

## **Conflict Handling Styles of Women Administrator at Universities, Myanmar**

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of the study is to explore interpersonal conflict handling styles practiced by women administrators at universities, Myanmar. The management styles of women head administrators (N=150) who are working at various universities, Myanmar were studied through questionnaire based on instruments for conflict management and leadership styles. Three parts of questionnaire: The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument, the Multi-factor Leadership Questionnaire, form 6S-short (MLQ 6S) and demographic data were used in this study. Women administrators managed their interpersonal conflicts mostly by practicing compromising conflict management style. Moreover, there is a relationship between leadership styles and choice of strategy in conflict management among women administrators at universities, Myanmar. These research findings revealed differences in practicing five interpersonal conflict management styles by woman administrators. In addition, this study indicated that leadership styles remained stable over time and significantly related to conflict management styles.

**Keywords:** Conflict handling style, Women administrators, University

### **I. Introduction**

Conflict is a normal, and even healthy, part of relationships. After all, two people can't be expected to agree on everything at all times. Since relationship conflicts are inevitable, learning to deal with them in a healthy way is crucial. When conflict is mismanaged, it can harm the relationship. But when it is handled in a respectful and positive way, conflict provides an opportunity for growth, ultimately strengthening the bond between two people. Learning the skill for successful conflict resolution keeps personal and professional relationships strong and growing.

Conflict arises from differences. It occurs whenever people disagree over their values, motivation, perceptions, ideas, or desires. Sometimes these differences look trivial, but when a conflict triggers strong feelings, a deep personal and relational need is at the core of the problem – a need to feel safe and secure, a need to feel respected and valued, or a need for greater closeness and intimacy.

In personal relationships, a lack of understanding about differing needs can result in distance, arguments, and break-ups. In workplace conflicts, differing needs are often at the heart of bitter disputes. When you can recognize the legitimacy of conflicting needs and become willing to examine them in an environment of compassionate understanding, it opens pathway to creative problem solving, team building, and improved relationships. When you resolve conflict and disagreement quickly and painlessly, mutual trust will flourish.

Conflict is inevitable in groups and organizations, and it presents both a challenge and a true opportunity for every leader. Therefore, for a group, team, or an organization to be effective, individual members need to be able to work in a positive conflict environment,

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not in an atmosphere that is full of stress, emotional tensions and conflicts with others, because that will inevitably lead to the destruction of relationships among members and thus reduces the level and quality of their productivity.

In the presence of stress, emotional tensions and conflicts in a group, team or an organization, the leaders may assist to release stress, to adjust problems, and to resolve conflicts. To function effectively in a team, group or an organization, conflict handling skills are important prerequisites. In this part, the role of leadership and the complexity in understanding human resource management mainly effects on leaders' attention to the issues like conflict handling (Smith & Toidanel, 2003).

Conflicts will always be present in leadership situations, and surprisingly, it often produces positive change. When leaders handle conflict effectively, problem solving increases, interpersonal relationships become stronger, and stress surrounding the conflict decreases. At universities conflicts also exist as academic members are also interacting with each other and with others around them.

In this regard, the aim of this study is to study interpersonal conflict handling styles practiced by women academic women administrators with their subordinates.

### **Objectives of the study**

- (1) To examine the most and least interpersonal conflict management styles practiced by women administrators at universities, Myanmar.
- (2) To explore the relationship between leadership styles and conflict management styles among women administrators at universities, Myanmar.

### **Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses are formulated:

- (1) There are some differences in practicing interpersonal conflict management styles among women administrators at universities, Myanmar.
- (2) There is a relationship between leadership styles and choice of strategy in conflict management among women administrators at universities, Myanmar.
- (3) Women administrators are more likely to use compromising strategies than any other strategies.

### **Literature review**

#### *Conflict*

Conflict is the psychological and behavioral reaction to a perception that another person is either keeping you from reaching a goal, taking away your right to behave in a particular way, or violating the experiences of a relationship. There are three types of conflict: interpersonal conflict, individual–group conflict, and group–group conflict.

Conflicts are normal and natural consequences of human interactions in organizational settings. For leaders and subordinates alike, interpersonal conflict is inevitable. Conflicts may occur for multiple reasons: competition for resources, task interdependence, jurisdictional ambiguity, communication barriers, and personality.

It is generally believed that most people have a particular style they use when they faced with conflicts and these different styles affect the outcome of conflicts. A conflict style is defined as a patterned response or behavior that people use when approaching conflicts. The ability to resolve conflict is a valuable managerial skill.

One of the most widely recognized models of conflict style was developed by Thomas and Kilmann (1976, 1988, 1992); Thomas and Kilmann (2002) based on the work of Blake and Mouton, and is the basis for conflict style in this paper.

The Thomas – Kilmann model identifies five conflict styles:

- (1) Avoidance,
- (2) Competition,
- (3) Accommodation,
- (4) Compromise, and
- (5) Collaboration.

The Thomas–Kilmann model (Figure 1) describes conflict styles along two dimensions: assertiveness and cooperativeness. Assertiveness refers to attempts to satisfy one's own concerns; while cooperativeness represents attempts to satisfy the concerns of others. Each conflict style is characterized by how much assertiveness and how much cooperativeness an individual shows when confronting conflicts.

Avoidance is both an unassertive and an uncooperative conflict style. Those who favor the avoidance style tend to be passive and ignore conflict situations rather than confront them directly. They employ strategies such as denying. Those who continually avoid conflicts bottle up feelings of irritation, frustration, anger, or rage inside themselves, creating more anxiety. There are some situations in which avoidance may be useful – for example, when an issue is of trivial importance or when the potential damage from conflict would be too great. Avoidance can also provide a cooling-off period to allow participants to determine how to best resolve the conflict at a later time.

Competition is a conflict style of individuals who are highly assertive about pursuing their own goals but uncooperative in assisting others to reach theirs. These individuals attempt to resolve a struggle by controlling or persuading others in order to achieve their own ends. A competitive style is essentially a win-lose conflict strategy.

In some situations, competition can produce positive outcomes. It is useful when quick, decisive action is needed, such as in an emergency. Competition can also generate creativity and enhance performance because it challenges participants to make their best efforts. Generally, competitive approaches to conflicts are not the most advantageous because they are more often counterproductive than productive. Finally, competition is disconfirming; in competition, individuals fail to recognize the concerns and need of others.

Accommodation is an unassertive but cooperative conflict style. In accommodation, an individual essentially communicates to another, “You are right, I agree; let's forget about it”. An approach that is “other directed,” accommodation requires individuals to attend very closely to the needs of others and ignore their own needs. Using this style, individuals confront problems by deferring to others.

Accommodation allows individuals to move away from the uncomfortable feelings that conflict inevitably produces. This style is productive when the issue is more important to one party than the other or if harmony in the relationship is the most important goal. The problem with accommodations is that it is, in effect, a lose-win strategy. It is a submissive style that allows others to take charge. Accommodators also lose because they may fail to express their own opinions and feelings and their contributions are not fully considered.

Compromise occurs halfway between competition and accommodation and involves both a degree of assertiveness and a degree of cooperativeness. Many see compromise as a “give and take” proposition. Compromisers attend to the concerns of others as well as to their own needs. This conflict style is often chosen because it is expedient in finding middle ground while partially satisfying the concerns of both parties.

Compromise is a positive conflict style because it requires attending to one’s goals as well as others’. Many times, compromise can force an equal power balance between parties.

Among the shortcomings of the compromise style is that it does not go far enough in resolving conflict and can become “an easy way out.” Innovative solutions are sacrificed in favor of a quick resolution, and the need for harmony supersedes the need to find optimal solutions to conflicts. The result is that neither side is completely satisfied.

Collaboration, the most preferred style of conflicts, requires both assertiveness and cooperation. It recognizes the inevitability of human conflict and confronts conflicts, and then uses conflict to produce constructive outcomes. The results of collaboration are positive because both sides win, communication is satisfying, relationships are strengthened, and negotiated solutions are frequently more cost-effective in the long run. It generates new ideas, shows respect for those involved, and gains commitment to a solution. Resolving differences through collaboration requires individuals to take time to explore their differences, identify areas of agreement, and select solutions that are mutually satisfying.

The five style of approaching conflict – avoidance, competition, accommodation, compromise, and collaboration – can be observed in various conflict situations. Although there are advantages and disadvantages to each style, the conflict-handling style meets the needs of the participants while also fitting the demands of the situation will be most effective in resolving conflicts.

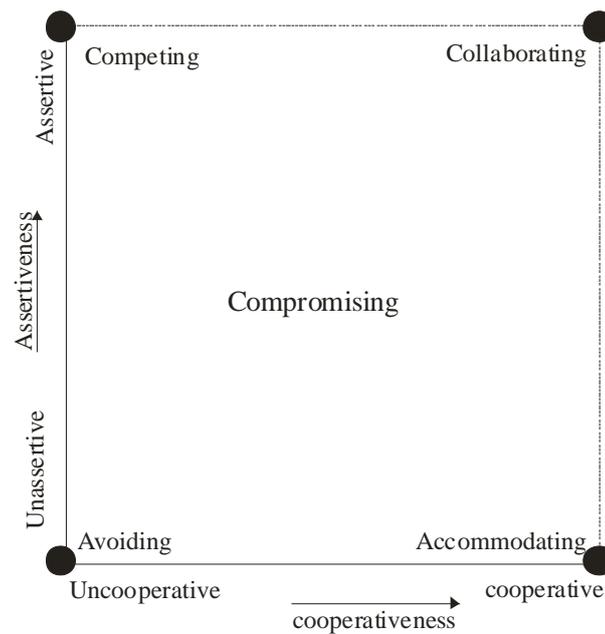


Figure (1) Styles of approaching conflicts

Sources : Kilmann, R.H & Thomas, K.W. Interpersonal conflict-handling behavior as reflections of Jungian personality dimensions. *Psychological Reports*, 1975, 37, 971-980. *Psychological Reports*, 1975.

## Leadership

Effective leadership is vital for the survival and success of an organization. Leadership involves influencing people to exert more effort in some tasks or to change their behavior. In order to get the best results from subordinates the manager must have regard for the need to encourage high morale, a spirit of involvement and co-operation, and willingness to work. There are many dimensions to leadership and many possible ways of describing leadership style. A style tends to contain what a particular leader has learned from other leaders that served as role models and this style is influenced by this experience. The leadership style also is affected by the purpose or goal of the leaders. Another influence is the particular personality of the leader and or the personality or capability of the followers or group being led, and or of the situation in which the leader is leading this or her people.

Personal characteristics have a significant impact on leadership style, and one's leadership style determines to a great degree one's response to every situation. Effective leaders are able to adapt their style of behavior to the needs of their followers and to the nature of the situation.

This paper focuses on transactional leadership style, transformational leadership style and laissez-faire leadership style.

Transactional leadership is based on legitimate authority within the bureaucratic structure of the organization. The transactional leader is more of a manager than a leader, and it highly focuses on getting tasks accomplished, providing very clear direction, and overseeing productivity in detail. Rules, procedures, and standards are essential to the transactional leader. When a subordinate fails to meet expectations, the next step is often a penalty or punishment.

A major downside of the transactional style is that it does not consider other potential factors that may influence outcomes and therefore affect leadership effectiveness. Transactional leadership has two components: Contingent reward and active management by exception.

In transformational leadership style, the leader motivates and inspires by developing a compelling vision, selling that vision, and focusing on developing relationships with followers as a teacher, mentor, and coach. This leadership style tends to help motivate followers to be loyal and dedicated workers, with the goal also of helping every member of the group are to be successful.

Four main components (the four “I’s”) the transformational leader strives to achieve are:

***Idealize influence:*** A transformational leader’s behavior becomes a role model for employees through exemplary behavior that instills pride and trust among followers. Because followers trust and respect the leader, they try to emulate this individual and personally adopt his or her ideals.

***Inspirational motivation:*** A transformational leader usually has a sense of team spirit, enthusiasm, passion, and optimism. This type of leader helps employees dedicate themselves to the organization’s vision.

***Intellectual stimulation:*** A transformational leader must question old assumptions, cast existing problems in a new light, encourage creativity and innovation, and look at more effective ways to make decisions. In this leadership style, a leader solicits ideas, and nurtures and develops people who think independently and who value learning.

***Individualized consideration:*** A transformational leader pays attention to the needs of individuals, and seeks to develop followers by supporting, mentoring, and coaching employees to reach their full potential. This type of leader also makes a strong effort to recognize followers for their unique contributions.

According to Hay, (2012), transformational leaders are leaders who engage with followers, focus on higher order intrinsic needs and raise consciousness about the significance of specific outcomes and new ways in which those outcomes might be achieved. Transformational leaders demonstrate active behaviors that include providing a sense of mission.

Laissez-faire leadership is demonstrated when leaders fail to lead. Subordinates working under this kind of supervisor are left to their own advice to execute their job responsibilities. Yammarino and Bass, (1990) found that laissez-faire leadership has an adverse effect on work-related outcomes of employees.

The study of Blake and Mouton (1964) and Rahim tried to measure the strategies in which individuals typically deal with conflicts. This approach stated conflict styles as individual disposition, stable over time and across situations. Hendel (2005) argued that leadership styles or behaviors remain stable over time and are expected to be significantly related to conflict management styles.

## **Operational definitions**

### *Women administrators*

In this study, women administrators means the respective heads of the different department including (teaching, administration, and finance, student affairs and librarians) who are working at the universities of Myanmar.

### *Conflict style*

For purpose of this research study, conflict style is defined as patterned response or behaviors that people use when approaching conflicts (Blake and Mouton, 1964, Thomas and, Kilmann, 1975, 1977). The Thomas-Kilmann model identifies five conflict styles: (1) avoidance, (2) competition, (3) accommodation, (4) compromise and (5) collaboration. This model (Figure 1) describes conflict styles along two dimensions: assertiveness and cooperativeness. Assertiveness refers to attempts to satisfy one's own concerns, while cooperativeness represents attempts to satisfy the concerns of others. Each conflict style is characterized by how much assertiveness and how much cooperativeness an individual shows when confronting conflicts.

## **II. Method**

### **Participants**

In this study one hundred and fifty women head administrators who are working in universities namely, Yangon, Dagon, Sittwe, Pyi, Kyauksye, Magwe, Mandalay, Monywa, Shwebo, Bamaw, Kalay Pharmacy, Foreign Language, Meiktila, Medicine-II, Nursing and Myanmar Maritime, Distance Education (Yangon and Mandalay) were used as participants. The ages ranged from 45-58 years old. The mean age was 50.83 year. The participants were informed the purpose of the study and all responses are confidential. All women administrators are willing to participate in the study.

### *Instrument*

In this study, a set of questionnaires was used for data collection, on the basis of the literature survey.

- (1) The Thomas and Kilmann (1976) Conflict Mode Instrument was adopted to measure interpersonal conflict handling style of women administrators at Universities Myanmar. MODE contains five conflict management modes: competing, cooperating, compromising, avoiding and accommodating. The instrument consists of 30 pairs of forced choice statements requiring respondents to identify the one they consider most characteristic of their behavior in times of conflicts. Instrument reliability (Cronbrash's alpha coefficient) based on the sample was 0.74.
- (2) Leadership style measured by Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLO), from 6S (Bass & Avolio, 1992), was used to assess the leadership styles of women administrators. The MLQ Form 6S consisting 21 items has three dimensions including transformational, transactional and laissez-fair leadership. Cronbach's Alpha for the instrument was 0.79.

- (3) Socio-demographic data concerning age, education, rank, and name of university were printed on the cover of the questionnaire.

### **Procedure**

Sample was collected from various universities in Myanmar. Demographic data such as age, education, and rank were printed on the cover of the questionnaire. The participants were instructed to answer all questions and not to omit any item or to discuss with others during the measurement session. The participants were also informed that the researcher got permission from authorities of institution to carry out the current study and all responses were confidential.

### **Data analysis**

The descriptive analysis such as mean and, standard deviation of all variables were performed in order to see women administrators' conflict handling profile for each mode and leadership profile for each style. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was conducted to evaluate the relationship between conflict handling styles and leadership styles.

## **III. Results**

This section presents the findings of the study from the questionnaires distributed to the respondents to practise among women administrators on five interpersonal conflict handling styles and on three leadership styles.

Table (2) shows that women administrators had varying levels of practice of each style. In compromising style the mean score was found to be ( $M = 40.12$ ) which falls into a very highly practiced style by the women administrators. This is followed by collaborating style where the mean score was found to be ( $M = 28.89$ ) which can be interpreted as a highly practiced style by women administrators. For competing style the mean score was ( $M = 27.12$ ) which falls into low practiced style by academic administrators. Similar results were found for avoiding style where the mean score of ( $M = 10.38$ ) which can be considered to be a low practiced style by women administrators. Lastly, the mean score for accommodating style resulted in ( $M = 6.59$ ) which can be inferred to as the least practiced by women administrators in handling their interpersonal conflicts at universities, Myanmar.

Results of Table (2) show that women administrators have varying levels of use of each leadership style. In transformational leadership style, the mean score was found to be ( $M = 25.29$ ) which can be interpreted as the most highly preferred style by women administrators. According to the results of this study, the mean score for transactional style resulted in ( $M = 21.87$ ) which can be interpreted as a highly preferred style by women administrators. For laissez-fair style the mean score was found to be ( $M = 5.89$ ) which can be considered as a low preferred style by women administrators.

Table 1. Demographic variables of respondents (N=150)

<b>Variables</b>	<b>No of Subjects</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Age</b>		
40-44	15	10.00%
45-49	30	20%
50-54	80	53.33%
55	25	16.87%
<b>Education</b>		
M.A	5	3.33%
M.Sc.	5	3.33%
Ph.D.	112	74.67%
M.Pharm.	5	3.33%
M.Med.sc	15	10%
M.E	2	1.33%
M.Econ	2	1.33%
B.com. CPA	2	1.33%
MRCP	1	0.67%
M.Sc.(Nursing)	1	0.67%
<b>University</b>		
Yangon	13	8.67%
Mandalay	10	6.67%
Yangon Uni. of Distance Edu.	20	13.33%
Mandalay Uni. of Distance Edu.	10	6.67%
Sittwe	8	5.33%
Magwe	10	6.67%
Pyi	10	6.67%
Kyauksye	9	6.00%
Monywa	10	6.67%
Shwebo	10	6.67%
Meiktiala	15	10%
Medicine-II & Nursing	10	6.67%
Dagon	8	5.33%
Bamaw	7	4.67%
Kalay		

According to the Table (3), there is a relation between leadership style and choice of strategy in conflict management among women administrators at universities, Myanmar. The correlation matrix shows that the transformational leadership style has significant positive relationship with transactional style and with competing and collaborating styles and negative relationship with the laissez-fair leadership style. The transactional leadership style exhibits a significant positive relationship with compromising style and negative relationship with accommodating conflict management style. On the other hand,

the laissez-fair leadership style has significant positive relation with avoiding style and negative relation with collaborating style of conflict handling. The result of descriptive statistics shows that women administrators were more likely to use compromising interpersonal conflict handling style than all the rest.

Table 2 Mean and standard deviation for all variables in this study

Study variables	Mean	SD
Thomas / Kilmann conflict Mode Instrument		
Compromising (most)	40.12	5.83
Collaborating	28.89	4.45
Competing	27.12	6.03
Avoiding	10.38	3.05
Accommodating (Least)	6.59	1.78
Multifactor Leadership Style		
Transformational	25.59	4.05
Transactional	21.87	3.42
Laissez-faire	5.89	1.78
N = 150		

Table 3 Correlation matrix of all study variables (N=150)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Transformational								
Transactional	0.38**							
Laissez-faire	-0.16*	0.11						
Competing	0.18**	0.12	-0.02					
Collaborating	0.21**	0.06	-0.19*	0.05				
Compromising	0.02	0.18**	0.05	0.06	-0.05			
Accommodating	-0.07	-0.15*	0.05	-0.13*	-0.18*	0.03		
Avoiding	-0.11	-0.06	0.23**	-0.02	-0.21**	0.03	0.16*	

Notes: p<0.05, p<0.01

#### IV. Discussion

Negotiation and dispute resolution are important tasks of managing work, team or organization and are crucial in solving conflicts or solving problems. The use of appropriate conflict handling modes in daily decision making is one of many problems facing women administrators and is influenced both by individuals and their working environments. Resolving conflicts successfully and effectively in a healthy way promotes environment that builds mutual trusts and get an opportunity for greater connection and intimacy.

The results of this study indicated that compromising mode was found to be the most frequent mode in use by women administrators in conflict handling and collaborating was found to be second most frequent. These results supported previous research findings.

According to the Barton (1991), compromising (Bargaining) is the most frequent conflict handling mode used by managers, followed by collaborating. Compromising is a positive conflict style because, it requires attending to one's goal as well as others. Many times, compromise can force an equal power balance between parties. In order to reach resolution, conflicting parties often don't fully express their own demands, personal thoughts, and feelings.

According to the research findings of Dove (1998), he stated that a decision resulting from compromising (Bargaining), is often a short-term solution. The same issue may need to be dealt with by confrontation at a later time. It may be useful when a temporary solution is needed in a complex issue. Compromising style is an intermediate conflict handling style in both cooperativeness and assertiveness. In previous research studies, O' Hearn Woodliti (1987), found that skill and comfort in using a variety of conflict-handling modes may help to develop a repertoire of conflict resolution skills that is essential in effectively managing the variety of conflict situations.

The results of the study supported the second hypothesis, anticipating that there is a relationship between leadership styles and choice of strategy in conflict management among women administrators at universities, Myanmar. These findings are in accordance with the results of prior researches.

According to a previous research, transformational leadership is effective and facilitative leadership style and is positively related to subordinate satisfaction, motivation and performance. In addition, transformational leaders are likely to be more effective because they seek new ways of positively managing conflicts, and seek opportunities in the face of risks.

Moreover, Bass and Avolio (1994) stated that transactional leadership is an exchange process based on the fulfillment of contractual obligations and transactional leaders offer rewards conditional on their behaviors. The compromising style of managing conflict in the organizations involves give-and-take to attain a mutually acceptable agreement. Bass and Avolio, (1994), indicated that transactional leaders identify and clarify subordinates' job tasks and communicate to them how successful execution of those tasks will lead to receive desirable job rewards.

And also, this study stated that laissez-fair leadership style has positive relationship with avoiding style. These findings are consistent with the prior research findings. According to Rahim (1992) and Bu Shyacharu (1996), avoidance style may take form in postponing an issue until a better time or withdrawing from a threatening situation. In addition,

according to Bass (1992) laissez-fair leaders are also avoiders and withdrawn in dealing with issues related to their subordinates.

## **V. Conclusion**

It can be concluded that women administrators managed their interpersonal conflicts mostly by practicing compromising conflict management style. They also practiced other styles like compromising followed by collaborating, competing, avoiding and accommodating. The research findings revealed that there were differences in conflict manage styles practised by women administrators at universities in Myanmar. Another result indicated that there is a relationship between leadership styles and choice of strategy in conflict management among women administrators at universities, Myanmar. In addition, this study found that compromising is the most commonly used interpersonal conflict management styles practiced by women administrators at universities, Myanmar.

## **Implications**

The ability to successfully manage and resolve conflict depends on many professional qualities and skills such as emotional maturity, self-control, empathy, communication skills, listening skills, confidence and skills of emotional intelligence.

To effectively and appropriately manage conflicts, administrators must understand conflict resolution skills. In addition, organization management should consider providing specialized training programs for its staff to modify their behavior and to improve their conflict handling styles.

## **Limitations and future research**

In assessing women administrator's conflict management mode and leadership styles, it was not possible to control all the factors, which could influence conflict management mode and leadership styles.

Moreover, the results of the study were based on subjects' self-report and the actual behavior is not observed. Furthermore, this study includes only women administrators from universities. So, further studies should be done in other public sectors and organizations.

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