manner is beneficial for both employees and organization. Tidd & Friedman (2002) narrated that properly handled conflicts reduce

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their negative impacts and associated uncertainties. Properly handled conflicts increase efficiency at both individual and group levels (Tjosvold, 1998).

There are many theories that suggest certain ways through which conflicts can be handled. Blake and Mouton (1964) posit four styles of conflict handling by projecting continuum of self-concern as one dimension and concern for others as the second dimension. These styles are: smoothing, forcing withdrawal, compromising, and problem solving.

Several other researchers have focused on personal styles of managing conflict. Such styles are rooted in deeper human constructs like personality or values (Brown et al, 1981). Current research on conflict management is guided by a two-dimensional theory best described by Thomas (1976), based on early work on Blake and Mouton (1964) and Lawrence & Lorsch (1967). Thomas (1976) theory describes two dimensions: assertiveness and cooperativeness and five modes of handling conflict. Rahim and Bomona (1979) identified five styles of conflict management and those are: Accommodating, Avoiding, Collaborating, Competing and Compromising. This study has used these five modes of managing conflict to establish the relationships between the conflict managing styles and personality types.

Accommodating is a situation of high degree of cooperation at the cost of low assertiveness. Accommodating individuals neglect personal concerns in order to satisfy concerns for others (Thoman & Kilmann, 1974). Avoiding is an uncooperative and unassertive way of dealing with conflict. Here none of the parties communicate their needs and pursue their interest (Thoman & Kilmann, 1974). Avoiding approach is associated with withdrawal, postponement or side-stepping. This results lose-lose outcome (Antonioni, 1998). Collaborating is the style that involves high degree of assertiveness and cooperation. Individual using this style works with others to reach a solution meeting the needs of all involved, therefore, entails a win-win result. (Thoman & Kilmann, 1974; Antonioni, 1998). Competing is the win-lose approach. While dealing conflict in this style, one acts in a very assertive way to achieve his or her goals, without caring for the interests of the other party. This style is power oriented i.e. uses power to win position (Thomas, 1976). Compromising approach requires a moderate level of assertiveness and cooperation. Individuals following this style try to work with the other party to reach an amenable solution for each but don't explore the opportunities fully. Here both parties give up something. Therefore, the outcome is a no-win/no-lose situation. This style can be phrased as a quick, middle-ground solution approach (Thomas & Kilmann, 1974)

Every manager deal conflicts in his own way (Deutsch, 1969) because individuals' perceptions, values, beliefs and attitudes of individuals play a crucial role in his/her conflict management style (Bono et al, 2002) and these factors characterize one's personality (Wilmot & Hocker, 2001). Therefore, an understanding of an individual's personality can provide a framework for his/her conflict management styles.

According to different definitions, personality is the set of unique features of a human being, exhibition of characteristic adaptations, unique identifications towards life, and a set of cultural differences (McAdams and Pals, 2006; Hogan, et al., 1996). In other words, personality is a person's complex set of traits that has an effect on behavior across time and situation (Zimbardo & Gerrig, 1996).

Classic personality theories have many different approaches namely Psychoanalytical Approach, Trait Approach, Behavior Approach and Humanistic Approach (Whitworth, 2008). The Trait Approach focuses on systematic differences and similarities among individuals. It has been widely accepted that the traits approach has pivotal effects on concepts like business performance, work values, entrepreneurship, stress, depression, satisfaction, organizational citizenship, teamwork, organizational commitment, learning, and academic achievement (Erdheim, et al., 2006; Molleman, 2005; Berings, et al., 2004; Blickle, 1998; Barrick and Mount, 1993; and Miller, 1991).

This paper therefore focuses on using The Traits Approach to determine influence of personality traits on conflict management styles of individuals. Personality psychologists have developed different tools for measuring personality traits, such as Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (Eysenck and Eysenck, 1985), Myers–Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) (Myers, et al., 1998) and Big-Five Personality Inventory (BFI) (John and Srivastava, 1999). The Five Factor Personality Inventory (or Five-Factor Model: FFM) is composed of five factors namely extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness and neuroticism/emotional stability (Busato et al., 1998; and McCrae and John, 1992).

Researchers have found relationship between personality factors and conflict management styles. For example, Antonioni, D. (1998) indicates that extroversion, conscientiousness, openness, and agreeableness have a positive relationship with integrating style. Extroversion has a positive relationship with dominating, while agreeableness and neuroticism have negative relationship with dominating. Extroversion, openness, conscientiousness have a negative relationship with avoiding, while agreeableness and neuroticism have a positive relationship with avoiding. However, some research on the relationship between personality and conflict styles have produced mixed results (Antonioni, 1998; Moberg, 2001). Some early studies supported a relationship between conflict styles and personality dimensions measured as Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) (Kilmann & Thomas, 1975), but others have reported weak relationships between personality and styles of handling conflict (Jones & Melcher, 1982; Whitworth, 2008) or personality and negotiation outcomes (Pruitt & Carnevale, 1993; Wall & Blum, 1991). An internet search for articles addressing this particular issue in Bangladesh context yielded only two articles namely, Ejaz et. al. (2012) and Ahmed et.al. (2010); these two research found significant relationships between personality dimensions and conflict handling styles of managers. Such inconsistency in the results of past research incites researchers of this paper to test the impact of personality factors on conflict management styles of managers in the context of Bangladesh.

Nevertheless, individuals' conflict management style varies with situation. Depending on position and power relations of the other party, individuals adopt different approaches to conflict. Moreover, urgency, and importance of the issue and individual's emotional attachment with the issue influences the conflict management styles applied by a person (Kaushal & Kwantes, 2006; Song, Dyer & Thieme, 2006). This study did not take these situational factors into account. It mainly attempts to find out the impact of personality composed of five factors namely agreeableness, conscientiousness, extraversion, openness and neuroticism/emotional stability on five conflict management styles. This study will contribute to the development of conflict management style considering personalities in work place.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this paper is to assess the influence of personality on conflict management styles of managers/executives. Specifically, this paper evaluates the impact of each personality factor (Big Five Factors of John & Srivastava, 1999) on the five conflict management styles (Rahim & Bomona, 1979) individually.

3.0 HYPOTHESIS

Following hypotheses were developed to address the above specific objectives.

H$_1$: Conflict management styles vary with personality type of individuals.

[As there are five types of personalities, the researchers have developed five working hypotheses to support the above hypothesis.]

Extraversion: Extraversion describes someone who is active, assertive, energetic, enthusiastic, outgoing and talking (McCrae and John, 1992). On the other hand, introverts have lower social engagement and energy levels than extroverts. They tend to be quiet, low-key, deliberate, and less involved in the social world (Rothmann and Coetzer, 2004).

H$_{1E}$ (Extraversion): Extraversion influences conflict management styles of managers.

Agreeableness: Agreeableness is described by cooperation, likeability, forgivingness, kindness, sympathy and trust (Carelson, 1999). Agreeable individual value getting along with others and having an optimistic view of human nature (Rothmann and Coetzer, 2004). Disagreeable individuals place self-interest above getting along with others. They are generally unconcerned with others' well-being, and are less likely to extend themselves for other people (Bartneck, 2013).

H$_{1A}$ (Agreeableness): Agreeableness influences conflict management styles of managers.

Conscientiousness: Conscientiousness is a tendency to show self-discipline, act dutifully, and aim for achievement against measures or outside expectations. High scores on conscientiousness indicate a preference for planned rather than spontaneous behavior (Costa and McCrae, 1992).

H_{1C} (Conscientiousness): Conscientiousness influences conflict management styles of managers.

Neuroticism (Emotional Stability): Neuroticism generally refers to anxiety, insecurity, defensiveness, tension and worry (Stoeva et al., 2002). According to Eysenck's (1967) theory of personality, neuroticism is interlinked with low tolerance for stress or aversive stimuli (Norris, et. al., 2007). Those who score high in neuroticism are emotionally reactive and vulnerable to stress. They are more likely to interpret ordinary situations as threatening, and minor frustrations as hopelessly difficult. Moreover, neuroticism is connected to a pessimistic approach toward work, impedes personal relationships, and results apparent anxiety linked with work (Fiske, et. al. 2009). On the other end, individuals who score low in neuroticism are less easily upset and are less emotionally reactive. They tend to be calm, emotionally stable, and free from persistent negative feelings (Dolan, 2006).

H_{1N} (Neuroticism): Neuroticism influences conflict management styles of managers.

Openness: Openness to experience is characterized by intelligence, unconventionality, imagination, curiosity, creativity, and originality (Mischel & Shoda, 1999; Robbins & Judge, 2003). People with low scores on openness tend to have more conventional, traditional interests. They prefer the plain, straightforward, and obvious over the complex, ambiguous, and subtle situations. They may regard the arts and sciences with suspicion or view these endeavors as uninteresting (McCrae and Costa 1987).

H_{1O} (Openness): Openness influences conflict management styles of managers.

4.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Data Collection Method:

Variables for the study were identified based on the literature review. For quantitative analyses, a questionnaire survey was done on executives, who are working in different organizations in Dhaka.

4.2 Population Frame and Sampling Plan:

Population for this study is all executives working in Bangladeshi Companies. Responses were collected from eighty (80) executives who have done their graduation/post-graduation from IBA, DU. Therefor the directory of IBA-DU have been used to reach them. Sixteen (16) of the respondents did not answer all the questions in the questionnaire. So we had 64 useable responses. Following table shows respondents' profile:

Table 1: Respondents' profile:

		Number (percentage) of respondents
Gender	Male	58 (90.6%)
	Female	06 (9.4%)
Position in the organization	Entry level	33 (51.6%)
	Mid level	22 (34.4%)
	Top level	09 (14.1%)
Years of experience	Below 5 years	35 (54.7%)
	5 to 10 years	22 (34.4%)
	Above 10 years	07 (10.9%)

4.3 Measurement and Scaling:

The study used The Big Five Inventory (BFI) developed by John and Srivastava (1999). The instrument consists of 44 items inventory to assess the Big Five personality domains of Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Openness. To measure conflict management style, questionnaire developed by Johnson (1990) has been used. Respondents indicate their level of agreement using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (1= strongly disagree) to 5 (5= strongly agree).

4.4 Statistical Tools Used:

Various statistical techniques such as Bi-Variate analysis, Cross-Tabulation, Chi-Square test and One-way ANOVA in SPSS 15.0 software were used for data analysis.

4.5 Reliability Test (Reliability Statistics)

Cronbach's α is used to test the reliability of the instruments used. Empirically, alpha can take on any values less than or equal to 1, including negative value. Some professionals, as rule of thumb, require a reliability of 0.70 (Kothari, 1990). The value of Cronbach's Alpha is 0.72989 for the questionnaire used in this research.

5.0 FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Relationship between Personality and Conflict Management Styles

Bi-variate analysis of personality types and conflict management styles (Table 2) shows that extraversion and agreeableness are positively correlated to all the conflict management styles. Openness is positively correlated with all except competing (-0.069) style. On the other hand, conscientiousness is negatively correlated with competing (-0.139), accommodating (-0.050) and compromising (-0.069) styles and positively

correlated with collaborating (0.059) and avoiding (0.021) styles. Similarly, neuroticism is negatively correlated to all conflict management styles except avoiding (0.168).

Table 2: Correlation between personality type and conflict management style

		Com-peting	Accomm odating	Collab-orating	Avoid-ing	Compro mising
Extraversion	Pearson correlation	0.023	0.081	0.113	0.116	0.177
	Sig. (2 tailed)	0.858	0.525	0.372	0.362	0.162
Agreeableness	Pearson correlation	0.018	0.060	0.314*	0.064	0.234
	Sig. (2 tailed)	0.889	0.640	0.012	0.614	0.063
Conscientiousne ss	Pearson correlation	-0.139	-0.050	0.059	0.021	-0.069
	Sig. (2 tailed)	0.272	0.693	0.646	0.870	0.586
Neuroticism	Pearson correlation	-0.157	-0.148	-0.081	0.168	-0.101
	Sig. (2 tailed)	0.215	0.242	0.523	0.183	0.429
Openness	Pearson correlation	-0.069	0.015	0.211	0.003	0.035
	Sig. (2 tailed)	0.590	0.904	0.093	0.980	0.782

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

The above stated relationships lead to following propositions-

1. Extrovert and agreeable persons adopt different conflict management styles depending on situation.
2. Open minded persons usually don't adopt competing styles, but they take other four strategies in varying degrees considering the demand of situation
3. Conscientious people follow collaborative and avoiding styles while avoid being competing, accommodating and compromising in conflict situations.
4. People who are neurotic usually become avoiding while managing conflict

However, the levels of significance of most of the relationships presented above are beyond the acceptable (5%) range. So we cannot make any generalized remark based on these relationships. Only agreeableness and collaborative style depicted a statistically significant (at 5%) positive relationship. We therefore, can conclude that agreeable persons usually follow collaborative style of conflict management. **Hence, all hypotheses under Hypotheses H_1 namely $H_{1E}, H_{1O}, H_{1C}, H_{1N}$ except H_{1A} are rejected.**

Descriptive cross tabulation of conflict management style and personality type is presented in Table 3. Results show that compromising and collaborating are dominant conflict management style among agreeable personalities. Accommodating is the dominant style of the conscientious people. Extroverts mostly follow accommodating and

compromising style in conflict situations. Majority of neurotic personalities adopt compromising and competing style of conflict management. Open personalities mostly take collaborating strategy.

Table 3: Cross Tab (conflict style and personality type)

Confilct_style	Personality_type	agrbl	cons	extrvsn	nuro	open	Total
Accomodatng	Count	2	3	5	1	5	16
	% within personality_type	20	50	55.6	20	14.7	25
Comprmising	Count	3	0	4	2	8	17
	% within personality_type	30	0	44.4	40	23.5	26.6
Collaboratng	Count	3	1	0	0	10	14
	% within personality_type	30	16.7	0	0	29.4	21.9
Competing	Count	1	0	0	2	7	10
	% within personality_type	10	0	0	40	20.6	15.6
Avoiding	Count	1	2	0	0	4	7
	% within personality_type	10	33.3	0	0	11.8	10.9
Total	Count	10	6	9	5	34	64
	% within personality_type	100	100	100	100	100	100

Note: agrbl=agreeableness; cons=conscientiousness; extrvsn=extraversion; nuro=neuroticism; open=openness.

But the Pearson Chi-Square Asymptotic Signifcance (2-sided) of the Cross-Tab results is above the acceptable 5% (0.05) limit (the Chi-Square test results shown in the following table (Table 4). This means that cross-tab results presented above cannot be generalized.

Table 4: Chi-Square test results

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	23.25	16	0.107
Likelihood Ratio	28.91	16	0.025
N of Valid Cases	64		

Level of significance of the one way ANOVA test with conflict management style as dependent variable and personality type as grouping variable (table above) is 0.927>0.05. **Hence, hypothesis H_1 is rejected**, which means conflict management styles does not vary with personality types and different personalities do not have any dominant conflict management styles.

Table 5: One-way ANOVA output

(Dependent variable- conflict management & Grouping variable -personality)

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1.90545	4	0.47636	0.21837	0.927
Within Groups	128.704	59	2.18142		
Total	130.609	63			
Likelihood Ratio		8.66	8	0.372	
N of Valid Cases		64			

6.0 DISCUSSION

This study was different from previous researches on personality and conflict management in two facets. **First**, most studies used the two-factor model of personality (Whitworth, 2008; Kilmann & Thomas, 1975). Few researches such as Antonioni (1998) and others used big five personality inventory. Earlier researches on conflict management focused on a two-dimensional model of conflict management i.e., assertiveness and caring for others (Kilmann & Thomas, 1975). Like, Antonioni (1998), Ejaz et. al. (2012), Ahmed et. al. (2010) and others this study is one of a few researches using big five personality inventory and five styles of conflict management. **Second**, data analysis tools used in this research are different from those used in previous studies. For example, Antonioni (1998) used regression analysis to come up with a model that can predict conflict management styles of managers based on their personalities. But this study, first carried out Bi-variate analysis to find out if there is any correlation between the personality types and conflict management styles and observed that there is no significant correlation except between agreeableness personality and collaborative style of conflict management. To confirm these findings we did Cross-Tab analysis to identify dominant conflict management styles of each personality types. This analysis takes the fact that conflict management style is not fixed, people change their conflict handling style depending on situation, into account. However, different personality types have some dominating styles that they usually use in different conflict situations. Finally ANOVA test was done to confirm that personality types as a predictor cannot explain the whole phenomenon of conflict management; it can be used in conjunction with other factors such as inter-relationship between the conflicting parties, hierarchy among the parties and others.

The empirical evidence this research provides for a relationship between personality types and conflict management styles of managers is one of the major contribution of this research. The research empirically proves that personality types can only shed some light on conflict management styles but inadequate for predicting the later. The result is

somewhat in line with the results of earlier studies. Like past researches, this research found weak correlation (below 0.5) between personality types and conflict management styles and most of these correlations are not statistically significant. This inferring is in direct contradiction of earlier findings of Ejaz et. al. (2012) and Ahmed et. al. (2010), who have done their studies in Bangladesh.

One reason for getting statistically insignificant results is perhaps the exclusion of contingencies- such as power relations between the conflicting parties, urgency and importance of the issue in hand, emotional attachment of the conflicting parties on the issue and others (Kaushal & Kwantes, 2006; Song, Dyer & Thieme, 2006). Use of self administered questionnaire is another limitation of this study. Self-assessment of actions taken in conflict situations in general usually generates desired and idealistic responses. To know the actual actions, third party monitoring and recording of the behavior and actions of conflicting parties is essential (Donaldson & Grant-Vallone, 2002). Small number of usable data set is another limitation of this study. Although the study dealt with two major variables, it thrived to find twenty five (five personality factors times five conflict management styles) paired relationships. In this case, sixty four useable data set might not have been representative and thereby restricted generalization of the results.

7.0 IMPLICATIONS

Findings of the study have good future implications for employers and managers as it would help them to indentify the personality traits of individual that generally influences the choice of conflict handling styles. This will further assist the top managers to understand the relationships among the workplace relations, outcomes, performance and organizational effect of the personality and conflict handling styles.

Future researchers can focus on developing case exercise based instruments for identifying conflict management styles. Future studies can also focus on different contingencies such as conflict among peers, conflict between subordinate and supervisor and others.

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