

Organized Chaos: A Survey of Conflict Management Strategies, Gender Roles, and Status in an Organizational Setting

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ABSTRACT

Conflict in organizations is ever present and yet rarely understood. However, through research on conflict resolution, insight into the effective communication behind conflict management evolves. Also, research on conflict allows for an understanding of the determinants and factors of conflict. This study explored conflict management strategies in an organizational setting. More specifically, research was conducted on the relationship between gender role and preferred conflict management strategies in respect to organizational status. A relationship was determined between gender and preferred conflict management strategy; however, it was discovered that organizational status does not mediate the relationship between gender role and preferred conflict management strategy. Despite the fact that organizational status did not mediate the relationship between gender role and preferred conflict management strategy, research on a different variable that mediates this relationship might provide more insight. Previous findings on a multidimensional treatment of conflict explain that a variable that mediates the relationship between preferred conflict management and gender role might offer a more in-depth explanation, and future research is called for.

INTRODUCTION

Conflict is a frequent occurrence in the workplace. In fact, in an organizational setting conflict consumes “up to 20 percent of employees’ time” (Song, Dryer, & Thieme, 2006, p. 341). Conflict occurs through the communication of a variety of issues including differences of opinion, procedural problems, and disagreements over approaches to work oriented tasks (Friedman, Tidd, Currall, & Tsai, 2000). Independent of the source, conflict has a value in promoting organizational change and conflict resolution is essential to the efficiency of any organization (Putnam, 1988; Putnam & Poole, 1987). Communication is the driving force behind conflict resolution and by exploring conflict management strategies; a greater insight into this type of communication can be obtained.

In order to develop an understanding of conflict in the workplace, the majority of previous research explored sex differences in relation to conflict management in organizations. However, to date, this body of research is filled with several inconsistencies; some studies found that males and females employ different conflict management strategies, whereas other studies found no measurable differences between men and women’s conflict management (Brewer, Mitchell, & Weber, 2002; Gayle, 1991; Orbe & Warren, 2000; Putnam & Poole, 1987; Sorenson, Hawkins, & Sorenson, 1995). Due to the lack of a relationship between sex and conflict management strategies, a different variable, such as gender roles, needs to be explored. The terms sex and gender are not interchangeable (Ocana, Chamberlain, & Carlson, 2005). The terms ‘sex’ and ‘sex differences’ are used in reference to the biological characteristic of being male or female. Whereas the terms ‘gender’ and ‘gender roles’ are used to describe the three specific roles, masculine, feminine, or androgynous. A gender role represents learned patterns of masculinity and femininity and exploring gender roles, as opposed to sex, may explain a possible relation in conflict management strategies employed in an organizational setting. This study will look at the relationship between gender roles and organizational conflict, a topic that has little previous research, in order to develop a deeper understanding of organizational conflict.

However, when exploring conflict in a workplace, one’s gender role may not be the sole determinant of conflict management strategies. This idea has been illustrated through previous research that has focused on a one-dimensional treatment of conflict, and has shown inconsistent results (Song et al., 2006). In addition to gender roles and conflict management, this study recognizes the necessity of a mediating variable to further explain conflict management. Organizational status is a variable that may assist researchers in understanding conflict (Dansereau & Markham, 1987). One previous study adds to the significance of status by explaining “organizational status may be

an important determinant of conflict management style” (Brewer et al., 2002, p. 81). Thus, in order to develop an increased understanding of organizational communication and interactions, the purpose of this study is to explore status as a mediating variable between gender roles and conflict management styles in an organizational setting.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the literature review, previous research conducted on workplace conflict, gender roles, and status is discussed. First, the necessity of conflict exploration in an organizational setting is addressed. Next, the variable of gender is contrasted against the more heavily researched variable of sex. Finally, organizational status and its relation to conflict management are discussed.

Organizational Conflict

Conflict in the workplace has been readily researched since the 1960s; however, the view of conflict research has developed over time. Initially, conflict in organizations had a negative connotation and was viewed as something to avoid (Song et al., 2006). In the 1970s, conflict research shifted slightly and was seen as the management of reoccurring conflicts (Putman, 1988). Currently, the view of conflict research has developed into focusing on the value that conflict has in “promoting organizational change and in managing divergent goals” (Putnam, 1988, p. 295).

The exploration of conflict in a defined environment, such as an organizational context, allows conflict to be better understood. A deeper insight occurs because a specific environment allows for “an understanding of the problematic situation...the role of the relational partner in the conflict, who or what was responsible for the conflict, feelings for the partner, and what might be done to resolve the conflict” (Witteman, 1992, p. 249). For example, Powell and Hickson (2000) explored conflict resolution and power imbalance in all types of interpersonal relationships and were unable to find any true causal effects from the results. However, given a more specific context such as an organization, the results may have been consistent, and a relationship could have possibly been determined (Powell & Hickson, 2000).

In addition to developing a deeper understanding of conflict, research regarding workplace conflict allows for insight into the communication and interactions of organizational members. Conflict is a frequent occurrence in the workplace, and conflict management skills are necessary for individuals to function effectively at each and every level in an organization (Brewer et al., 2002). Additionally, in an organizational setting, when an individual is able to manage conflict effectively, they are better apt to communicate and lead (Gross & Guerrero, 2000). Thus, understanding conflict in organizations is essential.

Putnam and Poole (1987) define conflict as “the interaction of interdependent people who perceive opposition of goals, aims, and values, and who see the other party as potentially interfering with the realization of these goals” (p. 552). One way to further research conflict and to develop an understanding of why conflict occurs is through conflict management strategies.

The definition of a conflict management strategy is greatly discussed by researchers. Some researchers believe conflict management strategies are a consistent trait and define them as “general tendencies or modes of patterned responses to conflict in a variety of antagonistic interactive situations” (Ting-Toomey, Oetzel, & Yee-Jung, 2001, p. 88). However, others view conflict management strategies as “a choice, intention, or plan of action based on a person’s goals and his or her analysis of the situation” (Putnam, 1988, p. 294). This study will conceptualize conflict management strategies as the preferred choice of handling a conflict dependent on the parties involved in the conflict. A definition that considers possible variance in conflict management styles was chosen because conflicts are often times managed differently according to the parties involved and the context surrounding the conflict.

There is five conflict management strategies: integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding, and compromising (Rahim, 1983). A person who uses integrating to manage conflict has a high concern for self and a high concern for others (Rahim, 1983). This style focuses on effectively dealing with conflict in a collaborative way (Gross & Guerrero, 2001). The obliging style of conflict management has a low concern for self and a high concern for others (Rahim, 1983). With this type of conflict management, one party essentially gives in to the other in order to resolve the conflict (Friedman et al., 2000). The dominating style has a high concern for self and a low concern for others (Rahim, 1983). This strategy entails a person considering his or her interests and disregarding the other party (Friedman et al., 2000). The avoiding method involves a low concern for self and a low concern for others (Rahim, 1983). This method does not allow for a well-resolved conflict because a person who uses the avoiding method disregards the conflict by being evasive (Gross & Guerrero, 2001). Finally, the compromising style has intermediate levels of concern for both self and others (Rahim, 1983). Compromising as a conflict management strategy

represents a middle ground; the individual is focused on his or her goals and the goals of the other party (Gross & Guerrero, 2001).

One useful way to measure these conflict management strategies is through the Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory-II (ROCI-II). The ROCI-II is a “comprehensive model for diagnosing organizational conflict” because it has a distinction between conflict with a subordinate, boss, or peer (Weider-Hatfield, 1988, p. 351). The use of the ROCI-II will be further addressed in the methods section of the paper.

As previously stated, the current study will focus on conflict management styles in a place of employment; however, this study will not choose a specific type of organization. When researchers survey an extremely specific population, it allows for an easily replicated study; yet, an extremely specific population can significantly hinder the research. For example, Lusch (1976) conducted a quantitative study on the relationship between the possession of power and conflict in automobile manufacturers and dealers and determined no significant relationship. Had the research been conducted with a less specific environment, a relationship may have been revealed (Lusch, 1976).

Sex Versus Gender Roles and Conflict

A great deal of research has been conducted regarding the differences and similarities in the ways the two sexes manage conflict (Sorenson et al., 1995). However, despite the large number of studies conducted, previous research on sex differences in managing conflict has proven to be inconsistent (Brewer et al., 2002; Orbe & Warren, 2000; Schockley-Zalabak & Morley, 1984; Sorenson et al., 1995). In fact, the results are so contradictory that some studies show that males and females employ different approaches to conflict, while others find no measurable differences between the sexes (Sorenson et al., 1995). Additionally, in the many studies where a sex difference was seen, there was so little variance in the selection of conflict management strategies that the findings were determined to be insignificant (Orbe & Warren, 2000).

Due to the inconsistencies between sex differences and conflict management, it is necessary for researchers to look for a different determinant of conflict management styles, such as gender roles. Gender roles represent learned patterns of masculine and feminine characteristics and have the ability to demonstrate how individuals behave in certain circumstances (Cook, 1985). The three gender roles are masculine, feminine, and androgynous. A masculine gender role represents the possession of masculine traits and at the same time the rejection of feminine traits. The masculine gender role is generally associated with “an instrumental orientation, a cognitive focus on ‘getting the job done’” (Bem, 1974, p.156). Conversely, a feminine gender role represents the possession of feminine traits and a rejection of masculine traits and is generally associated with “an expressive orientation, and affective concern for the welfare of others (Bem, 1974, p.156). An androgynous gender role represents both masculine and feminine traits (Bem, 1974).

Gender roles may give researchers a more in-depth understanding than research regarding sex differences because both sexes are able to possess high or low levels of masculinity and femininity (Bem, 1974; Brewer et al., 2002). Also, gender roles are easily measured by using the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI), which classifies individuals into masculine, feminine, or androgynous gender role categories (Bem, 1974). The BSRI classification system allows for an increase in individuality because each person is categorized into one of the three gender roles that fit them personally instead of one of the two socially prescribed sexes.

Little research on the topic of gender roles and conflict management has been explored, and additional research on this subject is called for (Brewer et al., 2002). This study aims to increase the body of knowledge regarding gender roles and conflict management in order to better understand how one’s gender role affects the conflict management style that is employed. The exploration of gender roles was chosen over sex because of the more complex classification system that the gender role perspective offers as well as the lack of consistent results from sex and conflict research.

Status as a Mediating Variable

As previously stated, the focus of this study will be on the relationship between gender roles and conflict management styles in an organizational setting. However, the sex or gender role of an individual may not be the sole indicator of conflict management strategy selection (Gayle, 1991). This idea has been demonstrated in the studies that have looked at gender roles as an explanatory variable but have shown inconsistent results (Brewer et al., 2002). Thus, it is necessary when exploring conflict management styles to use a mediating variable. Unfortunately, there is little previous research that has incorporated a multidimensional treatment of conflict management strategies, and further research is necessary (Canary, Cunningham, & Cody, 1988; Song, et al., 2006).

When looking at differences in conflict management styles in a workplace, an organizational variable such as status may help to explain the possible variance in conflict management styles. Status can be ambiguous; however, for the purpose of this study, status will be defined as “the organizational position that is occupied relative to others

in the workplace” (Domagalski & Steelman, 2007, p.303). Multiple studies have addressed that status is a crucial aspect of organizational conflict management. Putnam and Poole (1987) explain that status has been underemphasized in most organizational communication research, and when researching conflict management styles the “choice of style may...hinge on the organizational position of the opponent in a conflict” (p. 558). Additionally, Gross and Guerrero (2000) explored the appropriate and effective management of conflict, and suggested that the organizational positions of co-worker, superiors, and subordinates may have an impact on conflict management styles.

A previous study used three similar financial organizations and looked at gender roles, conflict management strategies, and status in workplaces (Brewer et al., 2002). This study found a relationship between gender roles and conflict management strategies and a relationship between status and conflict management strategies; however, the authors felt it would be beneficial to explore the same subject matter in a broader organizational setting because their findings were only applicable to financial organizations (Brewer et al., 2002). Additionally, the previous study explored conflicts with peers and not conflict between members of a different status (Brewer et al., 2002). The authors felt that it may be of more value to explore cross-status conflict because this type of research would offer a different perspective on status and conflict (Brewer et al., 2002).

There has been a great deal of research conducted on the communication between superiors and subordinates, which has demonstrated that the relationship between subordinates and superiors is unique (Infante & Gorden, 1981; Lamude, Daniels, & Grahm, 1988). When communicating with superiors, subordinates will often say what they feel to be acceptable but not necessarily true (Rahim, 1983). The differences in communication between superiors and subordinates may have an impact on the conflict management strategies used in a conflict between superiors and subordinates. As a result, this current study will explore status and conflict management between members of different organizational positions in a workplace in order to develop a more in-depth understanding of conflict management.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The majority of previous research regarding conflict management strategies has explored the possible differences and similarities between the two sexes. However, this research has also produced inconsistent results, leading researchers to believe that there is a better way to explore conflict management strategies. Gender roles allow individuals to be grouped into masculine, feminine, or androgynous gender role categories because either sex can possess high or low levels of masculinity and femininity (Brewer et al., 2002). Additionally, status has the possibility to affect many kinds of organizational interactions (Domagalski & Steelman, 2007). However, there is little previous research regarding status and conflict management, and the majority of previous research explored conflicts between individuals of the same organizational status (Brewer et al., 2002). Furthermore, as previous studies have shown, there is an established need for a mediating variable between gender roles and conflict management (Canary et al., 1998). Conflict management styles used in an organizational setting may be better understood by examining patterns in gender roles, conflict management styles, and the organizational variable of status. As a result of previous research and in order to develop a further understanding of organizational conflict, the following research questions are posed:

RQ 1: Is there a difference between preferred conflict styles according to sex in an organizational setting?

RQ 2: Is there a difference between preferred conflict styles according to gender in an organizational setting?

RQ 3: Is there a difference between preferred conflict style and organizational status of the respondent?

RQ 4: Is there a difference between preferred conflict management strategy according to the organizational status of the respondent and the organizational status of the second party in the conflict?

RQ 5: Is there a relationship between the number of years a respondent has been with his or her company and preferred conflict management strategy?

RQ 6: Is there a relationship between the age of the participant and conflict management strategy?

RQ 7: Does organizational status mediate the relationship between gender roles and conflict management strategies in an organizational setting?

METHODS

This study is quantitative in nature and is part of the social scientific paradigm. The goal of this research is to explore the relationship of two key variables, gender role and conflict management in respect to organizational status, and the social scientific paradigm allows the researcher to accomplish this task (Esterberg, 2002). This study employed a survey in order to remain objective and to not encourage or discourage the participants' remarks. The survey contained questions regarding demographic information to determine the characteristics of the participants, information about the participant's work experience, and organizational status. The ROCI-II was used to survey conflict management strategies used by respondents, and the BSRI was utilized to determine each participant's gender role.

Subjects

The population needed for this study was "professionals," defined as someone in a full time position in an organization with multiple levels of management. In order to obtain participants, a convenience sample was used. There were 74 participants and the population explored consisted of both men and women of different organizational positions from multiple organizational settings. The ages of the participants varied; the youngest participant was 21 and the oldest was 61. The mean age of participants was 40.95. A greater number of females than males completed the study; 64.9 percent of the participants were female whereas 35.1 percent were male. The majority of the participants were Caucasian. Of the participants, 68.9 percent were married, 24.3 percent were single, 4.1 percent were divorced, 1.35 percent were widowed, and 1.35 percent were engaged. In respect to their work environment, the number of years at their current place of employment varied from less than one year to 32 years. Of the 74 participants, 39 were in lower management, 21 were in middle management, and 11 were in upper management; 2 participants failed to respond to this question. The participants worked in 50 different organizational settings including school districts, pharmaceutical companies, churches, hospitals, and real estate offices.

Measurement

This study used previously established inventories in order to determine each subject's gender role and preferred conflict management strategy in an organizational setting. Both inventories are reliable and valid and are consistently used in similar research (Brewer et al., 2002; Rahim, 1983).

Conflict Management Strategies. Preferred conflict management styles were measured through the Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory II (ROCI-II) (Rahim, 1983). The ROCI-II consists of 28 questions regarding conflict with a boss or subordinate. The participants were asked to respond on a 5-point Likert scale to each of the 28 items. The ROCI-II measures each participant's preferred conflict management style by classifying it into one of the five conflict resolution approaches: integrating, dominating, obliging, avoiding, and compromising. This method of measuring organizational conflict has been proven both valid and reliable through its use in previous studies (Brewer et al., 2002; Rahim, 1983; Song et al., 2006).

Gender Roles. The Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) was used to measure the participants' classification as masculine, feminine, or androgynous (Bem, 1974). The BSRI asks subjects to rate how well 60 personality characteristics describe them on a 7-point Likert scale (Bem, 1974). Of the 60 personality characteristics, 20 are feminine items, 20 are masculine items, and 20 are neutral items. The BSRI is frequently used for gender research and has been found to be a reliable method for determining gender roles (Brewer et al., 2002; Cook, 1985). Due to the fact that the researcher sought to measure gender roles, this method of measuring gender roles was a valid tool for calculating these values.

Organizational Status. For the purpose of this study, the conceptual definition for organizational status was defined as "the organizational position that is occupied relative to others in the workplace" (Domagalski & Steelman, 2007, p. 303). Operationally, organizational status was determined through the subjects' responses to demographic questions on the surveys regarding status. The questions regarding organizational status asked each subject how many levels of management exist in his or her organization (lower, middle, and upper) and into which level of management the subject's position falls. Additionally, each participant was asked to classify his or herself in the organizational hierarchy. In order to ensure that this was a valid method of determining organizational status, there was a blank space provided so that the participant could explain any additional information regarding his or her organizational position in respect to others in the organization. The survey used in this study can be found in the Appendix.

Procedures

There were two aspects to data collection. First, upon receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board, hardcopies of the survey were dispersed to University of Wisconsin-La Crosse students in Communication Studies

classes, who delivered them to parents or other professionals. The students then returned the surveys in a sealed envelope to the researcher. The students were instructed to give the survey to a full time employee in an organization with multiple levels of management. Before the surveys were distributed, permission to distribute the surveys was obtained from the Communication professors. The second aspect of data collection included an online survey created in the Qualtrics Survey Software. The online survey ensured complete anonymity because the responses were collected in the Qualtrics account. Both the online Qualtrics survey and hardcopy survey contained identical questions. The online survey was distributed using a snowball sampling due to the difficulty in obtaining participants. To distribute the Qualtrics survey, the researcher sent the link to family, friends, and other social contacts and asked them to take the online survey if they were a “professional” or to forward the link to a “professional.” Sixteen of the participants completed a hardcopy survey, and 58 of the participants completed the Qualtrics survey. It took approximately 15 minutes to complete the survey.

Analysis

The statistical software program SPSS was used to analyze all of the data for all the research questions. In using SPSS, several different inferential statistics were employed to determine possible relations between the variables. The first research question was analyzed using a t-test. A t-test was used because it allowed the researcher to compare the mean conflict management strategy scores against the variable of sex.

The second and third research questions were both analyzed using an ANOVA test. To analyze the second research question, which looked at the relationship between gender roles and conflict management strategies, a one-way ANOVA was used. This method of analysis allowed the researcher to look at the multiple categories of gender roles and the multiple conflict management strategies, and the relationship that existed between the two variables. The topic of the third research question, the relation between organizational status and conflict management strategies, was also analyzed by using a one-way ANOVA. This test allowed the researcher to look at the multiple categories of conflict management and their possible difference between the respondents’ organizational status.

The fourth research question was analyzed using a two-way ANOVA, where preferred conflict management strategy was the dependent variable and the organizational status of the respondent, and the second party in the conflict was the fixed factors. This type of analysis allowed the researcher to look at the relationship between the organizational status of the respondent and the second party in the conflict in respect to the preferred conflict management strategy.

Both the fifth and sixth research questions were analyzed using a Pearson Correlation test. In the fifth question, the number of years a participant had been with his or her place of employment was analyzed in respect to conflict management strategies. The sixth question analyzed the age of the respondent against the conflict management strategies.

The final research question was analyzed by using a two-way ANOVA. In this case, gender role and organizational status were both fixed factors, while preferred conflict management strategy was the dependent variable. This type of analysis allowed the researcher to view the relationship between gender role and organizational status and the possible impact it had on preferred conflict management strategy.

RESULTS

The reliability for the two measures used was consistent. For the ROCI-II the reliability coefficient in this study was .865, and for the BSRI the reliability coefficient was .830.

The possible difference between preferred conflict styles according to sex was addressed in the first research question. The only significant difference between preferred conflict style and sex was seen with the dominant conflict management strategy ($t=2.05$, $p<.05$). Despite the lack of significant differences among the other conflict strategies and sex, there were clear differences between how males and females manage conflict. The lower mean score is the preferred style for managing conflict, and these means are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. The mean score of conflict management strategies according to biological sex

Conflict Style	Mean Scores	
	Male	Female
Integrating	2.0659	1.9792
Avoiding	3.2372	2.9340
Dominating	2.7385	3.1167
Obliging	2.5705	2.4167
Compromising	2.6346	2.3698

The second research question asked about the possible relationship between gender and preferred conflict styles. Of the five conflict management strategies, there was a significant relationship found between gender role and the avoiding conflict management style ($F=12.7, p<.05$) as well as a relationship between gender role and the dominating conflict management style ($F=4.4, p<.05$). There was a significant relationship between avoiding and the masculine gender role and avoiding and the feminine gender role. Similarly, there was a significant interaction between the dominating conflict management style and the masculine and feminine gender roles.

The third research question asked about the possible relationship between preferred conflict style and the organizational status of the respondent. There was no significant difference in conflict style according to the level of management of the respondent. Despite the lack of a significant relationship, there were interesting differences in the preferred conflict management strategy according to the respondents' levels of management. The lower mean score is the preferred style for managing conflict for each level of management, and this relationship is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. The mean score of conflict management strategies according to the respondents' level of management

Conflict Style	Mean Scores		
	Lower Management	Middle Management	Upper Management
Integrating	2.1209	2.0068	1.6494
Avoiding	2.8333	3.2619	2.0141
Dominating	2.8872	3.1619	3.3030
Obliging	2.427	2.4286	2.3636
Compromising	2.527	2.5714	2.6136

The fourth research question discussed the impact that the relationship between the organizational status of the respondent and the organizational status of the second party involved in the conflict had on the respondent's preferred conflict management strategy. There was no statistically significant relationship found between these three variables.

In research question five the possible relationship between the number of years a respondent had been with his or her company and preferred conflict management strategy was explored. There was no significant relationship found between these two variables. Research question six raised the question of whether or not there was a relationship between the age of the participant and their preferred conflict management strategy. Once again, there was not a significant relationship between the respondents' age and preferred conflict management style.

The final research question asked whether the organizational status of the respondent mediated the relationship between gender role and preferred conflict management strategy. There was not a significant relationship, and, thus, the organizational status of the respondent was not a mediating variable to the relationship between gender role and preferred conflict management strategy.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study answered the posed research questions and determined many significant and relationships between the different variables and conflict management strategies. Although significant relationships were not found for some of the research questions, there were interesting differences found between many variables.

Research question one discussed the difference between preferred conflict styles according to sex. Of the five conflict management strategies, only the dominant style had a significant relationship to sex. This lack of a relationship between the majority of conflict management strategies was not surprising. Sex is a socially-prescribed concept in which men are classified as masculine and women are classified as feminine. In reality, men can possess feminine or masculine characteristics whereas women also can possess feminine or masculine characteristics. Thus, considering the inaccuracy in classifying each individual as possessing male or female personality characteristics solely based upon their sex, the lack of relationship between sex and conflict management is expected.

Additionally, the majority of previous research came to the same conclusions regarding the relationship between sex and conflict management strategies. Gayle (1991) explained that sex was not a factor in conflict management styles and found no significant relationship between any of the conflict management strategies in respect to sex. Shockley-Zalabak and Morley (1984) conducted a study in which they found a significant difference in the relationship between sex and the compromising conflict management strategy, whereas Sorenson et al. (1995) found that only the obliging conflict management style had a significant relationship to sex. Thus, the results of this

research question were consistent with previous findings; there is not an explanatory relationship between sex and conflict management strategies.

The second research question inquired about the possible relationship between gender roles and preferred conflict styles. There was a significant relationship between both the avoiding and dominating style in respect to masculine and feminine gender roles. As expected, there were more significant relationships between gender role and conflict management than sex and conflict management. Gender roles offer a more accurate classification system because individuals are categorized according to personality characteristics rather than biological sex. Despite the fact that there was a greater relationship seen in gender roles, only two of the five conflict management strategies determined a relationship between gender and conflict management, and some of the relationships were unanticipated.

Individuals who are more masculine tend to be more achievement-oriented and less directed by feminine characteristics, such as concern for others. Thus, the relationship between the masculine gender role and the dominating conflict management strategy, high concern for self and low concern for others, was not surprising. However, the relationship between the feminine gender role and the dominating conflict management strategy was surprising because feminine individuals are typically more concerned for others than themselves. The avoiding conflict management style is associated with a low concern for self and a low concern for others. Due to the low concern for others the relationship between the masculine gender role and avoiding conflict management strategy was logical. However, once again the relationship seen between the feminine gender role and the avoiding style was unexpected.

The results from research question two have been illustrated in previous research. Brewer (2002) conducted a study regarding conflict management and found a significant relationship between the avoiding, dominating, and integrating conflict management strategies and gender but not between obliging and compromising. Thus, the lack of a clear relationship both in this study and in previous research between the five conflict management strategies and the three gender roles leads the researcher to believe that exploring a mediating variable might provide a clearer relationship.

The third research question explored the possible relationship between preferred conflict style and the organizational status of the respondent. No significant differences in conflict management styles according to organizational status were found. Despite the lack of significant relationships, there were some interesting findings as to which levels of management preferred which conflict management strategies. The integrating and avoiding styles had the lowest mean score and most prevalent relationship with upper management. This finding was interesting because the integrating style pertains to a high concern for self and a high concern for others, whereas the avoiding style pertains to a low concern for self and a low concern for others. These two styles are opposite and yet were used most frequently by the upper management. Lower management tended to be more dominating in their conflict management. This finding was surprising because research on the communication between superiors and subordinates suggests superiors, or lower management, tend to say what is expected of them rather than what they actually believe (Rahim, 1983). Thus, for lower management to use a conflict style with a high concern for self and low concern for others goes against previous findings on communication between superiors and subordinates. The three levels of management, lower, middle and upper, were almost identical in their use of obliging, and compromising conflict management styles.

Whereas previous research on conflict management in organizations explains that the status of the respondent may have an impact on preferred conflict management style, it is also explained that a multidimensional treatment of conflict may provide more insights on organizational conflict (Gross & Guerrero, 2000; Putnam & Poole, 1987; Song, et al., 2006). This research question did address the status of the respondent and the preferred conflict management strategy, but the lack of a significant relationship demonstrates the need for a mediating variable.

Research question four explored the relationship between the organizational status of both parties involved in the conflict, the respondent and the other party, and the preferred conflict management strategy of the respondent. There was no significant relationship determined. This lack of a relationship was unexpected because previous research explained that factors associated with the second party are crucial to understanding conflict and may have an impact on an individual's preferred conflict management style (Knapp & Putnam, 1988). Thus, it was surprising to find that there was not a significant difference between conflict with a subordinate or boss for any of the different levels of management. This lack of a relationship may be due to the small sample size of participants, or it may be that status does not impact preferred conflict management styles.

In research question five the relationship between the number of years a respondent had been with his or her company and preferred conflict management strategy was explored and no significant relationship was found. The lack of a relationship between these variables leads the researcher to believe that the number of years a respondent has been with his or her company is not a determining factor in conflict management strategies. Similarly, research

question six addressed the possible relationship between the age of the respondent and the preferred conflict management strategy and no relationship was found. Once again, the age of the respondent is not a factor in one's preferred conflict management strategy. There was, however, a relationship determined between the age of the respondent and the number of years the respondent had been with his or her company. The older the respondent the greater number of years he or she had worked at his or her organization. Even though this relationship did not have an impact on conflict management style, it does speak to the retention of employees in organizations.

The final research question asked if organizational status mediates the relationship between gender roles and conflict management strategies. It was determined that status is not a mediating variable for gender roles and conflict management strategies. In light of research question three, and research question four, these findings were not unexpected. In order for status to mediate the relationship between conflict management and gender, a relationship between organizational status and conflict management would have been needed, and as explained in research question three and four there was no significant relationship between these two variables. Despite the fact that organizational status was not found to be a mediating variable for conflict management and gender, research on mediating variables is still relevant. A multidimensional treatment of conflict may further explain the relationship between gender and conflict management, and future research is called for.

Limitations

As with most undergraduate research, there were quite a few limitations to this study. First, the study fell under a strict time constraint. The researcher had less than four months to complete the initial research, design the inventory, collect data, and analyze the results. Also, the researcher had little experience completing scholarly research. Attempting to finish a scholarly study in the limited amount of time and without a great deal of past experience caused some difficulties in obtaining a sufficient number of participants and also understanding the previous research.

Additionally, the number of participants was a limit because the number of participants was lower than the researcher had desired. Almost all of the participants were located in the Midwest region and were Caucasian. Due to the small number of participants and lack of racial or geographical diversity, it is impossible for the researcher to make a generalization about a larger population. Additionally, the small number of participants may have had an impact on the statistical results of the study, and more significant relationships may have been determined with a larger sample size. Unfortunately, this study was not able to go into great detail about the corporate culture of each individual's organization, which may have been a limitation. When conducting research regarding the participants' experience in a work setting, the corporate culture, departmental climate, and the specific demands of the participants' workplace may have had an effect on how the participants answered the questions. Also, the participants' understanding of conflict may have influenced his or her preference for a particular conflict strategy and the way he or she responded to the questions posed by the ROCI-II.

Future Research

The results of the study proved interesting, and further research on the topic of conflict management according to gender role and status is suggested. It would be of great merit to repeat this study with a larger, more diverse population. A larger sample of participants with more diversity may uncover new relationships or further the relationships found in this study.

As this study has demonstrated, organizational conflict is diverse, and it is difficult to conclude what variables are determining factors for preferred conflict management strategies. Thus, in addition to repeating this study with a broader group of participants, future research could explore a different mediating variable such as race, job satisfaction, or the depth of the relationship between the co-workers involved in the conflict. Also, future research could focus on a specific organization and explore aspects of the organizational culture and conflict management. This study was unable to address any aspects of the organizational climate or demands of the workplace, and this may have hindered the research. Future research could explore an organization through a case study to truly understand the organizational culture and could follow up by interviewing organizational members in an attempt to develop a deeper understanding of conflict.

CONCLUSION

Previous research on organizational conflict has generally utilized a one-dimensional approach to understanding conflict focusing solely on sex in relation to conflict management strategies. As a result of the inconsistencies in previous research, this study explored the conflict management strategies used in organizations according to gender role and organizational status. Whereas there was a significant relationship between gender role and preferred conflict management styles, there was not a significant relationship between organizational status and conflict

management strategies. Additionally, it was discovered that organizational status does not mediate the relationship between gender roles and conflict management. These findings are significant to research on conflict management because the findings explain that gender has more of an impact on how one manages conflict than organizational status. Thus, the idea that organizational status is a determinant of conflict management needs to be re-evaluated. Additionally, these findings demonstrate that the communication differences between subordinates and superiors may not be as prevalent as previous researchers described. The results of this study demonstrate the complexities of organizational conflict and present new avenues for future scholars to explore.

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