

## **Interpersonal Conflict Management Styles in Information Technology (IT) Industry Based on Demographic Variables**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The competitiveness among employees in Information Technology (IT) industry is always felt or heard as most, compared to other industries. This has the potential for increased interpersonal conflicts (IPC) at workplace among associates in IT industry. Although many of the associates find ways to manage such conflict, very little is known about how it is managed. This study analyzes the interpersonal conflicts handling styles of employees based on their demographic characteristics (age, gender, religion, educational qualification and marital status), as the demographic factors are expected to have bearing on the respondent's exhibition of Interpersonal conflict handling style at work place. A total of 512 samples have been collected from the top 5 Indian IT companies of the year 2015, based on revenue, profit and market capitalization as published by the National Association of Software and Services Companies (NASSCOM) were selected for this study. Descriptive research method is used to analyze the responses from participants.*

**Keywords:** Interpersonal, Conflict, workplace, demographic and Information Technology.

### **INTRODUCTION:**

Conflict may be defined as a struggle or contest between people with opposing needs, ideas, beliefs, values, or goals (Diez et al, 2006). Conflict is inevitable, however, the results of conflict are not predetermined. Conflict might escalate and lead to nonproductive results, or conflict can be beneficially resolved and lead to quality final products. Therefore, learning to manage conflict is integral to perform better. Largely, conflict results because of miscommunication between people with regard to their needs, ideas, beliefs, goals, or values.

Conflict may seem to be a problem to some, but this isn't how conflict should be perceived. On the other hand, it is an opportunity for growth and can be an effective means of opening up among groups or individuals. However, when conflict begins to draw back productivity and gives way to more conflicts, then conflict management would be needed to come up with a resolution.

Conflict Management involves the reduction, elimination, or termination of all forms and types of conflict. Five styles of conflict management identified are: competing, compromising, collaborating, avoiding, and accommodating (Thomas & Kilmann, 1977). Integrating is high concern for both self and others, Competing is high concern for self and low concern for others, Accommodating is low concern for self and high concern for others, Avoiding is low concern for both self and others and compromising is moderate levels of concern for both self and others.

Conflict management minimizes the negative outcomes of conflict and promotes the positive outcomes of conflict with the goal of improving learning in an organization (Rahim, 2002). The aim of conflict management is that Businesses & Individuals can benefit from appropriate types and levels of conflict. Conflict management does not imply conflict resolution. Organizational conflict at the interpersonal level includes disputes between peers as well as supervisor-subordinate. Conflict management is the principle that all conflicts cannot necessarily be resolved, but learning how to manage conflicts can decrease the odds of nonproductive escalation. This study focuses on analyzing the interpersonal conflict management styles of employees of IT industry based on their demographic characteristics.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW:**

ChangWon Lee et al. (1990) observed conflict management styles of 90 middlelevel managers from a large Korean furniture manufacturing company. By using accomplices, conflict conditions were introduced in a controlled setting which simulated the features of a work environment. The experiment manipulated the relative status among the subjects and observed the influence of this treatment on the subjects' choices among different conflict management styles. Both structured observations and self - report questionnaires converged to show that conflict management styles differed significantly when the managers interacted with superiors, peers, or subordinates: the managers were mainly avoiding with superiors, compromising with peers, and competing with subordinates.

Sayed M. ElsayedEkjiouly et al. (1996) in their study investigated the influence of culture on styles of handling interpersonal conflicts. The Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory was used to collect data on the conflict management styles of integrating, obliging, avoiding, dominating, and compromising. Two regions of the world were chosen: Middle Eastern countries and states (n = 913) and the United States (n = 144). MANCOVA was used to analyze the data. The results indicate that Arab Middle Eastern executives use more of an integrating and avoiding style in handling interpersonal conflict while U.S. executives use more of an obliging, dominating, and compromising style. Implications of the findings and future research are discussed.

Esharenana E. Adomi (2006) in her study in investigated pattern of conflict management in Nigerian university libraries. A survey employing descriptive design and using questionnaire to collect data from paraprofessional and professional staff of three Nigerian university libraries. The finding shows that majority of respondents perceive conflict as positive and can be stimulated by library managers; a majority of them have experienced conflict with their colleagues followed by those who experienced it with their boss(es); interpersonal conflict ranks highest in the type of conflict experienced in the libraries; organizational goal(s) is a major fact taken into consideration during conflictresolution while accommodation ranks highest as technique of conflict avoidance; it is concluded that library managers should deal with conflicts as soon as they arise.

EnverOzkalp et al. (2009) in their study aimed to determine Turkish managers' conflict styles in different sectors, namely durable consumer goods, aviation, automotive and banking. A total of 130 managers' conflict management styles were assessed by applying the Rahim's 1983 Organizational Conflict InventoryII. The find is, first, integrating and, second, compromising is found to be the most preferred conflict styles of Turkish managers. The other important finding is that preferring obliging styles of conflict management changes according to the status of managers. Obliging is mostly used when the conflict partner has an upper level status. The IT organizations are getting tuned to agile fashion of delivering to customers. Any conflict situations will lead to non-productive efforts and will be detrimental to the organizations productivity. It is of paramount importance to understand the Interpersonal conflict handling styles of employees in IT industry. There has been very limited study conducted so far on this subject in IT organizations. The previous studies have the following researchgaps, which has been addressed in this study.

- Very limited studies in IT industry in India
- Only few studies on analyzing the Interpersonal conflicts of employees in IT industry based on the demographic characteristics.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:**

This section explains the research objectives and a suitable methodology to achieve those objectives. This section describes the pilot study, participants of the study, Sampling Procedure, instrumentation used for the study, data collection, and data analysis procedures adopted for the study. Descriptive Research method was used to analyze the responses from participants. Rahim's organizational conflict inventory (ROCI II) (Rahim, 1983) questionnaire was adopted for this study. The data was obtained by distributing the physical questionnaires to the respondents and also through the use of an online survey using the platform [surverygizmo.com](http://surverygizmo.com). The top 5 Indian IT companies of the year 2015, based on revenue, profit and market capitalization as published by the National Association of Software and Services Companies (NASSCOM) were considered for the study. NASSCOM is a trade association of Indian Information Technology (IT) and Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) industry. The top 5 IT companies are as follows:

1. TCS - Tata Consultancy Services
2. Infosys
3. WIPRO
4. HCL technologies and
5. Tech Mahindra

The top 5 Indian IT Companies selected for the study majorly have their delivery centers in the Information technology hubs like Chennai, Mumbai, Pune, Bengaluru and Hyderabad.

The following procedure has been followed in order to arrive at the sample:

1. Cluster Sampling is applied to identify Chennai and Bangalore as 2 cluster samples for the study.
2. Cluster Sampling is again applied on the 5 IT companies to identify TCS as the cluster sample for the study
3. Simple Random sampling is applied in TCS Chennai and TCS Bangalore to identify the sample for the study.

The size of the population is approximately 12 Lakh employees and the empirical sample size is 400 with 5% margin of error, however a total of 512 samples have been taken for this study.

The data was obtained by distributing the physical questionnaires to the respondents and also through the use of an online survey using the platform [surveygizmo.com](http://surveygizmo.com). The data was collected over a period of 180 days. In general nearly 500 e - mails were sent to the employees and physical questionnaires were distributed to around 500 employees of IT Companies. Each questionnaire or e-mail contained information about the topic, instructions to fill, the length of the survey and the privacy conditions. First reminder was sent after 30 days of the first email followed by second reminder with the gap of 15 days. Information was finally gathered through questionnaire and in very few cases, interviews were also held in order to substantiate the data gathered. Separate appointments were scheduled with Delivery Heads of large accounts to explain the objective of the study. Only 547 filled in questionnaires were received out of which only 512 were found to be fully filled in, the rest 20 were discarded due to incomplete information. While analyzing the data, the focus was put on:

- Frequencies - Frequencies were used to determine how many answered each answer possibility for each question.
- Means - Means were used to find out the average score for some questions.
- Association - The independent and dependent variables were further tested using Chi - square test with the confidence level of 95% and the significance level of 5% respectively.

The research hypotheses are as follows;

**H1:** Age of the employees has a strong association with IPC management styles.

**H2:** Gender of the employees has a strong association with IPC management styles.

**H3:** Religion of the employees has a strong association with IPC management styles.

**H4:** Educational Qualification of the employees has a strong association with IPC management styles.

**H5:** Marital Status of the employees has a strong association with IPC management styles.

#### **ANALYSIS:**

This section analyses the Interpersonal Conflict Management styles of IT employees based on their demographic characteristics.

Age diversity in work place is regarded as competitive advantage among work force. Table 1 shows that youngest age group (21 – 25 years) respondents adopt more of avoiding style of handling interpersonal conflict than other age groups which infers that the younger age respondents in IT industry does not want to engage in unpleasant verbal or non verbal conversations with peers in any conflict situations. This invalidates the research findings, who circumvent self-reports using a multiple rater design (Davis et al., 2009) and show that supervisors, subordinates and peers agree that older employees use more frequent passive avoidant and active constructive conflict responses. In this study, It is also observed that more proportion of respondents exhibiting competing style of handling IPC are in the age group of 31 – 35 years, which infers that, this age group forming the middle management in IT industry try to be only assertive in handling conflicts and trying to win without considering the interests of other party. It is noted that more proportion of respondents exhibiting accommodating or Compromising style of handling IPC are in the age group of 36 – 40 years, which infers that with increase in age they minimize engaging in conflicts with peers and try to compromise in conflict situations. High proportion of respondents exhibiting collaborative style of handling IPC falls in age group 41 – 45 years, which could be attributed to the increase in maturity level of handling conflict situations wisely with increase in age.

**Table 1: Age\_Group and IPC management style distribution of respondents**

Age_Group_Range		IPC_Results					Total
		Collabo-rative	Accom-odatng	Comp-eting	Avoiding	Compro-mising	
21-25	Count	116	18	14	26	18	192
	% within Age_Group_Range	60.4%	9.4%	7.3%	13.5%	9.4%	100.0%
26-30	Count	122	14	8	12	26	182
	% within Age_Group_Range	67.0%	7.7%	4.4%	6.6%	14.3%	100.0%
31-35	Count	62	6	8	2	10	88
	% within Age_Group_Range	70.5%	6.8%	9.1%	2.3%	11.4%	100.0%
36-40	Count	20	4	2	0	8	34
	% within Age_Group_Range	58.8%	11.8%	5.9%	0.0%	23.5%	100.0%
41-45	Count	12	0	0	2	2	16
	% within Age_Group_Range	75.0%	0.0%	0.0%	12.5%	12.5%	100.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>332</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>512</b>
	<b>% within Age_Group_Range</b>	<b>64.8%</b>	<b>8.2%</b>	<b>6.3%</b>	<b>8.2%</b>	<b>12.5%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Conflict management is a very important skill within an organization to achieve the organization’s objectives and goals. With the increase in the number of women moving into IT organizations, the possible effect of gender differences in the ability to manage conflict comes to mind. Table 2 shows that Females (70.2 percent) are more collaborative than males (61.2 percent) in handling interpersonal conflict. Interestingly females are also more avoiding than males in handling IPC. On the other hand, Males are more accommodating, competing and compromising than Females in conflict situations. Irrespective of the age difference, majority of the respondents exhibit Collaborative style of handling IPC. Chi-square result: Gender of the respondents and their Interpersonal Conflict handling styles are associated at 5 % level (Pearson Chi-square: 0.002 at 94 degrees of freedom)

**Table 2 : Gender and IPC management style distribution of respondents**

Gender		IPC_Results					Total
		Collabo-rative	Accomo-datng	Comp-eting	Avoi-ding	Compr-omising	
Female	Count	146	12	4	22	24	208
	% within Gender	70.2%	5.8%	1.9%	10.6%	11.5%	100.0%
Male	Count	186	30	28	20	40	304
	% within Gender	61.2%	9.9%	9.2%	6.6%	13.2%	100.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>332</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>512</b>
	<b>% within Gender</b>	<b>64.8%</b>	<b>8.2%</b>	<b>6.3%</b>	<b>8.2%</b>	<b>12.5%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

The people from different religious background tend to handle conflicts based on the cultural differences in the religion. Table 3 shows that Hindus are more collaborative followed by Christians and Muslims in handling IPC. Majority of the respondents who exhibit accommodating and competing conflict handling behaviors are Muslims, while majority of the respondents who exhibit avoiding style are Hindus. It is also noted from the table that Muslims respondents do not exhibit Avoiding style while Hindu respondents do not exhibit Competing style in handling IPC. Irrespective of the religion, majority of the respondents exhibit Collaborative style of handling IPC. Chi-square result: Religion of the respondents and their Interpersonal Conflict handling styles are associated at 5 % level ( Pearson Chi-square: 0.002 at 94 degrees of freedom )

**Table 3 : Religion and IPC management style distribution of respondents**

Religion		IPC_Results					Total
		Collabo-rative	Accom-odatng	Comp-eting	Avoi-ding	Compro-mising	
Christian	Count	22	4	0	4	6	36
	% within Religion	61.1%	11.1%	0.0%	11.1%	16.7%	100.0%

Religion		IPC_Results					Total
		Collabo- -rative	Accom- -odatng	Comp- -eting	Avoi- -ding	Compro- -mising	
Hindu	Count	298	36	30	38	52	454
	% within Religion	65.6%	7.9%	6.6%	8.4%	11.5%	100.0%
Muslim	Count	8	2	2	0	2	14
	% within Religion	57.1%	14.3%	14.3%	0.0%	14.3%	100.0%
Other	Count	4	0	0	0	4	8
	% within Religion	50.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	50.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	332	42	32	42	64	512
	% within Religion	64.8%	8.2%	6.3%	8.2%	12.5%	100.0%

Knowledge about the subject is discussion during the conflict helps in taking informed decisions and acting the correct way while handling interpersonal conflict with peers and supervisors. Knowledge comes with education and has a direct relation to the educational qualification. Table 4 shows that the respondents who possess Diploma degree exhibit only accommodating style of handling IPC and respondents who are doctorates exhibit only collaborative style of handling IPC. Majority of the respondents exhibiting collaborative style are Post Graduates followed by under graduate and Doctorate respondents. Irrespective of the educational qualification, majority of the respondents exhibit Collaborative style of handling IPC. Chi-square result: Educational Qualification of the respondents and their Interpersonal Conflict handling styles are associated at 5 % level ( Pearson Chi-square: 0.003 at 12 degrees of freedom )

**Table 4: Educational Qualification and IPC management style distribution of respondents**

Educational_ Qual		IPC_Results					Total
		Collab- -orative	Accom- -odatng	Comp- -eting	Avoi- -ding	Compro- -mising	
Diploma	Count	0	2	0	0	0	2
	% within Education_ Qualification	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Under Graduation	Count	246	32	24	32	50	384
	% within Education_ Qualification	64.1%	8.3%	6.3%	8.3%	13.0%	100.0%
Post Graduation	Count	84	8	8	10	12	122
	% within Education_ Qualification	68.9%	6.6%	6.6%	8.2%	9.8%	100.0%
Doctorate	Count	2	0	0	0	2	4
	% within Education_ Qualification	50.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	50.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	332	42	32	42	64	512
	% within Education_ Qualification	64.8%	8.2%	6.3%	8.2%	12.5%	100.0%

Marriage brings in more responsibilities for any individual. The responsibilities could add to the pressure of the individual in handling work life balance, which could impact the Inter personal conflict handling style of individuals at work place. Table 5 shows that majority of the married respondents exhibit collaborative style while majority of the single respondents exhibit competing style of handling IPC. Also, the avoiding style is more exhibited by unmarried respondents. Irrespective of the marital status, majority of the respondents exhibit Collaborative style of handling IPC. Chi-square result: Marital Status of the respondents and their Interpersonal Conflict handling styles are associated at 5 % level ( Pearson Chi-square: 0.002 at 4 degrees of freedom )

**Table 5: Marital Status and IPC management style distribution of respondents**

Marital_Status		IPC_Results					Total
		Collabo- -rative	Accom- -odatng	Comp- -eting	Avoi- -ding	Compro- -mising	
Single	Count	180	26	28	30	38	302
	% within Marital_Status	59.6%	8.6%	9.3%	9.9%	12.6%	100.0%
Married	Count	152	16	4	12	26	210
	% within Marital_Status	72.4%	7.6%	1.9%	5.7%	12.4%	100.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>332</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>512</b>
	<b>% within Marital_Status</b>	<b>64.8%</b>	<b>8.2%</b>	<b>6.3%</b>	<b>8.2%</b>	<b>12.5%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

**CONCLUSION:**

The youngest age group (21 – 25 years) respondents adopt more of avoiding style of handling interpersonal conflict than other age groups. More proportion of respondents exhibiting competing style of handling IPC are in the age group of 31 – 35 years, which infers that, this age group forming the middle management in IT industry try to be only assertive in handling conflicts and trying to win without considering the interests of other party. There is no significant association between age group and IPC handling styles of employees in IT industry. Females (70.2 percent) are more collaborative than males (61.2 percent) in handling interpersonal conflict. Interestingly females are also more avoiding than males in handling IPC. On the other hand, males are more accommodating, competing and compromising than females in conflict situations. There is a strong association between the Gender of the respondents and their Interpersonal Conflict handling styles in IT industry. Hindus are more collaborative followed by Christians and Muslims in handling IPC. Majority of the respondents who exhibit accommodating and competing conflict handling behaviors are Muslims, while majority of the respondents who exhibit avoiding style are Hindus. It is also observed that Muslims respondents do not exhibit Avoiding style while Hindu respondents do not exhibit Competing style in handling IPC. There is a strong associate between the Religion of the respondents and their Interpersonal Conflict handling styles in IT industry. The respondents who possess Diploma degree exhibit only accommodating style of handling IPC and respondents who are doctorates exhibit only collaborative style of handling IPC. Majority of the respondents exhibiting collaborative style are Post Graduates followed by under graduate and Doctorate respondents. There is a strong associate between the Educational qualification of the respondents and their Interpersonal Conflict handling styles in IT industry. Majority of the married respondents exhibit collaborative style while majority of the single respondents exhibit competing style of handling IPC. Also, the avoiding style is more exhibited by unmarried respondents. There is a strong associate between the marital status of the respondents and their Interpersonal Conflict handling styles in IT industry.

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