

Linking Leadership Styles with Workplace Cognitive/task Conflict

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Abstract: The main purpose of this study is to evaluate that whether there is any significant relationship between different dimensions of leadership styles (transformational, transactional and laissez-faire) and workplace cognitive conflict. Few of the studies already been conducted to explore this new dimension of research i.e. conflict in organizations and also evaluate the impact of leadership on organizational conflict. But the study examined this relationship in different dimensions of leadership. For this study our sample is the academic staff of University of Gujrat. To evaluate and analyze the developed hypothesis we conducted a five point likert scale based questionnaire based survey. To interpret the results we used SPSS software and specifically regression and correlation test is used to analyze and interpret the results. The results of the study showed that there is a weak relationship between leadership styles and the cognitive conflict and the laissez faire leadership style significantly promote the task conflict amongst employees. But the study participate a lot towards top management that there is an importance of which leadership styles to overcome the cognitive conflict amongst the employees.

Key words: Transformational conflict • Transactional conflict • Laissez Faire conflict • Workplace conflict

INTRODUCTION

Every company wants to increase its profit margin and do some innovative activities to increase its market share. But all these things require persistent effort from organizational leadership and management. That's why most of the times companies hire those individuals for top level positions that have some type of excellent leadership skills (Lin Lu, Fan Zhou, Kwok Leung, 2011) [1]. Different organizational studies have already been conducted to evaluate the relationship of leadership styles (Transformational, Transactional and Laissez Faire) on employee performance, satisfaction, commitment, loyalty and satisfaction towards job [2-5]. But the topic is continuously ignored that whether there is any relationship between leadership styles and workplace task conflict. Because conflict is a fact of life and mostly a major threat for employees performance and also for organizational performance. To handle a conflict is a big challenge for every organizational leadership,

whether it is among peer group, bottom to top, or top to bottom. Before moving to next step we must understand that what conflict means.

“Generally, you can say that conflict is a situation when one individual disagree the thoughts and ideas of other individual.”

Usually researchers subdivide the concept of conflict into two dimensions i.e. cognitive conflict (task conflict) and relational conflict [6, 7] The first dimension i.e task related conflict occurs when there are some incompatibilities regarding interests or when there are some differences that how work will be performed [8-10]. Whereas relational conflict mostly occur when there are some emotional incompatibilities are occurred, that are based upon diversified personalities. Conflict always impact negatively on performance and satisfaction of employees but critiques said that most of the time it proves a constructive activity for the organization.

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So, this fact is considered while we will develop hypotheses and examine through proposed hypotheses that whether in some situations conflict is beneficial or harmful and what are the various root causes of this type of conflict.

Conflict is often easy to occur when there is no check and balance on employees from their leaders. The chances of conflict become greater when the roles and jobs in the organizations are not very clear and also when no one knows exactly that, what the expectations that organization wants from them are. In these types of situations, when roles are not so much clear, expectations are ambiguous and organizational rules and regulations are not properly communicated to the employees, chances of workplace conflict are increases. But if you want to reduce the level of conflict among your work groups or team members then leaders can plays a vital role in it [11,12]. Because if leaders properly motivated to their group members and assign tasks at regular intervals and on continuous basis then employees are more motivated towards their work instead of destructive activities like conflict. Same like the situation when leaders communicate clear roles towards employees. Because as much as the roles and tasks will clear the chances of conflict will be reduced. Proper communication of rules and regulations of organization from leaders could be a reason to reduce the level of conflict among group members.

So after seeing the importance of this relationship i.e. leadership styles and conflict at work place, this study is proposed and the main purpose of this study is to evaluate that whether there is any significant relationship between different dimensions of leadership styles and workplace conflict. Most of the studies suggested that leaders play a key role in managing conflict at work place [13] A leader may involve in organizational conflict in following three ways:

- First, when a leader is directly influence over workplace conflict i.e. (his/her management style of avoidance and collaboration) (Olivier Doucet, Jean Poitras & Denis Chenevert, 2008).
- Second, when a leader try to overcome the conflict facing among his/her subordinates i.e. (playing role of mediator, arbitrator or mentor) (Olivier Doucet, Jean Poitras & Denis Chenevert, 2008).
- Third, when a leader influences over workplace conflict by using his/her leadership style i.e. (to reduce conflict by using different styles) [5,6].

The research will be conducted with the help of different variables based upon dependent and independent nature. The above three leadership styles (Transformational, Transactional and Laissez Faire) will be treated like independent variables whereas cognitive conflict (task conflict) will be dependent here. Transformational leadership style will be discussed with four dimensions i.e. inspirational motivation, idealized influence, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration and the impact of these on cognitive conflict. And transactional leadership style will also be evaluated the nature of relationship between cognitive conflict with the dimensions i.e. contingent reward and management by exception (active and passive). Laissez faire leadership style will also be examined through its impact on cognitive conflict.

Statement of the Problem: Conflict is the fact of life and every organization facing the conflict and also suffering its harmful effects. Task Conflict is mostly considered a big hurdle in the work performance of employees and it becomes more harmful when it occur in such type of jobs having behavioral nature e.g. in educational sector where leader directly affect the follower's motivational level. Because in this sector more face to face interaction is required to achieve the desired objectives. So the major problem here is that how to reduce the harmful effects of interpersonal conflict by using different leadership styles. The whole study is conducted to evaluate that whether there is any relationship between leadership styles and conflict and to what extent the problem of conflict in University of Gujrat can be solved through leadership styles.

Objectives of Study: The objective of this study is to evaluate the impact of different leadership styles on workplace conflict. Basically the main objective of this study is:

- To check that whether there is a negative relationship between transformational leadership and relational conflict.
- To check that whether there is a negative relationship between transactional leadership and relational conflict.
- To check that whether there is a positive relationship between laissez faire leadership and relational conflict.

Significance of the Study: Most of the explorative studies highlight the importance of role of different leadership styles and their impact on employee performance, satisfaction, commitment, loyalty and satisfaction towards job. But very few of the studies suggest that how leadership affects task conflict in different dimensions. Study not only highlights the importance of leadership on workplace conflict but also examined that how leadership styles influence workplace conflict. The study participate a lot to evaluate that whether leadership styles influence the work place conflict. And also the study is very much helpful for the practicing managers, especially those who are very conscious towards their employee's relations and performance. Because the study explore the fact that whether leadership styles participate to overcome or enhance the level of conflict.

Review of Literature

Transformational Leadership: Whenever we are going to study leadership literature, it's often to distinguish into two forms i.e. transformational leadership and transactional leadership. Basically the differentiation concept in these two types of leadership first suggest by Burns (1978). In transformational leadership approach leaders try to increase the performance of employees through motivation, awareness, confidence and interest towards their work attitude [14]. According to Bass and Avolio (1990, 1995) transformational leadership based on behavioral approach in which you can inspire, motivate and activate your followers by establishing challenging goals and building interest for their work. Leaders who are having high transformational charisma are able to achieve maximum output from their workers, through trust building and loyalty of their employees for the leaders [13, 14]. Transformational leadership is further divided in four subscales to better understand the all aspects of transformational leadership i.e. idealized influence, individualized consideration, inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation [4,5,6].

Individualized Consideration: A leadership behavior in which a leader consider the contribution of workers or followers as an important and valuable for organization (James C Sarros & Joseph C Santora., 2001). According to (Joyce E. Bono, 2004) it's a leadership behavior in which you recognized the development needs of your followers and also consult with them in decision making. Simply you can say that to what extent a leader considers the needs of their followers [15].

Idealized Influence: A leadership dimension in which a leader influence over followers by using high ethical and moral values (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). suggests that the behavior in which leaders influence their followers by showing self confidence and the ability to achieve exceptional results. In which leaders considers as a role model for their followers. According to Bass (1990) to what extent your followers feel proud with your association as a leader.

Inspirational Motivation: (Judge & Piccolo, 2004) argues that inspirational motivation means that to what extent a leader communicate clearly the goals and visions of the organization that become the reason of inspiration for their followers. Leaders who use such type of behavior identify high standards and challenging goals to their followers and encourage them to accomplish these goals by using the norms of organization [16,17].

Intellectual Stimulation: [18] argues that in this dimension leaders encourage and motivate their workers to practice new ways of doing things and allocate new ways to solve the problems. The behaviors in which leader appreciate their followers for innovations. Leadership having this trait encourages new ideas and innovations towards the followers [3].

Transactional Leadership: [19] said that this type of leaders gives something to their followers in exchange of something that leader wants. This type of leaders influences their followers on the basis of cost & benefit analysis means that the followers needs are only recognized and fulfilled when they meet the expectations of leader [3-5] Under transactional leadership style the workers are reinforced positively or negatively by assigning rewards and bonuses after the successful accomplishment of task [3] This type of leadership is only beneficial when top management is innovative and introducing new ideas at every level. The transactional leadership is further operationalizing on the basis of these three dimensions i.e. contingent reward, management by exception (active and passive).

Contingent Reward: Said that in this type of leadership behavior reward are associated with their job commitments and usually rewards are assigned in tangible form against their efforts. According to it's a style of leadership in which both parties are agreed by mutual expectations that rewards are given at every successful completion of task.

Management by Exception: Explores that the behavior in which punishment and rewards towards followers are associated with contingent actions. This style of leadership concerns the follower's mistakes, errors and shortcoming. It is further divided into two subparts i.e. management by exception active and passive.

Active: Under this approach leader is pro-actively tried his best to overcome the deficiencies to reduce the chances of mistakes.

Passive: This type of leadership takes some actions when undesired behavior is occurred.

Laissez Faire Leadership: This type of leadership does not take part actively in management decisions and not actively participate in the operating functions of the business (Judge and Piccolo, 2004). Under this, leadership shows lazy behavior and tries to avoid taking responsibilities (Bass and Riggio, 2006). Laissez faire leadership is also called non-transactional leadership where leader's interaction with employees is very low or you can say that where leader not aggressively take part in the decisions and socializing towards employees.

Workplace Conflicts: Conflict is the reality of group and organizational lives, which can be seen in various forms. The study specifically highlights the one dimension of conflict i.e. cognitive (task) conflict which occurs due to disagreements between ideas, views and opinions (Jehn, 1997). (De Dreu and Weingart, 2003) argues that workplace conflict is always harmful for group performance because it create the supportive environment for negative emotions among group members and also deviate members from original objective. Cognitive (Task) conflict is mostly occurs when there is a disagreements between the ideas of two or more individuals. Task conflict is associated with negative emotions and dissatisfaction and sometimes it promotes relationship conflict (Curs,eu and Schruijer, 2010; Greer et al., 2008).

Impact of Leadership on Conflicts: Only the few studies highlight the relationship of leadership and task conflict and most of them are explorative. (Bass and Riggio, 2006) plays a vital role to explain this relationship and prove that leaders can play a central role in organizational conflict situations.

Transformational Leadership and Conflict: (Kimura, 2012) said that transformational form of leadership reduces the chances of unproductive conflict because

individuals are more motivated and concentrated towards their work. (Bass and Riggio, 2006) argue that if leader's focus is organizational interest instead of individualized interest then you can minimize the level of task conflict between subordinates. As conflict is the essential attribute between individuals relationship, but shared visions and goal clarity developed by the transformational leader can reduce the conflict (Olivier Doucet, Jean Poitras & Denis Chenevert, 2008). Moreover conflict can be reduced through influencing others as a role model and communicate to subordinates that how you can achieve better position by cooperating with each other (Olivier Doucet, Jean Poitras & Denis Chenevert, 2008). (Bass and Riggio, 2006, p. 69) states that you can impact positively in cognitive conflict type situations when you encourage them to mutually solve this issue and produce some new ideas. Most of the researches prove that transformational type of leadership increases the cohesiveness and collaboration amongst employees which become the reason of reduction of task conflict (Carless et al., 1995; Shamir et al., 1993). [19-25]When you recognized the needs of individuals then this type of act also de-motivates the task conflict situation (Bass and Riggio, 2006). According to (Parent and Gallupe, 2001) transformational leaders are more supportive, so they reduce the chances of cognitive conflicts at work place.

Transactional Leadership and Conflict: According to (Olivier Doucet, Jean Poitras & Denis Chenevert, 2008) transactional leadership reduce the chances of cognitive nature of conflict among members because in this, leaders maintain positive relationships with employees and individuals are more motivated towards their work for earning more. (Kotlyar and Karakowski, 2006) said that transactional type of leaders manage subordinates and their expectations which reduces frustration among them and also overcome task conflict because of continuous interaction with clearly communicated expectations. (Olivier Doucet, Jean Poitras & Denis Chenevert, 2008) suggest that transactional leadership is more effective in reducing cognitive conflict as compare to transformational leadership. When employees expectations are attached with rewards,[26] then employees are more motivated for rewards and compromise in most of the situations and ultimately task conflict is avoided (Bass and Riggio, 2006). (Parent and Gallupe, 2001) find that management by exception (active) leadership style usually promotes task conflict among subordinates.

Predictive model for study:

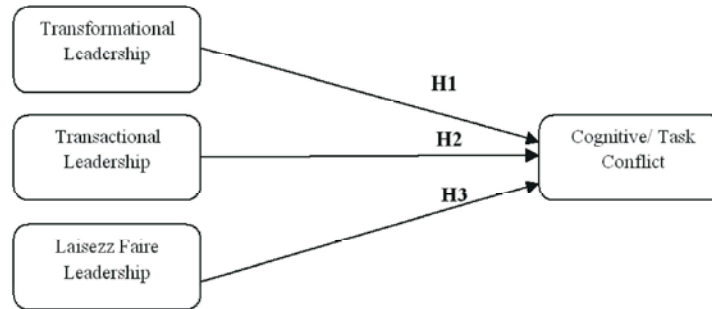


Fig. 1: Research Model

Laissez Faire Leadership and Conflict: The literature related to the relationship between laissez faire leadership and task conflict is very rare. The only study we met for evidence is related to Bass and Riggio (2006), who argues that sometimes laissez faire leadership style is very constructive in which conflict is resolved automatically after some time but most of the times it gives very harmful results. [27-30] Instead of this positive relationship between laissez faire leadership and conflict, we can also argue that the results could be harmful if not properly intervene during conflict hours.

Theoretical Framework: There are three independent variables in this study, these are:

- Transformational Leadership
- Transactional Leadership
- Laissez Faire Leadership

And the only one dependent variable in this study i.e.

- Cognitive conflict/ task conflict

Hypothesis: Following hypothesis will be developed to check the reliability and validity of the study.

H₀: There is no relationship between transformational leadership and relational conflict.

H₁: There is a negative relationship between transformational leadership and relational conflict.

H₀: There is no relationship between transactional leadership and relational conflict.

H₂: There is a negative relationship between transactional leadership and relational conflict.

H₀: There is no relationship between Laissez faire leadership and relational conflict.

H₃: There is a positive relationship between Laissez faire leadership and relational conflict.

METHODOLOGY

The targeted population in this study is the employees (academic staff only) of University of Gujrat (Hafiz Hayat Campus) and its constituent colleges. And our unit of analysis in this research is the administrative and academic staff of University of Gujrat.[31] Due to the time and resource limitations we will use simple or convenient random sampling in this study. And the nature of population is the employees (academic staff only) of all departments who are working under their leaders according to the hierarchical order. From the whole population the numbers of units that are used to conduct the research survey are called sample size of the respective population. Sample size is also called the subset of population.

A well known formula of Yamane (1967) has been used to get the appropriate representative sample

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + Ne^2}$$

Where

n= sample size

N= population size

e= margin of error

In this study N=400 e=0.05

This study our original sample size was 186 but due to non responses of employees, the sample size become of 122.

Questionnaire: Five point likert scale based questionnaire survey method is used to collect data. And whole questionnaires contain mostly close ended questions. Primary data is used in this study. There are two main

sections of the questionnaire one is containing the demographical information of the questionnaire and the second is containing the subjective information of the respective dependent and independent variables. [32] Second subjective section is further subdivided into four parts. Part I contains the questions regarding the transformational leadership and the items are adopted from Podsakoff et al. (1990). Part II and III contain the items regarding transactional leadership and laissez faire leadership and the items are adopted by Av. To assess the level of conflict the four items based construct is adopted from, [33-36]

Data Analysis: In this study we evaluate the impact of Transformational leadership, Transactional leadership and Laissez faire leadership on cognitive/task conflict. The construct that we used in this research is based upon the previous literature. And the previous studies that are held in different countries shows that there is a relationship of these independent and dependent variables but the intensity of that relationship is very week. To predict the results of this study we will use descriptive and inferential statistics and use these results for the recommendation and future research suggestions.

The values of mean and standard deviation show the intensity of respondents toward the questionnaire. From these values we can easily judge that what the most common trend of the respondents E.g. mean value of (TFL) is 2.9 which shows that most of the respondents are at the neutral option of five point likert scale questions and the S.D value i.e. 0.924325 for (TFL) shows that 92% of respondents varied in their responses and same is the case with other variable's values shown in the Table: 1. Whereas cronbach's alpha values shows the reliability statistics of the above given variables. All the values are greater than.600 instead of Cognitive conflict (CC) i.e..532 which is also acceptable because in psychometric studies the value of cronbach's alpha is acceptable when it is greater than.500.

Table 2 shows that to what extent variables are correlated with each other. The value of.014 shows that there is a very week correlation between independent variable (TFL) and dependent variable (CC). There is also a moderate relationship between (TRL) and (CC) i.e..08. But the most important result is that the value.318 shows that there is a fair positive relationship between laissez faire leadership and cognitive conflict. The above given table shows that the relationship between dependent and independent variables exists but the intensity of this relationship is very much week.

Table 1: Mean, Standard Deviation, Cronbach's Alpha

Variables	MEAN	SD	ALPHA
Transformational Leadership (TFL)	2.96198	0.924325	.661
Transactional Leadership (TRL)	2.85454	0.943126	.632
Laissez Faire Leadership (LF)	2.53223	0.934671	.600
Cognitive Conflict (CC)	2.89876	0.937309	.532

Table 2: Pearson Correlation Coefficient Values

Variables	TFL	TRL	LF	CC
Transformational Leadership (TFL)	1			
Transactional Leadership (TRL)	.598**	1		
Laissez Faire Leadership (LF)	-.272**	-.138	1	
Cognitive Conflict (CC)	.014	.086	.318**	1

Table 3: One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Normality Test

	CC MEAN
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z	1.080
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.194

Normal P-P Plot of Regression Standardized Residual
Dependent Variable: CCMean

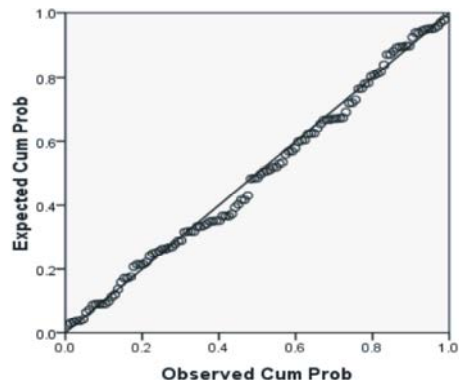


Table 4:

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson1
1	.345 ^a	.119	.097	2.79679	1.966

a. Predictors: (Constant), LFMean, TRLMean, TFLMean

b. Dependent Variable: CCMean

Table 3 shows the p value in Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z test is.194 which is higher than á (.05). So here Ho is accepted that the data is normally distributed and the same results are showing the PP plot in the below plotted plot. So when we are confirm that the data is normal then we use the regression analysis test to further evaluate the data and model fitness.

Model summary table 4 shows that the value of R square is 12% which means that these three independent variables explained the 12% variation in

Table 5:

ANOVA					
Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	123.982	3	41.327	5.283	.002 ^a
Residual	915.175	117	7.822		
Total	1039.157	120			

a. Predictors: (Constant), LFMean, TRLMean, TFLMean

b. Dependent Variable: CCMean

Table 6:

Model	Coefficients				
	Unstandardized		Standardized		Sig.
	Coefficients		Coefficients		
B	Std. Error	Beta	t		
1 (Constant)	5.939	1.860		3.194	.002
TFLMean	.021	.053	.043	.389	.698
TRLMean	.084	.085	.107	.992	.323
LFMean	.304	.080	.344	3.818	.000

a. Dependent Variable: CCMean

the dependent variable. However the variability is very less that is explained by the independent variables but the in psychometric studies the results are acceptable and the other is the above given results of R square support the Pearson correlation results that the relationship is very week between the dependant variables and the independent variables. Durbin Watson test shows the value i.e. 1.966 Which means that there is very week or you can say that no serial autocorrelation between the independent variables.

Table 5 given ANOVA table it is very clear that the value of p is .002 which is less than the α value .05. That's why H_0 is rejected here that there is no relationship between independent variables and dependent variable. The p value in the above given table is .002 shows that there is a significant relationship between the three independent variables and the dependent variable. [37-39].

Table 6 of coefficient shows the value of the $B=5.939$ that represent the average value of cognitive conflict when the value of the transformational leadership is zero. And 0.021 value of "beta" that shows that one unit increase in the transformational conflict will bring 0.021 unit increases in the cognitive conflict.

Following Is the Formula of Regression Line:

Regression line is $y=a + bx$

- y =dependent variable (D.V)
- a =constant Variables

- b =coefficient of variables
- x = independent variable (IN.V)

And the liner regression equation is given below:

Cognitive conflict (CC)=5.939+.021 Transformational Leadership (TFL)

The equation shows that one percent change in transformational leadership will bring 2% change in cognitive conflict.

Cognitive conflict (CC)=5.939+.084 transactional leadership (TRL)

In the above equation it is shows that one percent the transactional leadership change will bring 8% change in the cognitive conflict. Above table shows the tolerance value is 0.992 and the VIF value is .323 which shows that there is no colinearity. Because if the tolerance value > 5 and the value of VIF >10 then collinearity exists in the data.

Cognitive conflict (CC)=5.939+.304 laissez faire leadership (LF)

Above equation shows that one percent change in laissez faire leadership will bring 30% change in the cognitive conflict.

DISCUSSION

Basically the study is conducted to evaluate the relationship of leadership styles with workplace conflict and specifically the cognitive/task conflict. The results show that the reliability of all the variables met the desired standards. But the results of regression and correlation analysis are not so much appropriate to our objectives. Because according to the results our all H_0 are rejected here and somehow the relationship is found between the dependent and independent variables both in positive and negative direction. Results show that there is a very week positive relationship between the transformational leadership and the relational conflict which is totally against our objectives. The results also suggest that there is a positive relationship between the transactional leadership and relational conflict. So, in this case also we are unable to meet our objective that there is a negative relationship between transactional leadership and relational conflict. According to the results we are able to meet the third objective that laissez faire leadership promotes the relational conflict because the results support this objective that there is a positive relationship between laissez faire leadership and relational conflict. Because if the leader not actively participate in the matters

of the business and always delays the decisions and not shows his/her presence then there are a lot of chances that the matters of business gone towards a major threat and the possibility of relational conflict amongst employees increases. At the end you can say that the study participate a lot to increase the awareness of top management that which type of involvement from their side reduce or overcome the relational type of conflict among the employees.

Limitations and Future Recommendations: The study has some limitations but if these limitations are properly overcome in future then it will become the future research area. The first limitation is that the sample size contains only one organization and the second limitation is that the response rate is very low due to the busy schedule of the respondents. Thirdly the research is only concerned with services sector and specifically the educational sector. So, it's very difficult to generalize this concept towards the manufacturing sector. Another drawback of the study is that the data is cross sectional that is used. So, in future the study can be conducted by increasing the sample size and also in different environments where there is a cultural variation exists.

CONCLUSION

Basically whole of the study is conducted to evaluate the impact of leadership styles and relational and cognitive conflict. The results of the study open some new ways to predict this relationship. Results of the study provide some informative ideas about this proposed relationship. Because some of the results against my literature means the results reject the theory and some of them are accepted. But the whole results are very close to the reality. The study has three main objectives instead of those only two are met but the other one is rejected from the study results. Concludedly you can say that the impact of leadership styles is significant on interpersonal workplace task conflict. And the study is very important participation for the top management to provide the hidden picture of resolving conflict by using different leadership styles.

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