

Full Length Research Paper

Managing conflicts through personality management

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This research integrates personality management with conflict management and examines the relationship between interpersonal conflict and personality types selected from Big Five model. In general, personality dimensions (extraversion, conscientiousness, neuroticism) were related to interpersonal conflict. The study was aimed to uncover the moderating role of personalities to reduce conflict. The study was cross sectional and survey research design was used. Correlation, regression and moderation were applied to analyze the impact of personality traits on interpersonal conflict and their moderating nature. The moderating role of personality is identified as results are significant for conscientiousness and neuroticism whereas insignificant for extraversion.

Key words: Personality management, conflict management, big five model, personality transformation, frequency matching.

INTRODUCTION

The researchers are taking interest in two phenomena-personality management (Raja et al., 2004; Rahim, 1983) and conflict management (Tjosvold, 1998; Schneer and Chanin, 1987; Van de Vliert and Euwema, 1994) in organizational behavior for decades. This highlights the importance of managing conflicts and personality management. The present study is a unique contribution to the literature because very limited research has been conducted on present dimensions of this study. We are interested in linking and integrating personality management with conflict management, as we discuss evidences from literature that level of interpersonal conflict depends on personality type of human beings interacting with each other.

According to Prof. Mark A. May (Davis, 1929), "the personality is a social stimulus value of an individual". According to Prof. May, "responses by others to dress, body type, manners, voice, language, social actions, define individual's personality". In the view of Moody (1988), personality is "the feature behaviors people show

to respond to the world and the ways they desire to gain knowledge".

Thomas (1992) defines conflict as "the inaptness in response propensity within a person". He worked on the conflicts taking place among different persons, groups, organizations and social entities and termed it 'interpersonal conflict'. According to Putnam and Wilson (1982), conflicts are differences of opinion among inter-reliant relations which leads to irreconcilable goals and interests; whereas, Wall and Callister (1995) take it as a process which starts with perception of one party which another party is opposing, or negatively affecting the first party's interests.

Conflict management is "the treatment of grievances", according to Black (1990). He proposed five types of conflict management techniques and communal conditions under which these strategies will be used. Conflict seriously affects the performance of employees, partners, organizational processes and outputs. The importance of conflict management has been recognized in many fields like management, organizational behavior, psychology and communication (Greenhalgh, 1987; Pruitt and Rubin, 1986; Robey et al., 1989; Wall and Callister 1995).

The focus of many researchers is to examine the

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response of conflict in terms of personality reaction to that conflict (Bolger and Zuckerman, 1995; Berry and Willingham, 1997; Suls et al., 1998) whereas, it is also described by some authors that responses to conflict and conflict related behaviors are dependent on traits of personalities (Graziano et al., 1996).

This research is conducted to find out the relationship between interpersonal conflict and personality traits. The main concept behind the research is to test the idea of temporary transformation of personality by an individual. If an individual has interpersonal conflict with other persons, then by predicting the other person's personality type, the individual may transform his personality components with the other personality types of Big Five model for 'frequency matching' to avoid or reduce conflict levels. The research will develop a universal theory because conflict is the problem of human being not of a geographical region or segment.

Personality, conflict and personality change

Researchers are working to uncover relationship between personality and conflict for decades. It is found that choice of strategies for conflict reduction varies from individual to individual (Rahim, 1983; Van de Vliert and Euwema, 1994; Schmeer and Chanin, 1987). Conflicts are the vital part of all organizations and conflict management is essential to solve the problems raised by conflict and to overcome the negative impacts of conflict (Ahmed et al., 2010). According to Tjosvold (1998), conflicts are very important segment of organizations. Unlike other assets of organizations, only human assets are the parties of conflict. The human part of organization is the most important part that is responsible to manage other assets and resources of organizations. The conflict is caused by human interaction. It is necessary to handle conflict in public, employees and organizations for good productivity, financial performance and relationship building. Individuals can get more advantage, if they know how to handle conflict in a proper way. It will improve the interaction qualities, organizational performance and group activities in organizations. The choice of proper conflict handling technique varies from individual to individual. Human beings cannot avoid conflicts and perceive it as a detrimental process (Lindelow and Scott, 1989). Conflict can be negative or positive, depending on our perception and how conflict is handled (Rahim, 1986). Proper management of work conflict is profitable for organization as well as for employees. When conflicts are produced, only appropriate conflict handling techniques can reduce the harmful impacts of conflict and ambiguity (Tidd and Friedman, 2002). According to Tjosvold (1998), individuals and groups can increase their work efficiency

if conflicts are properly handled. The same was found by Rahim (2002) and Friedman et al. (2000).

Among many determinants of conflict management style, personality traits are most important (Robbins et al., 2008). There are many personality measurement techniques used in research, we used Big Five Model of personalities (Goldberg, 1999) which is widely used, studied and discussed by researchers in organizational behavior studies and has good impact as well. The Big Five Model consists of five personality dimensions known as Extraversion, agreeableness, openness to experience, neuroticism, and conscientiousness (Robbins et al., 2008, Barrick and Mount, 1991; Judge et al., 2002). Moberg (2001) investigated that Big Five Model has direct impact on individual's conflict handling technique selection. Openness to experience, agreeableness and extraversion are significantly positively correlated with conflict handling style (Antonioni, 1998). The impact of self and partner personality on interpersonal conflict has been examined by researchers. They investigated this relationship between married couples, friends, class fellows and roommates (Buss, 1991; Geist and Gilbert, 1996; Thomsen and Gilbert, 1997). Anwar (2010) explored the relationship between openness to experience and neuroticism. It was found that both personalities have high conflict levels with each other but these conflicts can be moderated by overlapping personality dimensions which must be revealed in future.

Many research studies used self reported and partner reported personality traits which are associated with self reported relationship adjustment. However, the comprehensive personality model is used by very few researchers (Kurdek, 1997). Most of the studies measure one or two personality traits. It is also important to note that some of the personality traits are being studied frequently by researchers like neuroticism; whereas, conscientiousness and openness to experience were studied less frequently. The Big Five dimension known as openness to experience has controversial structure, limited research support and weak relevance to organizational behavior (McCrae and Costa, 1997). So, the present inscription do not cover all the Big Five personality dimensions as researchers omitted few of personality dimensions (Raja et al., 2004) like agreeableness.

We discussed the relationship and 'moderating' effects of extraversion, conscientiousness and neuroticism on interpersonal conflict in this study. The present study is based on two assumptions. First, each personality type has certain level of conflict with other personality types. This level of conflict is termed as "intrinsic conflict". Secondly, people can transform their personality temporarily (principle of frequency matching), when required. This is termed as "temporary personality transformation".

McCaulley and Natter (1974) and Myres and Myres (1980) highlighted the importance of personality because personality dimensions determine the learning behavior of people. According to Barron (1981), human personality is based on his genes and the range of predictability is from fifty to eighty percent. He argued that personality cannot change completely but habits can be changed. American Psychological Association (APA) conducted a one day session on the topic "Can personality change?" and invited reputed psychology and personality scholars in 1992 (Heatherton and Weinberger, 1994). Scholars provided evidences that adult personality remains stable; many researchers highlighted the incontrovertible fact that people change their attitudes, plans, activities and purposes, and we know that these factors also define personality. James (1990) exemplified the personality change in a different and explicable way. A personality that faces an abrupt religion change now will influence according to new religion's lessons. James focused that individual components of personality do not alter much at the accurate time of religion transformation but the partial change can be seen. The complete personality will change gradually with religious teaching. Researchers presented their models distinguishing the aspects of human personality that 'readily change' and those that do not change. McAdams (1992) presented a three level model that explains the personality change whereas McCrae and Costa (1995, 1996) explained more logical hypothesized interrelations to understand the personality.

Extraversion

This personality dimension describes people who are sociable, gregarious, assertive, energetic, talkative, enthusiastic and ambitious, with high desire of wealth, status, recognition, and power. People with this personality expose dominance and affiliation (Robbins et al., 2008; Costa and McCrae, 1988, 1992).

Extroverts want to be dominant, assertive and forceful (Trapnell and Wiggins, 1990; Costa and McCrae, 1992); these characteristics of personality play an important role in handling conflict and making conflict resolution strategies (Schneer and Chanin, 1987). This personality trait is directly proportional to anger and its strength (Buss, 1991; Geist and Gilbert, 1996; McFatter, 1998). One can think that extroverts might face more number of conflicts due to anger but empirical evidences show the opposite (Asendorpf and Wilpers, 1998). Therefore we suggest that:

H_{1a}: Extraversion is negatively related to interpersonal conflict.

H_{1b}: Extraversion moderates the relationship between neuroticism and interpersonal conflict.

Conscientiousness

This dimension of Big Five inventory describe those people who are responsible, dependable, persistent, organized, disciplined, methodical, diligent, risk averse, achievement oriented and purposeful (Robbins et al., 2008; John and Srivastava, 1999; Goldberg, 1990). They show high performance and job satisfaction in organizations (Barrick and Mount, 1991; Judge et al., 1999, 2002).

There is no famous research conducted to examine the impact of conscientiousness on conflict (Bono et al., 2002). Researchers thought that this personality dimension expresses people who are responsible, dependable, organized, disciplined, diligent, achievement oriented, and purposeful (Robbins et al., 2008; John and Srivastava, 1999; Goldberg, 1990), so it is very unlikely to have interpersonal conflicts (Bono et al., 2002). According to Fuller and Hall (1996), the reasons of conflict in this personality could be difference in living style and habits between partners; however, the exact relationship and direction cannot be predicted confidently. Hence, we propose that:

H_{2a}: Conscientiousness is negatively related to interpersonal conflict.

H_{2b}: Conscientiousness moderates the relationship between extraversion and interpersonal conflict.

Neuroticism

Neuroticism is personality dimensions that typify persons as calm, depressed, insecure, emotionally unstable, mistrust, anxiety, and hedonism (Robbins et al., 2008; Judge et al., 1999; Goldberg, 1990). People having this type of personality, always have limited social networks and avoid managerial tasks (Judge et al., 1997).

According to Bouchard et al. (1999), neurotic persons recurrently expose negative emotions which injure their close relations and increase conflicts with others. Murray et al. (1996) exposed that people feel good by idealizing their partner's interpersonal attributes but persons with neurotic personality very rarely idealize their partners which leads to low level of adjustments and high number of conflicts. The results of research show that neurotic personalities have more conflicts with their partners (Bouchard et al., 1999). Therefore our proposition is:

H_{3a}: Neuroticism is positively related to interpersonal conflict.

H_{3b}: Neuroticism moderates the relationship between conscientiousness and interpersonal conflict.

Figure 1 gives an overview of the framework.

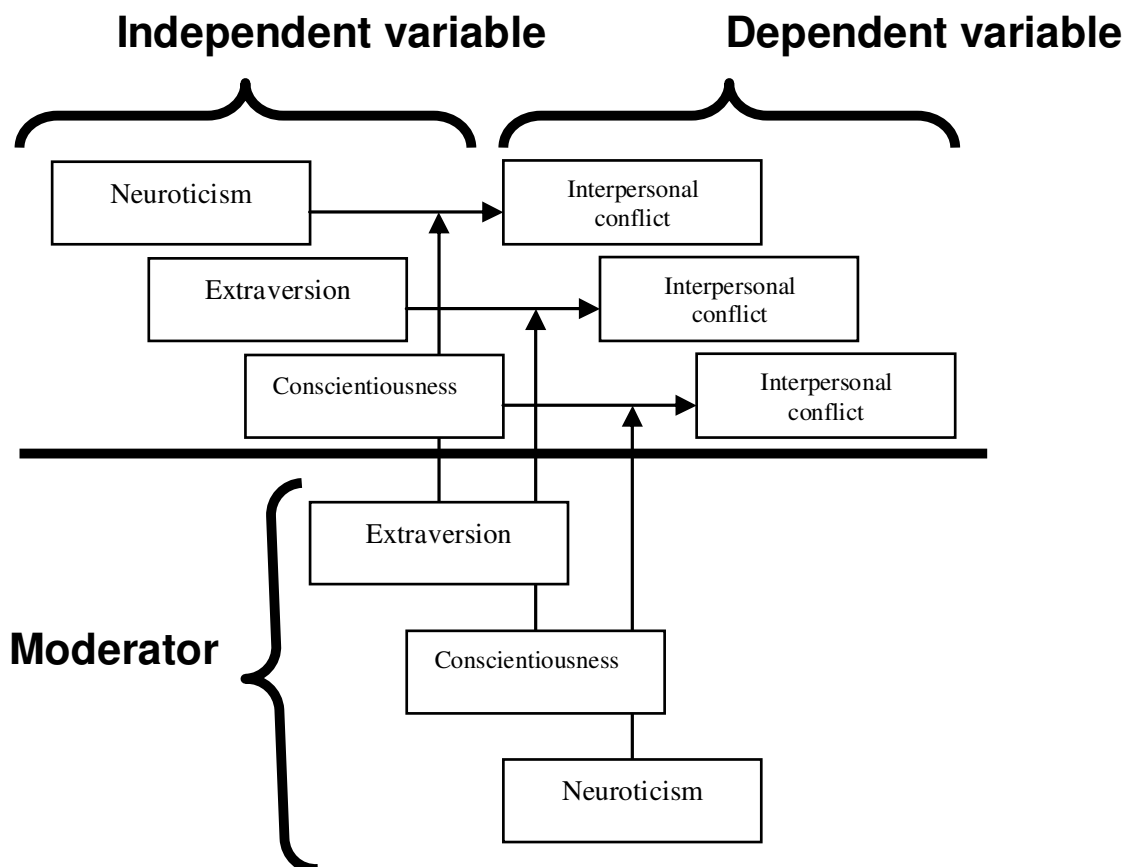


Figure 1. Theoretical framework.

METHODS

Sample and procedures

The present study was a cross sectional study and was conducted among people of five different work environments of Pakistan. The selected organizations are well known in the country; one is an international university, second is a private bank, third is a public sector department in federal capital city of Pakistan and the remaining two are private sector organizations. An introductory session was organized before disseminating the questionnaires to develop know how to the employees about the research topic.

Copies of the questionnaire were disseminated to respondents by hand and e-mail. As the focus of research is to highlight the important and sensitive relationship of personality dimensions, interpersonal conflict and the moderating role of personality traits, target sample organizations were selected carefully for the study. These are the popular institutions in which only competitive people of Pakistan like to serve. As the study was self financed by the author, owing to limited resources and time precincts, convenience sampling method was used. A total of 325 questionnaires were disseminated. 226 were received back, giving a response rate of 69.53%. After analyzing the questionnaires, it was found that 26 questionnaires were useless because of non serious and misleading answers. So, the total size of responses being analyzed for statistical modeling was 200 (n = 200), which is 88.49% of total

received questionnaires. The male respondents were 87% and female were 13% only. The reason of less female respondents is due to cultural limitations because fewer females prefer job in Pakistani culture. The rate of married respondents was 59%. The average age of respondent was 29 years, having graduate and postgraduate credentials.

Measures

The data were collected by means of standard questionnaires. The scale used for measurement was "Likert scale", which is, 1, "strongly disagree," to 5, "strongly agree" for personality measurement, and for interpersonal conflict, it was 1, "never," to 5, "very often". English is taught as a foremost, compulsory subject from start till university level and English is the medium of instruction in Pakistani education system. Every educated person in Pakistan understands English that is why, the translation of the questionnaire into the native language was not necessary.

Extraversion, conscientiousness and neuroticism

Required personality dimensions were measured with 25 items selected form Big Five Inventory (BFI) taken from John and Srivastava (1999). The average reported Cronbach's alpha for the

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, correlations and reliabilities^a.

Variable	Mean	S.D	1	2	3	4
Extraversion	3.13	0.64	1 (0.71)			
Conscientiousness	3.34	0.61	0.13	1 (0.71)		
Neuroticism	3.06	0.73	-0.15*	-0.50**	1 (0.83)	
Interpersonal conflict	2.52	0.89	0.19**	-0.18**	0.44	1 (0.82)

^an = 200; alpha reliabilities are given in parentheses; * correlation is significant at $p < 0.05$; **correlation is significant at $p < 0.01$.

Table 2. Results of regression analyses for personality types^a.

Predictors	Interpersonal conflict	
	β	R ²
Personality types		
Extraversion	0.27*	0.03***
Conscientiousness	-0.26*	0.03*
Neuroticism	0.54**	0.20**

^an = 200; * $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.001$; *** $p < 0.007$.

extraversion and conscientiousness is 0.71 and for neuroticism is 0.83. Higher scores on BFI scale is high in respective personality type.

Interpersonal conflict

Interpersonal conflict was measured with 4 items interpersonal conflict at work scale (ICAWS) taken from Spector and Jex (1998). The average reported Cronbach's alpha for the conflict scale is 0.82. Higher scores on conflict scale designate greater conflict.

RESULTS

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics, correlations among variables and their alpha reliabilities. Correlations were significant at $p < 0.05$ and $p < 0.01$. The arithmetic mean for extraversion, conscientiousness, neuroticism and interpersonal conflict was 3.13 (s.d. = 0.64), 3.34 (s.d. = 0.61), 3.06 (s.d. = 0.73) and 2.52 (s.d. = 0.89) respectively. The correlation between extraversion and interpersonal conflict was 0.19, conscientiousness and interpersonal conflict was -0.18, neuroticism and interpersonal conflict was 0.44. The bivariate associations shown in correlation matrix supported H_{2a} and H_{3a} whereas H_{1a} was not supported.

Regression analyses

We executed regression analyses to investigate the hypotheses. Due to the broad and dynamic nature of Big

Five personality dimensions, the challenging task was the analyses of data. We run separate regression analyses for Big Five personality dimensions of extraversion, conscientiousness and neuroticism. This method is suggested by many personality researchers (Hough and Schneider, 1996).

Interpersonal conflict was regressed on extraversion, conscientiousness and neuroticism. The results presented in Table 2 indicate that conscientiousness ($\beta = -0.26$, $p < 0.01$) and neuroticism ($\beta = 0.54$, $p < 0.001$) are significant predictors of interpersonal conflict, whereas extraversion ($\beta = 0.27$, $p < 0.007$) is also significant predictor of interpersonal conflict but the direction of association is opposite to our hypotheses. The results supported H_{2a} and H_{3a}, whereas H_{1a} was not supported.

Moderator analyses

We used moderated regression analysis as suggested by Lindley and Walker (1993) to examine the effects of selected personality dimensions on interpersonal conflict. First, we calculated the 'interaction term' between the selected independent variable and moderator variable. To cope with multicollinearity problem, the independent and moderator variables are transformed into standardized values as recommended by Tabachnick and Fidell (2001). In the first step of hierarchical regression model, we entered personality variables to predict interpersonal conflict. The interaction terms between independent personality variable and moderating

Table 3. Results of moderator regression analyses for personality types^a.

Predictors	Interpersonal conflict		
	β	R	ΔR^2
Moderator analyses			
Personality types			
Step 1			
Neuroticism	0.60		
Extroversion	0.38	0.2	0.27
Step 2			
Neuroticism \times Extroversion	0.02	0.27	0.00
Step 1			
Extroversion	0.31**		
Conscientiousness	-0.31**	0.08**	0.08**
Step 2			
Extroversion \times Conscientiousness	-0.08	0.10*	0.02*
Step 1			
Neuroticism	0.58**		
Conscientiousness	0.08	0.20**	0.20**
Step 2			
Neuroticism \times Conscientiousness	-0.45**	0.20*	0.19**

^an = 200; * $p < 0.04$; ** $p < 0.001$.

personality variable were entered in the second step of hierarchical regression.

The results presented in Table 3 show that, addition of first interaction term (neuroticism \times extroversion) in regression model does not yield significant results [$F(1,196) = 0.220$, n.s.]. When second interaction term (extroversion \times conscientiousness) is added to the predictor and moderator variables, the R^2 change is 0.02. This change is significant [$F(1,196) = 4.34$, $p < 0.04$]. The significant interaction tells that our presumed moderator (conscientiousness) does indeed moderate the effects of the predictor (extroversion) on the outcome variable (interpersonal conflict). The third interaction (neuroticism \times conscientiousness) is also moderately significant [$F(1,196) = 61.55$, $p < 0.001$] with R^2 change equal to 0.19. This shows that our alleged moderator (conscientiousness) moderates the effects of neuroticism on interpersonal conflict.

DISCUSSION

The main focus of this research was to investigate the relationship between human personality and

interpersonal conflict and testing the concept of temporary personality transformation by an individual. We found good support to our many hypotheses in this regard. Four out of six predictions were corroborated. It was found that extraversion is associated and predicts interpersonal conflict. According to literature reviewed, extraversion is negatively associated to interpersonal conflict which disapproved our results. As we know that extroverts always want to be dominant, assertive, and forceful (Trapnell and Wiggins, 1990; Costa and McCrae, 1992), due to this nature, they handle conflict situations effectively but "autocratically" which increase the interpersonal conflict level. The positive relation to anger (Buss, 1991; Geist and Gilbert, 1996; McFatter, 1998) and autocratic style of extroverts both increases the 'intrinsic' conflict. No support was found that extraversion moderates the relationship between neuroticism and interpersonal conflict.

The evidence supported our hypotheses that conscientiousness is negatively related to interpersonal conflict and conscientiousness moderates the relationship between extraversion and interpersonal conflict. According to Bono et al. (2002), no eminent research examines the impact of conscientiousness on

conflict. Some researchers thought that individuals with this personality type do not have interpersonal conflicts with others. Fuller and Hall (1996) pointed that reasons of conflict in this personality type could be incongruity in living style and habits between cronies; however, the direction of association cannot be vaticinated confidently. The present work fills this gap because our hypothesis about negative bivariate association between conscientiousness and interpersonal conflict is well supported.

According to our statistical figures, neuroticism is positively related to interpersonal conflict and neuroticism moderates the relationship between conscientiousness and interpersonal conflict.

The results provided significant support to our main concept that one individual can adopt the components of other personality types or temporarily transform his personality.

In the context of the present study, the concept of personality transformation should not be taken in the way that other people can mold individual's personality as it is possible as studied by James (1990) but requires long term teaching plus motive.

The case reported by James is very special and unique to understand that personality can be changed but our focus is to highlight the fact that "the first party can adopt the components of personality dimensions (with moderating effects) from Big Five Model, by predicting the personality type of second party to minimize interpersonal conflict level. This temporary personality transformation is known as "principle of frequency matching". This principle was discussed in the case research studied by Anwar (2010). The aim of this study was only to uncover the hidden fact that people can match their frequency by temporary personality transformation to reduce interpersonal conflict. We conducted cross sectional research with convenience sampling technique, both have many limitations. We suggest personality researchers to conduct longitudinal study to generalize the findings with higher degree of confidence.

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