

Conflict Management Proficiency Scale for Managers

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KEYWORDS Likert Scale. Dysfunctional Conflict. Item Analysis. Reliability. Validity

ABSTRACT Conflict is inevitable and a dysfunctional conflict can lead to appreciable loss of man-hours. If dealt skillfully a destructive conflict can be converted into functional conflict. Recognising the conflict and attacking the issues demands an assessment of both the conflict and the conflict handler. The present paper will show development of conflict management proficiency scale based on Likert scaling technique that can be used by employers to help managers gain insight into their personal styles of conflict management. The scale is focused on the concept of conflict, the effect of conflict and the practices adopted to manage conflicts. The scale was developed on the responses of 300 managers of public and private sector organisations. The items were screened through item - total correlation and item - difference analysis. The final list had 24 items, each asked to be responded in terms of their own degree of agreement and disagreement on five - point scale. It was tested for its reliability and validity by both split half method and test - retest method by calculating Karl Pearson's coefficient. The reliability score of the scale by split half method came to be 0.82 and by test - retest method it was 0.79. The index of reliability by split half method was 0.903 and by test - retest it was 0.89. When the CMP score for managers was calculated, the scale could differentiate the respondents of higher and lower level of CMP.

INTRODUCTION

Conflict, fundamentally is a state of disharmony brought about by differences of impulses, desires or tendencies. It generally occurs due to difference in personalities, values, attitudes, perceptions, needs, unfulfilled expectations and limited resources. De Dreu et al. (2008) defined conflict as 'a process that begins when an individual or group perceives differences and opposition about interests and resources, beliefs, values, or practices that matter to them. Conflict, is valuable for all intents and purposes and should be managed to encourage positive change even though, for many people such conditions are disconcerting. Decisions made by people in conflict may lack rationality as irritated colleagues might deny or maneuver information required by decision makers, furthermore decision makers' judgments can be flawed when they feel threatened by the other's intentions'. Consequently, when identified, conflict should be managed with full understanding of complex relationships and has to be shared by all involved parties (Gibson et al. 1997). Effective conflict management is a vital skill that can be learned and a better understanding of conflict per se, is prerequisite to it.

Researchers agree that how a conflict is managed, will determine whether the conflict is constructive or destructive. Disturbed feelings and/or automatic responses to contain or escape distressed feelings often negate effective conflict management, and an unmanaged conflict can lead to dysfunction and disaster (Singh 2001), especially when people lack the skill to deal with it effectively (Bens 1997). Bens (1997) accordingly recommends that 'teams need to become educated and learn the differences between healthy debate and dysfunctional arguments. Gibson et al, (1997) suggest that direct open discussion of disagreements result in greater understanding of other people's ideas and motivate one to question the accuracy and completeness of one's own views. Discussion allows people to see limitations of their own perspective, and, people are better able to understand opposing views and different ideas by considering other people's perspective or ideas. Bens (1997) describes 'dysfunctional arguments as black and white thinking of people where they assume they are right and others are wrong. 'A team facilitator can either encourage a healthy debate or allow a dysfunctional argument depending on how the facilitator handles the conflict. But it requires an honest and conscientious effort of assessing the conflicting situation and the proficiency of managing the conflict in conflict handler' (Bens 1997).

Conflict management proficiency assessment is the essential first stage in the process of

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conflict management and resolution. It should offer a reflective tool, which clarifies disputants' interest, positions and issues and allows revealing of others. At the same time, it should build a shared body of knowledge and information. The tool then, at times, may begin to reframe relationships, build interests and issue-based coalitions (Shmueli 2003).

There was requirement of developing such conflict management proficiency assessment tool that is embedded in reflection and social learning and can help reveal disputes through self-discovery. Present tool can bring those issues into lime light that are important to disputants in addition to understanding the priorities that motivate the beliefs and actions of others. The assessment can be helpful in building relationships and in eliciting the managers' participation in managing and resolving conflict.

As an evaluation tool, the present scale for assessing conflict management proficiency (CMP) has all the inherent advantages. It offers insights into the type of intervention most likely to succeed. The task of standardising the tool was taken up with the main objective of providing an input into designing a work plan, should intervention be initiated after assessing the conflict management proficiency of managers of different public and private sector organisations.

METHODS

In the present study, Likert Scale for assessing Conflict Management Proficiency (CMP) was standardised. For developing Likert scale 'a set of items, composed of approximately an equal number of favourable and unfavourable statements concerning the attitude object, is given to a group of subjects. They are asked to respond to each statement in terms of their own degree of agreement or disagreement' (McIver 1981). The present scale was a multi-item tool as suggested by Nunnally et al. (1994) that 'measurement error averages out when individual scores are summed to obtain a total score'. The scale was meant to measure the concept of conflict and behaviour of individual during conflict through different items. The Conflict Management behaviour, further, had three dimensions, namely, effect of conflict on person, inter-individual conflict management

practices and intra-individual conflict management practices.

The initial version of the tool on CMP was a set of 60 items from total four categories of both concept of conflict and behaviour of individual during conflict. The format was suitable for use with adults. Items were kept short, limited to one idea and consisted of terms that are simple and understandable within a wide range of reading ability. Statements used personal and individual pronouns. The items were created primarily from an in - depth study of subject matter and later on through brainstorming with number of employees in public and private organisations. This list of items was given to a panel of seven experts from the fields of organisational behaviour, psychology, business administration and resource management. The experts dropped ten different items due to their vagueness, repetition or needlessness. The tool of remaining 50 items was given to a group of judges to rate the items for favourability to concept on one (strongly unfavourable to concept) to five (strongly favourable to concept) rating scale. Based on the ratings of the judges the item correlations and item differences were computed for the purpose of item analysis. The results of item analysis led to selection of six items in each of the four dimensions, which suitably fitted in the dimension conceptually. In this way the final version of CMP had 24 items. Half of the items from each dimension were randomly worded negatively and rest positively. The items were elicited on a Likert scale that ranged from Zero (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). An introductory note briefed the importance of managing the conflict and an assurance to the respondents that there was no right or wrong answers, only answers that reflected their feelings about conflict and their own strategies of managing conflicts. A set of instructions outlining the procedure of responding was also provided.

To test the 24 items format of CMP, employees of both public and private organizations in service sector (telephone, insurance and banks) were contacted.

Responses were obtained from 300 respondents with different qualifications and duration of experience. These respondents were males, young and old, married, with or without children, belonging to nuclear and joint families (Fig. 1, Table 1).

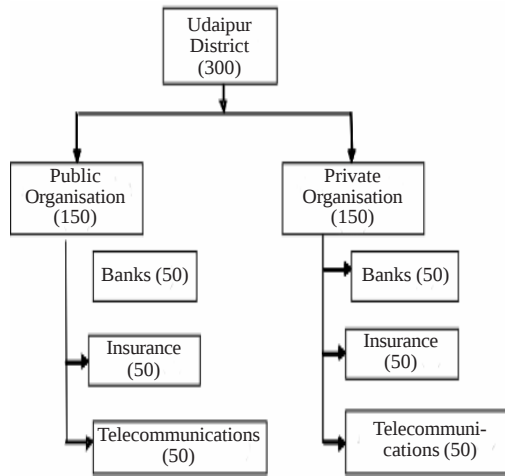


Fig. 1. Sample design

Six percent were diploma holders, 25 percent were engineering graduates and remaining 39 percent were post-graduates in different branches. Of these 300 respondents, 34 percent were senior managers, 22 percent were managers, 14 percent were engineers and rest 20 percent supervisors/clerks, working for 8 to 10 hours a day in general and even more in some of the cases, and had different lengths of service ranging from less than five years to more than 35 years.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Following the basic principle of test design that is, more the items to measure a concept, the more reliable the measurement will be, the scale on CMP had 24 varied items from all four dimensions viz. conflict concept, effect of

Table 1: Characteristics of the sample selected for the standardization of the conflict management scale

S. No.	Service industry characteristics	Telecommunications(100)		Insurance (100)		Banks (100)		Total(300)
		Public sector (50)	Pvt sector (50)	Public sector (50)	Pvt sector (50)	Public sector (50)	Pvt sector (50)	
1	Age(Yrs.)							
	>25	5(10)	21(42)	9(18)	25(50)	12(24)	17(34)	89(38)
	25-35	10(20)	13(26)	11(22)	15(30)	5(10)	15(30)	69(38)
	35-45	12(24)	8(16)	13(26)	7(14)	7(14)	12(24)	59(38)
	45-55	14(28)	6(12)	12(24)	Nil	16(32)	2(04)	50(38)
	55and more	9(18)	2(04)	5(10)	3(06)	10(20)	4(08)	33(38)
2	Marital Status							
	Married	44(88)	39(78)	42(84)	37(74)	48(96)	36(72)	244(38)
3	No. of Children							
	None	9(18)	15(30)	11(22)	16(32)	14(28)	17(34)	82(38)
	One	20(40)	22(44)	17(34)	21(24)	18(36)	9(18)	107(38)
	Two	18(36)	11(38)	14(28)	9(38)	13(38)	15(38)	80(38)
	More	3(06)	2(04)	8(16)	4(08)	5(10)	9(18)	31(38)
4	Type of Family							
	Nuclear	26(52)	39(78)	35(70)	33(66)	42(84)	31(62)	206(38)
5	Education							
	Diploma	11(22)	7(14)	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	18(38)
	B Sc, B Com, BA	3(06)	Nil	27(54)	26(52)	20(40)	14(28)	90(38)
	BE, B Tech	34(68)	41(82)	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	75(38)
	Post Graduation	2(04)	2(38)	23(46)	24(48)	30(60)	36(72)	117(38)
6	Position Held							
	Sr managers	16(38)	12(38)	9(38)	23(38)	14(38)	25(38)	99(38)
	Managers	12(38)	10(38)	18(38)	8(38)	17(38)	7(38)	72(38)
	Engineers	19(38)	23(38)	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	42(38)
	Supervisor/clk.	3(38)	5(38)	23(38)	19(38)	19(38)	18(38)	87(38)
7	Length of Service							
	>5	7(38)	21(38)	9(38)	20(38)	12(38)	21(38)	90(38)
	15-25	13(38)	15(38)	16(38)	15(38)	15(38)	15(38)	89(38)
	25-35	16(38)	8(38)	13(38)	15(38)	7(38)	12(38)	71(38)
	35 and more	14(38)	6(38)	12(38)	Nil	16(38)	2(38)	50(38)
8	Working Hours (Hrs)							
	8	12(38)	14(38)	12(38)	17(38)	16(38)	11(38)	82(38)
	8-10	33(38)	21(38)	28(38)	14(38)	27(38)	21(38)	144(38)
	10 and more	5(38)	15(38)	10(38)	19(38)	7(38)	18(38)	76(38)
9	Hours of Working							
	Day	38(38)	31(38)	50(38)	50(38)	50(38)	50(38)	269(38)
	Night	4(38)	6(38)	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	10(38)
	Varying	8(38)	13(38)	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	21(38)

* Figures in parantheses denote percentages.

conflict on person, inter-individual and intra-individual conflict management practices scale was developed on Likert Summated Rating method.

The scale was standardized through a sequential screening of items from an initial list of 60 statements. A panel of seven experts who removed ten statements did the first screening and the second stage screening was done by item analysis.

Item Analysis

Kerlinger (2004) suggests that whatever the type of test, an item analysis should be done to improve test by revising or eliminating ineffective non - discriminating items from analysis of every item done. Since varieties of issues are associated to conflicts it was thought relevant to find out how managers handle these issues through inclusion of various queries very directly. Some of the examples of the items from different dimensions that were thrown to item analysis were: I feel that the conflict benefits me; I feel that conflict checks my creativity; I feel conflict stimulates me; I lose my temper during conflict; I feel misunderstanding leads to conflict; I come under stress when there is conflict; I manage conflict by identifying causes; I integrate to manage conflict; I expand resources for managing conflict etc. The list was exposed to 300 managers and responses of each statement were demanded in five degrees - strongly disagree, disagree, undecided, agree, strongly agree on a 'Zero' to 'four' point scale. Based on these responses, the item - total correlation was computed for each item to see the relation of the item to the total scale. Secondly for judging item difference the same responses to the items were used to compute the student's 't' values for each item between responses of the top quarter of the judges and the bottom quarter.

Finally, only those 24 items, each of which had high item- correlation (with a correlation coefficient value more than 0.6) and high discrimination (with 't' values more than 1.75) were retained.

Reliability

After Item analysis, CMP scale was subjected to test of reliability for judging its stability so

that it yields consistent results. The CMP scale was found reliable for the study of Conflict Management Proficiency of the managers.

The reliability was found by calculating the correlation coefficient of scores of 300 managers by both split - half method to find out the internal consistency of scale by test - retest method to test the stability of the scale overtime. The values of coefficient of correlation by split - half method and test - retest method were found to be 0.82 and 0.79 respectively. The scale, thus, had both internal consistency and stability. To further ascertain the reliability, a step - by - step direction was developed to minimise the possibilities of variation in using the scale at different times and on different groups.

Validity

The tool was validated to assure its dependability in assessing the Conflict Management Proficiency in the managers. A number of measures are needed to be adopted to establish the content and construct validity, viz. creation of items after thorough literature scanning, brainstorming sessions etc (McIver 1981) with employees of public and private sector organisations and scrutiny of the tool by a panel of seven experts from different relevant fields. The panel was requested to comment on the favourability and unfavourability of the item to the concept that helped in suitably modifying the scale, retaining the meaning of the desired aspects to be enquired in the statements.

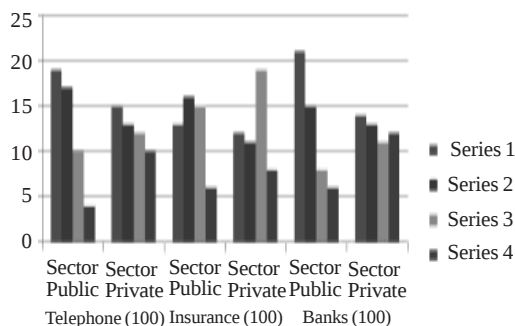
The test may be useful in predicting the manager's competence in problem solving, resource handling, job allocation and assessing worker's efficiency. Besides, the test may closely be related to individual's managerial proficiency, stresses and stress management competence, communication ability, organisational goal achievement and all other such individual and organisational dimensions. Further, the criterion related validity was established by calculating the index of reliability that came to be 0.903 by split - half and 0.89 by test - retest method. The final version of CMP had 24 items from four different dimensions mixed together into a common list.

Any respondent could have scores ranging between '0' to '96' which was divided into four levels - Less than 24 scores - 'very poor

Table 2: Distribution of respondents according to Level of Conflict Management Proficiency

Service industry Level of Conflict Management Proficiency	Telecommunications (100)		Insurance (100)		Banks (100)		Total (300)
	Public sector (50)	Private sector (50)	Public sector (50)	Private sector (50)	Public sector (50)	Private sector (50)	
Very poor CMP	19(38)	15(38)	13(38)	12(38)	21(38)	14(38)	94(38)
Average CMP	17(38)	13(38)	16(38)	11(38)	15(38)	13(38)	85(38)
Above average CMP	10(38)	12(38)	15(38)	19(38)	8(38)	11(38)	75(38)
Excellent CMP	4(38)	10(38)	6(38)	8(38)	6(38)	12(38)	46(38)

Conflict Management Proficiency (CMP)', 25 - 48 - 'average CMP', 49 - 72 scores - 'above average CMP' and 73 - 96 scores - 'excellent CMP' While analysing the scale, it was expected that all the items would firstly, reflect the concept of general conflict - handling and secondly, the Conflict Management Proficiency (CMP) assessed through the scale will be a sum total of respondents' proficiency in the concepts, managing the effects of conflict plus inter and intra - individual conflict management styles, both of these were indicated by the cent percent responses on all the items by all the respondents (Table 1, Fig. 2).

**Fig. 2. Distribution of respondents according to level of Conflict Management Proficiency**

Thus, after item analysis and establishment of reliability and validity, when, the means of the scores of different dimensions were also calculated for assessing total CMP of managers

of both public and private sector, the scores could differentiate the managers of higher and lower level of CMP based on the total scores received by the respondents.

The mean was relatively higher than the average (52.01-56.31) in employees of public sector indicating that the respondents believed their proficiency in managing conflict was in the above average range on the Likert scale. Whereas, the mean CMP scores of private sector employees were ranging between 44.12 and 46.7 i.e. falling in the average CMP range (Table 2). Further, while the coefficient of variation for the CMP scores of different categories was calculated it ranged between 24 percent and 30 percent for different categories of respondents and was 31.46 percent for the total number of respondents, with standard deviation (SD) ranging between 11.3 and 13.5 and standard error (SE) between 0.71 and 1.19 which is substantially low and could be due to mild sample variation. However, the 't' value calculated to test the significance of difference in CMP scores between public and private sector managers came to be 1.32, which was non - significant at 0.05 percent level of significance indicating that there was no significant difference between the public and private sector managers.

From the mean scores on CMP falling on the average and above average range, it can be inferred that the managers will face both constructive and destructive types of conflict,

Table 3: Summary of scores on conflict management proficiency as given by respondents

Service industry level of conflict management proficiency	Telecommunications (100)		Insurance (100)		Banks (100)		Total (300)
	Public sector (50)	Private sector (50)	Public sector (50)	Private sector (50)	Public sector (50)	Private sector (50)	
Mean scores	52.01	44.12	56.31	44.43	53.33	46.7	49.48
SD	11.7	13.3	12.6	11.8	13.5	11.3	17.8
SE	.71	1.2	1.3	1.19	1.8	1.11	4.39
CV (%)	24	30	26	25.6	26.2	25.2	31.46

because the socio-cognitive conflict or information conflict result from incompatible or divergent understandings and interpretations of facts and figures. When the managers will seek cognitive consistency and social validation of their beliefs and insights, divergent viewpoints create tension that needs to be resolved. Socio-cognitive conflicts can be about intellectual or judgmental problems. While intellectual problem usually have one correct solution, judgmental problems are a matter of taste (De Dreu et al. 2008). The mean scores are quite low that is ranging merely between 44.12 and 46.7 in case of private sector employees and between 52.01 and 56.31 in case of public sector employees. It is a clear indication that the developed scale is reflecting the CMP of the managers in the low range, probably because the conflict at hand may be coloured by a backlog of animosities, historical grievances, mistrust, alliances and structural power imbalances (Shmueli 2003) and low employees motivation (Hessel 2003).

It is a big loss to organisation too in terms of wasted time on conflicts (Bacal 2004) lower productivity (Adkins 2003), equipment being stolen or vandalized (Dana 2001) increased legal costs (Smith 2002), relational pull in the workplace, negative consequences for health (De Dreu et.al. 2004) and stress-related medical claims (Smith 2002).

Scarcity of resources is another ground that gives rise to conflicts of interest as interdependence theory predicts that the way participants' interests relate to one another, or are perceived to be related influence their subsequent behavior and interaction patterns. The basic human need to 'develop, maintain, and protect a positive view of the self' thus can be a basis of conflict (De Dreu et al. 2008). This process of social identity formation forms the basis for intergroup interaction and can lead to relationship conflicts between groups since individuals - in obtaining a positive self-image - are inclined to attach positive attributes to in-group members and negative characteristics to out-group members. A struggle for a positive social identity goes thus hand in hand with feelings of superiority towards others (Dencker et al. 2007). Usually, when opinions, insights and beliefs are not consensually shared in organizational settings, they give rise to dispute and opposition. Disagreements concerning ideas

and opinions about the tasks being performed in the organization are also conflicts and are called task conflicts (Jehn et al. 2008). The socio-cognitive conflicts between generations in organizations can be task related conflicts and triggered due to divergent beliefs held by generations about 'age norms' (Dencker et al. 2007).

Since there are variety of causes of conflict the present tool was developed to assess the conflict management proficiency of the managers. An employer/ manager proficient in managing conflict may engage in healthy discussions with managers and motivate employees also to indulge into healthy debates that include: being open to other people's ideas, listening and responding to different ideas from other team members, understanding other people's views, staying focused on the facts and systematically analysing the situation to find solutions'.

In the present study, it can be inferred from the scores received with the help of scale that at times managers will involve in inter and intra group dysfunctional conflict leading to indecisiveness, reduced cohesiveness, distrust, cynicism and disengagement. The present tool in this way can help in differentiating the dysfunctional and constructive conflict. A constructive conflict will result in solving the problem, an increase in investment and involvement in teamwork and team cohesiveness. The assessment of CMP may lead to a desire of managing conflict and can check it from leading to dysfunctional and disaster.

CONCLUSION

The 'individual's need for cognitive consistency and socially validated knowledge about oneself and the (immediate) surroundings' is a conflict source (DeDreu et al. 2008). The research construct tested and standardised an instrument meant to measure the proficiency in managing conflict by the managers that contribute to worker's productivity. The Conflict Management Proficiency Scale was developed to assist managers in identifying their attitudes toward conflict management.

Different people have approached conflict management differently. Early empirical studies of conflict ought to relate conflict style preferences to personal characteristics (Keenan et

al. 1998) based on the premise that an improved understanding of the role of the personality type. In later studies, the influence of context on an individual's conflict style choices was examined (Keenan et al. 1998). In present scale conflict concept, effect of conflict on person, inter-individual and intra-individual conflict management practices were considered. The influence of work group norms and individual normative beliefs were examined. Findings suggest that based on the results received from the scale interventions can be designed to promote employee collaboration.

A primary goal of such assessment is for all concerned to gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics inherent in their relation. Information on CMP will allow managers to plan and implement programmes to address specific area and methodology to handle conflicts of work situations. It might also be helpful in identifying the problems and suggesting solutions; to plan and implement programmes for enhancing managerial proficiency. The tool can also be commonly employed in consensus building and dispute resolution in formal and informal ways.

More work in this area can be taken up to study the societal and familial conflicts and to develop need – based programmes. The efficacy of training packages to improve proficiency in managerial conflicts may also be tested through the same scale.

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