

Adeptness in Conflict Management of Expatriates deployed in Government, Semi-Government and Private Service Operations in the United Arab Emirates

Ofelia T. Posecion^{1*} Sami E. Alajlani²

1. College of Business, University of Modern Sciences,UAE
2. College of Business, University of Modern Sciences,UAE

* E-mail: felytp@gmail.com

Abstract

The purpose of this research investigation is to verbalize the conflict management of expatriates deployed in service operations in government, semi-government and private organizations in UAE, their maturity level, length of work experience, type of industry, location of workplace: Abu Dhabi, Ajman, Dubai, Fujairah, Um Al Quwain, Ras Al Khaimah, and Sharjah; and the length of business operation of the company. The research design employed was descriptive- correlational, and generally quantitative, as this investigation used post-positivist claims for developing knowledge to test the hypotheses formulated. Data were collected from the group of expatriates who were working in different emirates in UAE, and were deployed in service operations.

A questionnaire -survey form was the data collection method utilized with subparts on indicators and respondents' profiles and comprised of closed-ended questions gleaned from readings and other learning resources. The items were subjected to validity and reliability testing techniques, its validity index established, and the reliability index was generated using the Cronbach Alpha. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) based on the specific research objectives was used to analyze the data gathered.

Findings of the study showed that the conflict management skills of expats deployed in the service operations of government, semi-government and private organizations in UAE were High. Expatriates in service operations in the United Arab Emirates have the very high emotional maturity, high in communication skills, and creativity in problem-solving but only have Moderate skill in empathy.

Moreover, results showed that the conflict management skills of the expats are significantly influenced by their maturity level, length of work experience and length of service operations of the organizations where the expatriates were employed but the locations of the workplace where the expats were assigned to, do not significantly influence their conflict management skills as expressed in their communication skills, empathy, maturity and creative problem-solving skills. The purpose of this research investigation is to verbalize the conflict management of expatriates deployed in service operations in government, semi-government and private organizations in UAE, their maturity level, length of work experience, type of industry, location of work place, and the length of business operation of the company.

Keywords: Adeptness, Conflict Management, Communication Skills, Emotional Maturity, Empathy, Creative Problem Solving

I. Introduction of the Study:

Max Lucade posited that "Conflict is inevitable, but combat is optional"; conflict happens but how we respond to and resolve conflict will either limit or maybe enable our success. A leader has to expose himself/herself to conflict management tools to better understand conflict, and be able to learn individual conflict patterns. Understandably, managers and leaders ought to be capable of embracing conflict as a source of growth and transformation and accept conflict as a possible source of personal growth and transformation to pave the way towards success in business transactions.

The Leadership or supervisory qualities of those involved in conflict management must include being able to evaluate the importance of conflict management and the variety of sources which are possible predictors of its occurrence: Goals, that can occur as a result of conflicting priorities or maybe because of the lack of shared targets; Personality conflicts, which are a common cause of conflict; Scarce resources, where conflict may happen due to slack resources, Styles that are different for each person, and Values that may create conflicts between and among members of the organization, or among other interlinked groups if the individual or groups in the organization do not have shared values.

Consequently, the researcher investigated the conflict management style of expats in UAE in relation to their deployment in the service operations and will be delved into the length of work experience, work sector, type of industry, the location of workplace, maturity level, and length of business operation of the company as possible correlates.

1.1.Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this research investigation are to ascertain the adeptness in conflict management of expatriates in various business organizations in UAE and its deployment in service operations, in terms of each component, namely: communication skills, emotional maturity, empathy, and creative problem-solving.

The researchers further analyzed if the independent variables such as length of business operation of the company, maturity level, location of the workplace in any of the Emirates, and type of industry of expatriates deployed in service operations are correlates of the independent variable- the conflict management of expatriates in various business organizations in UAE.

1.2. Research Questions

Specifically, the following research queries were presented in this research work:

RQ1. How is adeptness in conflict management manifested by expatriates who are deployed in the service operations of business organizations in UAE?

RQ2. Does the maturity level of the expatriates in the service operations of organizations in UAE significantly influence their conflict management?

RQ3. Does the length of work experience of the expatriates in the service operations of organizations in UAE significantly influence their conflict management?

RQ4. Does the location of the service operations of organizations in UAE significantly influence the conflict management of expatriates?

RQ5. Does the length of service operations of organizations in UAE significantly influence the conflict management of expatriates?

1.3. Research Hypotheses

The following research hypotheses were formulated:

Ho1. The maturity level of the expatriates in the service operations of organizations in UAE does not significantly influence their adeptness in conflict management.

Ho2. The length of work experience of the expatriates in the service operations of organizations in UAE does not significantly influence their adeptness in conflict management skills.

Ho3. The location of the service operations of organizations in UAE does not significantly influence the adeptness in conflict management of expatriates.

Ho4. The length of service operations of organizations in UAE does not significantly influence the adeptness in conflict management skills of expatriates.

1.4. Rationale of Study and Literature Review

This research work is anchored on Thomas' concepts that conflict as the process, begins when one party perceives that another has negatively affected, or is about to negatively affect, something that he or she cares about. (Thomas (1992).

Conflict management influences the well-being of individuals who are into the business transaction activities, the group performance and the effectiveness of the organization. The effectiveness of the individual employees and the entire organizations depends on how they manage interpersonal conflicts at work (Tjosvold, 1998). Managers spend an average of 20% of their time managing conflict (Thomas, 1992), and evidence suggests conflict. Conflict management at work substantially influences individual, group and organization's effectiveness as well as well-being as indicated by health complaints and doctor visits (De Dreu, et al., 1999; Spector and Jex, 1998).

Given the importance of conflict management in organizations, it is important that manager or any top management be familiar with their own conflict management skills, enhance these and benchmark from the practices of other members of the management team.

Structural conflict is rooted in the very nature of organizations. Organizations divide the work they do across a set of positions—in many places the positions are mainly organized vertically in a classic pyramid, while in other places the positions are more horizontally arranged into task-oriented teams (and, indeed, almost all organizations have both of these structures). Interpersonal conflict is rooted in differences in personalities, communication styles, and values. (Mintzberg (1973).

Mintzberg further pointed out that as much of our personality and communication style—as well as many of our values—are shaped by the social groups to which we belong, interpersonal conflict is magnified by social differences. These would include, for example, differences in race, gender, national origin, age, income, marital status, sexual orientation, religion, and physical disability.

Fisher et al. (1991) remind us that the “other side” of a conflict is a person or persons. As human beings, we have emotions, values, different backgrounds, and different viewpoints. Everyone wants to feel good about him or herself. Furthermore, Fisher et al. (1991) observe that individuals who focus only on particular positions in a conflict situation tend to paint themselves into a corner.

Henri Fayol, a French industrialist, developed what is still the most popular list of managerial functions, where he stated that managers plan, organize, command, coordinate, and control. These will include dealing with people, negotiating, and as (Mintzberg (1973), a leading management writer, pointed out: there are three key elements, or activities, performed in the managing process: dealing with people, handling and using information, and making decisions.

Mintzberg likewise discovered that most successful managers are much less scientific and systematic than is often assumed. He demonstrated that most managers work at an unrelenting pace; that their activities are characterized by brevity, variety, and discontinuity; and that they are strongly oriented toward action and tend to steer away from reflective activities. Managers must understand what kind of conflict they are facing before proposing solutions to it (Carter et al (2006).

There are a number of ways to break down conflict situations into specific categories. There are conflicts caused by structural conditions and conflict originating from interpersonal factors where this distinction is useful in finding effective approaches to resolving the conflict.

Structural conflict is resolved best through structural resolution methods, while interpersonal conflict demands interpersonal solutions. It is also possible to categorize conflict based on the degree to which a manager is involved in it and the manager's relationship to the conflicting parties. Carter et al ((2006). Thus, as business and industry continue to progress and expand to respond to the global challenges in the business world and industry; people change; thus each one has to move on and improve their capability.

The research work of Ping-Kit Lam and Kwai-Sang Chin (2005), entitled "Identifying and prioritizing critical success factors for conflict management in collaborative new product development", examined the critical success factors of conflict management in collaborative new product development (NPD).

The results of their study showed that communication management, trust, and commitment to the collaboration are the most important factors, thus, they recommended that a hierarchy model of conflict management is proposed, with which clients and suppliers can formulate action plans for better conflict management.

The preponderance of the cited concepts and researches enthused the researchers to find out the negotiation and conflict management skills of managers in relation to their deployment in service operations. Service operations in this context is used in terms of delivering service to the customers or users of the service and involves understanding the service needs of the target customers, managing the processes that deliver the services, ensuring objectives are met, while also paying attention to the continual improvement of the services (Johnston, et al (2008).

1.5. Conceptual Framework of the Research Study

The foregoing concepts set the directions of this research undertaking:

Conflict management is the process of limiting the negative aspects of conflicts while increasing the positive aspects of the conflict, the aim of Conflict management is to enhance learning and group outcomes, including effectiveness or performance or performance in an organizational setting.(Rahim, 2002,p.208). Further, it was cited that a properly managed conflict can improve group outcomes (Alpert, Tjosvaldo, & Law, 2000; Bodtker & Jameson, 2001; Rahim & Bonoma, 1979; Kuhn & Poole, 2000; DE Church & Marks, 2001).

In the same setting, service operations are distributed networks, in varied outlets, back offices, and other functions to investigate and determine delivery options that best serve the business strategy in conflict management or synonymously in conflict resolutions.

Clients are expected to transform their service operations to and beyond their expectations, as they attain business goals that are related to cost and profitability of the entities they are working with. As expatriates work closely with clients at all levels in an organization, conflict management becomes a valid issue to confront with because it is the only way to lay the foundation for continuous improvement.

There are four components of Conflict Management Skills, namely: Communication Skills, Emotional Maturity, Empathy, and Creative Problem-Solving skills. The first component is on Communication Skills which supports the notion that much unnecessary conflict can be avoided if there are clear, accurate written and verbal communication language both in spoken and even in sent emails could lead to failed plans and create problems among groups in the organization. Emotional maturity is the ability to understand one's own feelings and those of others, and to be able to handle those feelings well. People who have high emotional maturity are skilled at identifying and meeting the needs of others while they continuously take responsibility for their own needs and feelings. Creative Problem Solving skills which intend to make sure that any disagreement remains productive and professional, employers, leaders are expected to possess Creative Problem Solving skills because most often conflict happens because nobody among the team can come up with a workable solution; resolving the conflict depends on creating a solution; and that makes problem-solving an in-demand skills for employers.(Doyle, Alison,2017).

The fourth component that was considered in this research endeavor is Empathy which means feeling what

others feel, the ability to see a situation from someone else's viewpoint, to understand their needs, motivations, and possible misunderstandings because these are critical to effective conflict management. Empathy is augmented by an intellectual understanding of another's situation, though can sometimes create complicated enmeshments; it is best applied in a work environment when paired with critical thinking, emotional intelligence, and other types of discernment.(Doyle, Alison,2017).

Assumptions about what other people already know, think, or intend to do which can cause resentment or maybe worse happenings may either be creating or preventing arguments and conflicts; or that there may be too many arguments happening simply because everyone wants to feel heard; a leader who is a good listener brings about a strong inspiration and brings about a feeling of trust and appropriately resolve hurt feelings.

Maturity level, the length of work experience, the length of business operation of the company, and location of the service operations of the organization whether the expats worked in government, semi-government and private institutions, may serve well to ensure the client's ability to enhance their conflict management skills.

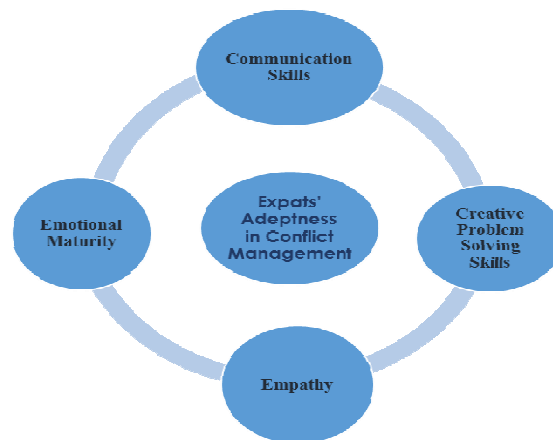


Figure 1. Schematic Diagram reflecting the components of Expatriates' Adeptness in Conflict Management

II. Research Methodology

11.1 . Research Design of the Study

The research design which employed in this research undertaking was descriptive- correlational, and generally quantitative, in which this investigation used post-positivist claims for developing knowledge to test the hypotheses formulated.

11.2 .Respondents of the study

The respondents of this research undertaking were the 156 expats who are in service operations in various organizations in UAE, in private organizations, semi-government and government sectors. Simple random sampling was utilized to determine the sample for this research work among expatriates who are employed in service operations across the seven emirates of UAE which are members of a group, population or universe of expatriates in UAE, to have an equal and independent chance of being selected as respondents of the study.

II.3. Data Collection Instrument

A questionnaire was designed by the researcher which comprised of closed-ended questions culled out from readings and other learning resources about conflict management skills, the indicators of conflict management, service operations of expats, demographic profiles both of the organizations, the industries where the expats are employed in, and personal variables that may influence the conflict management skills of expatriates.

The question items which aimed to determine the expats' conflict management skills are represented by indicators on *communication skills*, *emotional maturity*, *empathy* and *creative problem solving skill* which the author appraised to be relevant to the present research work. The situations included information about how service operations can be delivered effectively and efficiently.

II.4. Validity and Reliability of the Data-Collection Instruments

Validity and reliability procedures were used to determine the internal validity of the research instrument. The questionnaire was conducted to dry-run respondents who were not included as the actual respondents of the study.

The reliability index was determined through the use of Cronbach's alpha which yielded a reliability index of .91. A value of 0.7 and above is acceptable to manifest the reliability of the data gathering instrument (George and Mallaey (213).

The questionnaires were distributed to expatriates who are employed in various service operation organizations in UAE, they were assured that the information that are obtained from their responses will be held in confidence, and whatever results which will be generated from the collated results of the research undertaking will only be used for research purposes.

The Interpretative Scale on the responses to the question items on Conflict Management Skills of expats in the service operations of business establishments in UAE is shown in the table.

Table 1. Numerical Responses and its Verbal Interpretation

Numerical responses	Verbal Interpretation
5	Always
4	Often
3	Sometimes
2	Seldom
1	Never

III. Data Analysis Procedure

The data were subjected to the statistical software, *Statistical Package for the Social Sciences* (SPSS), to analyze the gathered information. Mean, frequency count, and correlational techniques were employed to analyze the encoded data as represented by the mean range and interpretative descriptions.

Mean Range	Verbal Interpretation
4.21 – 5	Very High
3.41 – 4.20	High
2.61 – 3.40	Moderate
1.81 – 2.60	Low
1 – 1.80	Very Low

III.1. Results and Discussions

RQ1. The adeptness in conflict management of expatriates deployed in the service operations of business organizations in UAE.

The table below reflects the interpretation of the adeptness in Conflict management by expats in UAE.

Table 2. Mean scores of Expats' Adeptness in Conflict management

Components	Mean	Verbal Interpretation
Communication skills	3.49	High
Emotional Maturity	4.42	Very High
Empathy	3.28	Moderate
Creative Problem Solving	3.46	High
Over-All (Mean of mean scores)	3.66	High

The mean scores of each of the components of conflict management which are communication skills,

emotional maturity, empathy, and creative problem-solving. The overall mean score is 3.66 which is interpreted to mean that Expats' Conflict management skills were only High. From the generated means scores, the emotional maturity component of conflict management was 4.42 which was interpreted as Very high. This result may imply that the ability of the expats in various work sectors, even with different types of industry to understand freely their own feelings and those of others, manifest that these expats have high maturity level and thus are skilled at identifying and meeting the needs of others and are responsible for their own needs and feelings.

In the same note, among the indicators of conflict management, the expats who the respondents of the study, got a High mean score on Communication skills as represented by the numerical value of 3.49. Creative Problem-Solving skills yielded a mean score of 3.46 which is interpreted as High only; this result may imply that there might be a need to enhance the conflict management skills of expatriates in terms of improving their analytical skills and their ability to resolve conflicts by creating a solution or solutions to problem situations; enrich their lateral thinking skills also to be more proactive in responding to some problematic situations in the work area.

However, in terms of empathy which is one of the components of Conflict management, the mean score is the lowest among the indicators which was 3.28, and with a verbal interpretation of Moderate only. This is not a commendable attribute for expatriates, considering that empathy for the conflict management is feeling what others feel; expatriate supervisors have to see a situation from someone else's viewpoint. Empathy is supposedly critical to effective conflict management since empathy is augmented by an intellectual understanding of another's situation, although there are situations which sometimes may create complicated enmeshments; expats have to oversee in a work environment when paired with critical thinking, emotional intelligence, and other types of discernment.(Doyle, Alison,2017).

Furthermore, these results may be assumptions about what other people already know, think, or intend to do which can cause resentment or maybe worse happenings. There are too many arguments happening simply because everyone wants to feel heard. A leader who is a good listener brings about a strong inspiration and brings about a feeling of trust and the ability to immediately resolve hurt feelings.

RQ2. Correlation between Maturity level of the expatriates in the service operations of organizations and their conflict management skills

Table 3. Correlation between the Conflict management and maturity level of expats in UAE

Paired variables	P-value	Interpretation	Status of Hypothesis
Conflict management Skills and Maturity level	0.127	Not Significant	Rejected
* Significant if the p value is @ \leq .05 level			

On the correlation between the Conflict management and maturity level of expatriates in UAE, the p-value is 0.024, this result is less than the level of significance, thus is interpreted to be not significant; in which case, the hypothesis which states that there is no significant correlation between the conflict management and maturity level of expats in service operations of organizations in UAE is rejected. This result may imply that the extent of the expatriates' maturity level significantly influences their conflict management skills.

This result may also be enhanced by some concepts about emotional maturity which become important as the concept of emotional intelligence came out in the cultural imagination of various stakeholders. Experts have anticipated that when one's emotional maturity is high, then one's bargaining outcomes and successful negotiation and conflict resolutions may increase or may be strengthened.

RQ3. Correlation between Conflict management skills and length of work experience of expatriates in the service operations of organizations in UAE

Table 4. Significance of Correlation between the Conflict management and length of work experience of expatriates in UAE

Paired variables	P-value	Interpretation	Status of Hypothesis
Conflict management Skills and Length of work experience	0.249	Not Significant	Rejected
* Significant if the p value is @ \leq .05 level			

The p-value between the paired variables is 0.249, which is higher than the .05 thus the hypothesis is rejected. Based on this result, it may be said that *Conflict management skills* is significantly influenced by the length of work experience of expats in the service operations in UAE. In this instance, the result further implied that the experience that a person gains while working in a specific field or occupation, and his or her exposure to a professional working environments, have a substantial influence on how they will handle conflicting situations.

RQ4. Correlation between Conflict management skills and Location of the service operations

Table 5. Correlation between the Conflict management and Location of the service operations of the organizations

Paired variables	P-value	Interpretation	Status of Hypothesis
Conflict management Skills and Location of the service operations	0.039	Significant	Accepted
* Significant if the p value is @ \leq .05 level			

As shown in the table, the p-value between the paired variables *Location of the service operations and conflict management skills* is 0.039 which is lower than .05, thus the hypothesis is accepted.

This interpretation implies that whether the location of the service operations is in Abu Dhabi, Ras al Khaimah, Sharjah, Um Al Quwain, Fujairah or in any of the Emirates, this does not have a significant influence the conflict management skills of expatriates.

This result further showed that expats who are in operations management services, wherever it is located, has still the functional responsibility for producing the services of an organization and providing them directly to its customers. Expatriates specifically deal with decisions required as operations managers for the simultaneous production and consumption of an intangible product. In the same manner, these decisions are concerned with the process, manpower, material resources, information and the system that produces and delivers the service regardless of where the expats are assigned.

RQ5. Correlation between Conflict management skills and Length of service operations

Table 6. Correlation between the Conflict management and Length of service operations of the organizations

Paired variables	P-value	Interpretation	Status of Hypothesis
Conflict management and Length of service operations	0.252	Not Significant	Rejected
* Significant if the p value is @ \leq .05 level			

As shown in the table, the p-value between the paired variables Length of service operations and conflict management skills is 0.252 which is higher than .05, thus the hypothesis is rejected. This result implied that the Length of service operations of the organization where the expatriates work significantly affect their conflict management skills. As leaders stay longer in service operations, their conflict management skills are expected to rise higher; the longer the organization has been into service operations, the skills of their managers and leaders are also enhanced.

Kenneth W. Thomas and Warren H. Schmidt, cited these issues in their article “A Survey of managerial interests with respect to Conflict management”, which was conducted by the American Management Association pertinent to the regarding the managerial interests in the area of conflict and conflict management. Organizations now included conflict management in their training programs; the results of the survey suggested that managers from top to bottom echelons must all be active and should emphasize the importance in learning and enhance their skills both in prevention and management of conflict and of conflict resolution

V. Summary of Results

The conflict management skills of expatriates deployed in the service operations of government, semi-government and private organizations in UAE is high. The expats in service operations in UAE have a very high emotional maturity, high in communication skills, and creativity in problem-solving but only have moderate skill in empathy.

The communication skills, empathy, maturity and creative problem-solving skills which are indicators of the conflict management skills of expatriates are significantly influenced by their maturity level, length of work experience and length of service operations of the organizations where the expatriates are employed.

However, the locations of the workplace where the expatriates were assigned do not significantly influence their conflict management skills as expressed in their communication skills, empathy, maturity and creative problem-solving skills. The locations of the workplace where the service operations are done in terms of any of the seven emirates Abu Dhabi, Ajman, Dubai, Fujairah, Ras al-Khaimah, Sharjah and Umm al-Quwain, do not significantly influence the adeptness of expatriates in conflict management.

VI. Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the results of this research undertaking, it can be concluded that expatriates working in government, semi-government and private agencies have High adeptness in conflict management. The conflict management skills of expats are significantly influenced by their *maturity level, length of work experience and length of service operations* of the organizations where the expatriates are employed. Premised on the findings of this research endeavor, the researcher recommends that expatriates must be sensitive and pay attention to the feelings being expressed both in gestures and the spoken words of staff and team members, possess the ability to successfully resolve conflict based on his or her ability to manage stress quickly while remaining alert and calm in any transaction, the aptitude to control one's emotions and behavior; to evaluate and analyze the challenges that comes in every unique situation, including the peculiarities of other stakeholders in varied transactions.

Most importantly, expatriates must be aware of and be respectful of cultural differences both personal and organizational, enhance their empathy towards others, manifest greater respect for other employees' feelings, manifest willingness to listen to other ideas and opinions, improve communication skills, most preferably on the language used by majority of the team members, learn the intricacies and peculiarities of the various work sectors and the ruling policies in government, semi-government and private organizations.

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