

## **Application of Thomas Kilmann Conflict Resolution Mechanism for Conflict Management in HR of Manufacturing Sector**

**Shivani Nischal**

### **Abstract**

The Thomas Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument is widely used to assess conflict management styles. The instrument uses two parameters, i.e., assertiveness and cooperation, resulting in five distinct styles: avoiding, competing, collaborating, accommodating and compromising. Taken this as a questionnaire instrument, the present research has been conducted in order to examine the perceptions of employees working in these organisations towards the adoption of conflict management styles by top level managers among their employees. The current study analyzes the adoption of conflict management styles by top management towards their employees whenever conflict exists. Hundred employees, selected randomly from five manufacturing industries of Amritsar, completed the questionnaire, answering in the context of their perceptions that which are top most strategies to be implied upon them by their top management. Findings revealed that the top management prefers the assertive styles (competing and collaborating) with scant attention to avoiding Style of Conflict Management in these industries. Further, industry wise comparison had been done to analysis the strategies adopted in very particular industry. The implications of these findings are discussed, leading to particular recommendations.

**Keywords:** Conflict Management Styles, MODE Instrument, Manufacturing Industry

### **Introduction**

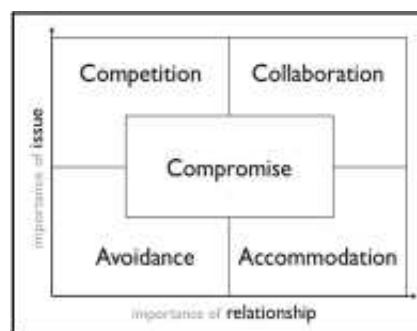
Whenever two persons interact, there are chances of difference of opinion. Conflicting situation is a situation in which two or more values, perspectives and opinions are contradictory in nature, have not yet aligned or agreed upon yet. A simple definition of conflict is experienced when one person perceives that one's needs or desires are, or are likely to be thwarted. Conflict is considered to be necessary for creativity and effectiveness of any organization. Optimal level of conflict is required. Excessive conflict in organization adversely affects the smooth functioning of any organization. Conflicts are inherent in any interpersonal relationship; its management is integral to the performance of any organization. Conflict management is based on the principle that all conflicts cannot necessarily be resolved, but learning how to manage conflicts can decrease the odds of non-productive escalation. Our problem is never our problem, but reaction to problem is our problem.

Conflict management involves acquisition of skills relating to conflict resolution, self-awareness about conflict modes, conflict communication skills, and establishing a structure for management of conflict in your environment. Manufacturing industry is the backbone of any economy. Progress of any country is directly or indirectly influenced by soundness of manufacturing system of the country. In globalized world, trade and commerce would almost be impossible without the availability of suitable manufacturing products/services. Indian manufacturing industry has various milestones of success in its history.

Manufacturing industry is performing well but still there are some corners in interpersonal relations of organization, which need more attention. Causes of conflicts in organization and their effective resolution is one of such issue. To manage conflict effectively, an organization needs to develop a common language that helps people think effectively and communicate clearly about conflict and its management. The foundation of this language is a useful definition of conflict and a set of alternative ways of dealing with it. People often think of conflict as fighting. It's important to realize that fighting is only one way of dealing with conflict. A more useful definition of conflict is the condition in which people's concerns appear to be incompatible. A concern is anything people care about. In an organization, people's concerns might centre on such things as deciding how to allocate resources, determining what facts bear on an issue, and supporting different strategies. Not only banking, the other industries like manufacturing, service, non-productive industries also adopt various techniques to resolve the conflicting situations prevailing in their concerned area.

#### **Conflict-Handling Modes (Thomas and Kilmann Scale, 1974)**

When people find themselves in conflict, their behavior can be described in terms of where it lies along two independent dimensions—assertiveness and cooperativeness. Assertiveness is the degree to which you try to satisfy your own concerns, and cooperativeness is the degree to which you try to satisfy the other person's concerns. The figure below shows the main choices you have in a conflict—the conflict-handling modes.



**Figure 1. Conflict Handling Modes**

(Source: Thomas Kilmann Mode, 1974)

The Thomas Kilmann Instrument (developed by Thomas Kilmann, 1974) has been the leader in conflict resolution assessment for more than thirty years. This instrument is used by Human Resources (HR) and Organizational Development (OD) consultants as a catalyst to open discussions on difficult issues and facilitate learning about how conflict-handling modes affect personal, group, and organizational dynamics.<sup>1</sup> The Thomas Kilmann Instrument is widely used to assess conflict management styles. The instrument uses two parameters, i.e., assertiveness and cooperation, resulting in five distinct styles: avoiding, competing, collaborating, accommodating and compromising. So, the present study utilizes the instrument in order to analyse the strategies adopted by the management of these styles.

### **Review of Literature**

Some types of conflict can be detrimental to organizations' success; other forms create a more open, more creative, and ultimately more effective organization. The key is to know that how to steer towards the constructive conflict. Gupta and Joshi (2008) highlighted the transitions in conflict thoughts. Traditional view considers conflict to be harmful and need to be avoided. Conflict was viewed negatively and it was used synonymously with terms like violence, destruction and irrationality. Human Relation View argued conflict as a natural occurrence in all groups and organizations and this view says that conflict is avoidable by creating an environment of goodwill and trust. Management should always be concerned with avoiding conflict if possible and resolving it soon, if possible. Integrationist View or Modern view point is based on belief that conflict is not only a positive force in a group but is also necessary for a group to perform effectively. This approach encourages conflict. According to this approach if group is harmonious, peaceful and cooperative, it is prone to become static and non responsive to the needs for change and innovation. Blake and Mouton (1964) first presented a conceptual scheme for classifying the styles for handling interpersonal conflicts into five types such as problem-solving, smoothing, forcing, withdrawal, and sharing.

Organization Behaviour theorists have accepted conflict as integral part of any organization's everyday life. Different styles and strategies for managing conflicts in organization have been proposed. Afzalur (1983) constructed factorially independent scales to measure the five styles of handling conflict and provided evidence of their reliability and validity. Calvin (1991) advanced the argument based upon the notion that conflict management varies with the informal norms that govern interpersonal networks. Executives experiencing fragmented and atomized interpersonal networks were more likely to manage conflict without confrontation than in networks of strongly and densely connected individuals. Cheung and Chuah (1999) examined the influence of cultural values on choice of conflict resolution strategies in Hong Kong industries and concluded that the influence of Chinese culture and traditional values on Hong Kong engineers/managers' perception of conflict, and their choice of resolution methods is diminishing and they prefer to use the

confrontation mode in their handling of conflicts instead of the compromising and withdrawing/avoiding approaches as reported in the past. Kaushal and Catherine (2006) indicated the influence of culture on conflict management and resolution behaviors that individualism and collectivism did indeed influenced a person's style of conflict resolution behavior.

Afzal (2004) investigated the moderating or mediating effects of the conflict management strategies on the relationship between conflict and job performance and concluded that employees should also be encouraged to minimize their bargaining strategy to improve their job performance. This would require conflict management training of the employees. Managers are required to be trained to encourage their subordinates to use more integrating and less avoiding styles of handling conflict to improve job performance. Susan and Patti (2007) found the prevalent style for nursing students was compromise, followed by avoidance. In contrast, avoidance, followed by compromise and accommodation was the prevalent style for allied health students.

#### **Application of Thomas and Kilmann Instrument**

Thomas and Kilmann (1974) identified five main styles of dealing with conflict that vary in their degrees of cooperativeness and assertiveness. Avoiding style of conflict management is low on both assertiveness and cooperativeness and might be appropriate when the issue perceived is trivial by nature. Competing style is also known as the win-lose approach. A manager using this style, characterized by high assertiveness and low cooperativeness, seeks to reach his/her own preferred outcomes at the expense of other individuals. This approach may be appropriate when quick, decisive action is needed, such as during emergencies. It can also be used to confront unpopular actions, such as urgent cost cutting. Accommodating conflict resolution style reflects a high degree of cooperativeness. It has also been labelled as obliging. A manager using this style subjugates his/her own goals, objectives, and desired outcomes to allow other individuals to achieve their goals and outcomes. This behavior is appropriate when people realize that they are in the wrong or when an issue is more important to one side than the other. This conflict resolution style is important for preserving future relations between the parties. Compromising is moderating level of both assertiveness and cooperativeness. Compromise can also be referred to as bargaining or trading. It generally produces suboptimal results. This behavior can be used when the goals of both sides are of equal importance, when both sides have equal power, or when it is necessary to find a temporary, timely solution. It should not be used when there is a complex problem requiring a problem-solving approach. Collaborating approach is high on both assertiveness and cooperativeness; it is often described as the win-win scenario. Both sides creatively work towards achieving the goals and desired outcomes of all parties involved.

#### **Objectives and Research Methodology**

The main objective of the study is to examine the conflict management styles of top level managers among their employees in five manufacturing industries of

Amritsar city. Further, industry wise comparison has been made in order to analyse the various styles adopted by managers for handling of conflicts in their particular industry. The present study is empirical in nature. Sample for study consisted of 100 respondents. Twenty employees have been selected from each industry. Five manufacturing industries have been selected on the basis of convenience according to area and the selected manufacturing industries are: (1) Paint Manufacturers, (2) United Surgical Industries, (3) Punj-Aab Agro Industries, (4) Hira Industries and (5) Kochar Woolen Mills. Primary data was collected using structured questionnaire developed by Thomas and Ralph Kilmann i.e. "Thomas Kilmann Instrument" consisted of 30 items. For scoring purposes, these items are further divided into five styles of managing conflict. Respondents were asked to choose the conflict management style adopted in their respective organizations on five-Point scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". Data was analyzed to meet the objectives of the research by using descriptive analysis and Statistical package SPSS is used for analyzing the data. Table 1 mentioned below indicated that Top management prefers the Competing style of handling conflict with mean (m= 3.38), followed by Collaborating style (m=3.16), Accommodating style (m=2.80), Compromising style (m=2.68) and with scant attention to Avoiding style (m=1.94) with their respective mean scores.

**Table 1. Mean Scores of Various Conflict Management Tactics adopted in Manufacturing Industries**

<b>Conflict Management Tactics adopted by Top level Managers</b>			
<b>S.N.</b>	<b>Variables</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean Values</b>
1	Competing	100	3.38
2	Collaborating	100	3.16
3	Accommodating	100	2.80
4	Compromising	100	2.68
5	Avoiding	100	1.94
A	<i>Valid N</i>	100	
	<b>Total Respondents</b>	<b>100</b>	

(Source: Primary Data)

**Table 2. Industry wise comparative analysis of Conflict Management Strategies**

<b>Industry Wise Conflict Management Tactics</b>							
<b>S.N.</b>	<b>Variables</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean Values</b>				
			<b>Paint Manu- facturers</b>	<b>United Surgical Industries</b>	<b>Punj-Aab Agro Industries</b>	<b>Hira Industries</b>	<b>Kochar Woolen Mills</b>
1	Competing	100	3.45	3.20	3.41	3.20	3.66
2	Collaborating	100	3.44	2.41	2.46	3.52	4.01
3	Accommodating	100	2.26	3.01	2.66	3.24	2.84
4	Compromising	100	3.69	3.32	3.21	2.01	1.21
5	Avoiding	100	2.01	2.65	2.00	2.04	1.01
<b>Total Respondents</b>			<b>100</b>				

(Source: Primary data)

Table 2 revealed that management of Paint Manufacturers prefers Compromising (3.69), Competing (3.45) & Collaborating (3.44) style of handling conflict within the organisation with scant attention to Accommodating (2.26) and Avoiding (2.01) style of handling conflict. United Surgical Industries adopted Compromising (3.32), Competing (3.20) & Accommodating (3.01) style of handling conflict with scant attention towards Avoiding (2.65) and Collaborating (2.41). Punj-Aab Agro Industries prefers Competing (3.41) and Compromising (3.21) styles of handling conflict within the organisation with little attention towards Accommodating (2.66), Collaborating (2.46) and Avoiding (2.00) style of handling conflict. Hira Industries followed Collaborating (3.52), Accommodating (3.24) and Competing (3.20) styles and Kochar woollen mills followed Collaboration (4.01) and competing (3.66) styles of handling conflict. The study provided various styles adopted by managers for handling of conflicts in their respective concerns based upon the scale MODE developed by Thomas Kilmann (1974).

Respondents further has been classified according to five manufacturing industries i.e. 1) Paint Manufacturers, (2) United Surgical Industries, (3) Punj-Aab Agro Industries, (4) Hira Industries and (5) Kochar Woolen Mills. These five strategies under conflict management MODE given by Thomas and Kilmann (1974) have been taken as dependent variables and industry comparison has been taken as independent variable or grouping variable which have five groups (five industries). ANOVA has been applied to find the impact of these various classified manufacturing concerns upon various management strategies of conflict. Descriptive statistics and Analysis of variance (ANOVA) of conflict management strategies had been mentioned in table 3. Following hypothesis has been framed in order to analyse the significant differences in the preference of conflict management styles among the top management of these five manufacturing concerns:

Null Hypothesis ( $H_0$ ): There is no significant difference in the conflict management strategies adopted by the top management of these five manufacturing concerns.

Alternate Hypothesis ( $H_a$ ): There is significant difference in the conflict management strategies adopted by the top management of these five manufacturing concerns.

**Table 3. Descriptive statistics and ANOVA of Conflict management strategies**

Variables	Paint Manu.	United Surgical	Punj-Aab Agro	Hira Ind.	Kochar Woolen	Sig*
<b>Competing</b>	3.45	3.20	3.41	3.2	3.66	<b>0.050**</b>
<b>Collaborating</b>	3.44	2.41	2.46	3.52	4.01	<b>0.000*</b>
<b>Accommodating</b>	2.26	3.01	2.66	3.24	2.84	<b>0.000*</b>
<b>Compromising</b>	3.69	3.32	3.21	2.01	1.21	<b>0.000*</b>
<b>Avoiding</b>	2.01	2.65	2.00	2.04	1.01	<b>0.070**</b>

\*significant at 0.05 level; \*\*significant at 0.10 level

The result displayed in table 3 indicates significant differences among the managers in the adoption of conflict management strategies. Hence it can be further concluded that there is significant difference in the conflict management strategies adopted by the various managers of these manufacturing concerns thereby accepting alternate hypothesis and rejecting null hypothesis. Major findings of the study are as follows:

- Findings indicates the preference of the top management towards the following of Competing approach, Collaborating approach and Accommodating approach whenever conflictual situation arises in the organisation in order to provide healthy competition and a way towards organisational growth and productivity.
- Employees' also perceive that avoiding and compromising strategies to manage conflict has been completely neglected by top management and necessary possible steps has been taken by management because withdrawing from scene whenever conflict occurs is not a solution to any problem. Management pay attention and face the conflicts that occurs in their relative concern in a positive way and positive strategies which included collaboration and accommodation have been adopted and withdrawing from scene in the form of avoiding scenario is discarded.
- Further, findings reveal the strategies adopted by top management towards their employees on the basis of industrial wise comparison. These five industries selected under study tends to follows competing approach; collaborating approach and accommodate approach towards managing conflict as already depicted in table no.2.
- One way analysis of variance has been applied in order indicates significant differences among the managers in the adoption of conflict management strategies in these five manufacturing industries. These Five strategies have been taken as dependent variables and industry comparison has been taken as independent variable or grouping variable which have five groups (five industries). Further significant differences have been found in the adoption of conflict management strategies by the managers of these five manufacturing concerns.

#### **Recommendations, Conclusion and Scope of Future Research**

Management should have open communication policies so that human resource can easily join hands together, come closer, collaborate and make compromises wherever possible with the authorities of higher designation. Not only manufacturing sector but every organisation should have a proper conflict resolving mechanism and managers should personally involve themselves into such structure and mitigate the impact of negative conflict or dysfunctional impacts of conflict in the organisation. This paper has been limited to handling conflict in manufacturing industries but it can further be extended to service sector, i.e. banks etc. This paper is also limited to industry wise comparison for handling of conflict in their respective manufacturing area. But the study can

further be extended to compare the level wise managers of various departments to handle conflict. Comparative study of top and bottom players of the industry could also be done for private sector and public sector as well as including foreign sector also. The impact of demographic variables such as age, gender, educational qualification can be further explored in future research studies. Conflict is not only limited to manufacturing industry, it is a major issue of human resource management in all the industries/organizations wherever interactions of human beings are involved. So study can be extended to other industries also.

### References

- Afzal, R. (2004). "Conflict Management Strategies as Moderators or Mediators of the Relationship Between Intragroup Conflict and Job Performance", presented at the Annual conference of the International Association for Conflict Management, Pittsburgh, PA, June 15-18.
- Afzalur, R.M. (1983). "A Measure of Styles of Handling Interpersonal Conflict" *The Academy of Management Journal*, 26(2), 368-76.
- Blake, Robert R. and Jane S. Mouton (1964), *The Managerial Grid*, Houston: Gulf Publishing Company.
- Cheung, C.C. and Chuah, K. B. (1999). "Conflict management styles in Hong Kong industries", *International Journal of Project Management*, 17(6), 393-99.
- Gupta, S.K. and Joshi, R. (2008): *Organizational Behavior*, Kalyani Publishers, NewDelhi.
- Kaushal, R. and Catherine, K.T. (2006). "The role of culture and personality in choice of conflict management strategy", *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 30(5), 60-69.
- Morrill, Calvin. (1991). Conflict Management, Honor, and Organizational Change. *American Journal of Sociology*, 96:585-621.
- Susan, S. and Patti, H. (2007). "Conflict management styles in the health professions." *Journal of Professional Nursing*. 23(3), 157-66.
- Thomas, K.W. and Kilmann, R.H. (1974). *Conflict Mode Instrument*, Sterling Forest, New York.

### Bibliography

- Bercovitch, J. and Jackson, R. (2001). "Negotiation or Mediation?, An Exploration of Factors Affecting the Choice of Conflict Management in International Conflict" *Negotiation Journal*, 17(1), 59-77.
- Bhawan, M. (1999). "Perceived organizational climate and interpersonal conflict handling strategies", *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 35(1), 43-54.



- Binaca G., Brass, D.J. and Gray, B. (1998). "Social networks and perceptions of intergroup conflicts: The role of negative relationships and third parties", *Academy of Management Journal*, 41(1), 55-67.
- Bornstein, G. (2003), "Intergroup Conflict/: Individual, Group, and Collective Interests", *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 7(2), 129-145.
- Brett, J.M. (1984), "Managing Organizational Conflict", *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 15(5), 664-678.
- Brewer, N., Mitchell, P. and Weber, N. (2002). "Gender Role, Organizational status and conflict management styles", *The International Journal of Conflict Management*, 13(1), 8-94.
- Burke, R.J. (1970). "Methods of Resolving Superior-Subordinate Conflict: The Constructive use of Subordinates Differences and Disagreements", *Organisational Behaviour and Human Performance*, 15(2), 579-603.
- Busch, D. (2012). "Cultural theory and conflict management in organizations: How does theory shape our understanding of culture in practice?", *International Journal of Cross Cultural Cross Cultural Management*, 12(1), 9-24.
- Cai, D. A. and Fink, E. L. (2002). "Conflict Style Differences Between Individualists and Collectivists", *Communication Monographs*, 69(1), 67-87.
- Rabinarayan, S. (2004). "Conflict Management Strategies and Organizational Effectiveness", *Indian Journal of Industrial Relations*, 39(3), 298-323.
- Slabbert, A.D. (2004). "Conflict management styles in traditional organizations", *The Social Science Journal*, 41(1), 83-92.

#### Footnotes<sup>1</sup>

<http://www.kilmanndiagnostics.com/overview-thomas-kilman-conflict-mode-instrument-tki>