

Culture and Gender Differences in Negotiation Styles

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Abstract

Culture and Gender differences became an important topic in managing organizations in the last two or three decades. Culture, gender and power positions are the variables of a negotiation. This paper examines the different negotiation styles used by different cultures and genders. Choice of conflict management strategy depends on the characteristics of that culture. There are two main kinds of characteristics, which are collectivist and individualist cultures. Collectivist cultures use compromising, accommodating and avoiding strategies while individualist cultures use forcing, compromising and collaborating negotiation styles. Studies show that individualistic cultures are American and Australian cultural that give high value on individualist achievement. Collectivist cultures are Asian and Chinese cultures that give high value on conformity and tradition. The same division between negotiation styles can be seen between genders. There are perceptions that the outcome of the negotiation changes based on gender differences. But after 2000's, the studies shows that there is no difference between the outcomes, the difference is between the negotiation styles. Men mostly use forcing and competitive negotiation styles; they use more tactics and set high goals before the negotiation. Women mostly use accommodating and compromising negotiation styles; they focus on relationships and set lower goals than men.

Keywords: Conflict Management, Gender, Culture.

1. Introduction

Culture and gender differences in organizations became an important topic in the last three of four decades. By multiculturalism and globalization, maintaining peace in an organization became an important topic. Cultural conflicts have become more important with the attack on United States World Trade Center and Pentagon in September 11, 2001. Peace can be kept by using the right negotiation style for conflicts because different cultures can cause misunderstandings. In the absence of the negotiation, violence can occur. In the history, the causes of war and violence can be multiple as moral, economic, political, religious and psychological domains but long-term historical conflicts are one of the most important cause (Marsella, 2005). Marsilla(2005) stated that there are many researches about the costs and consequences of war and violence while there are a little that support negotiation and harmonious relations. As mentioned, multiculturalism in organizations have raised the topic of effects of culture on the negotiation style. In joint ventures and acquisitions cross-cultural relations causes conflicts. There are two kinds of cultural diversity in an organization as cultural differences among countries and cultural differences among organizations. Diversities in the organizational culture can cause cultural conflicts but in this paper cultural differences means cultural differences among countries.

It has been found out that the solution of the negotiations are based on the negotiation styles used by conflicting parties. If they can not solve, violence can occur. Conflict resolution techniques can be change independent from the subject. We call them variables of the negotiation which are culture, gender and power positions (Holt and De Vore, 2005). Also Hofstede (1980) defined many different ways that conflict may be influenced which are individualism/ collectivism, power distance, masculinity/ femininity, short/long term orientation and uncertainty avoidance. So, gender is an another variable of conflict. It has become an important topic in the last years after women have entered the work life.

There are important questions about the cultural and gender differences as;

- Are these differences effect the negotiation outcome?
- How culture and gender affect the way information is processed?
- How communication and negotiation are experienced?
- How power is exercised and understood?
- How risks are evaluated?
- Decisions and agreements are reached by using which negotiation style?

2. Conflict Resolution Styles

Conflict resolution can be defined as ‘the process used by parties in conflict to reach a settlement’ (Sweeney and Carruthers, 1996). There are many conflict resolution styles defined but the earliest defined one is Blake and Mouton’s (1964) five-style paradigm which includes smoothing, problem-solving, compromising, withdrawing and forcing. Using their dual concern theory Blake and Mouton claimed that people have two primary motivations in a interpersonal conflict; the desire to obtain one’s own goals and desire to retain interpersonal relationships. Five-style paradigm occurs from this dual theory. Smoothing relates to high concern with people and low concern with production, withdrawing relates to low concern with both people and production, compromising relates with medium concern with both people and production, problem-solving relates with the high concern with both people and the problem, and forcing style relates with the high concern with productivity and low concern with people (Holt and De Volt, 2005). The general principles of the ‘managerial grid’ of the Blake and Mouton did not change, but the terms are interpreted differently by researchers among the instruments used (Figure 1). In this paper the definitions of the Thomas and Kilmann (1974) will be used because the two side of the grid defined more adequate for the basis of culture and gender differences which one is party’s desire to satisfy other’s concern and the other is party’s desire for own concern. So the five-style will be called as accomodating(smoothing), collaborating (problem-solving), compromising, avoiding (withdrawing), competing (forcing).

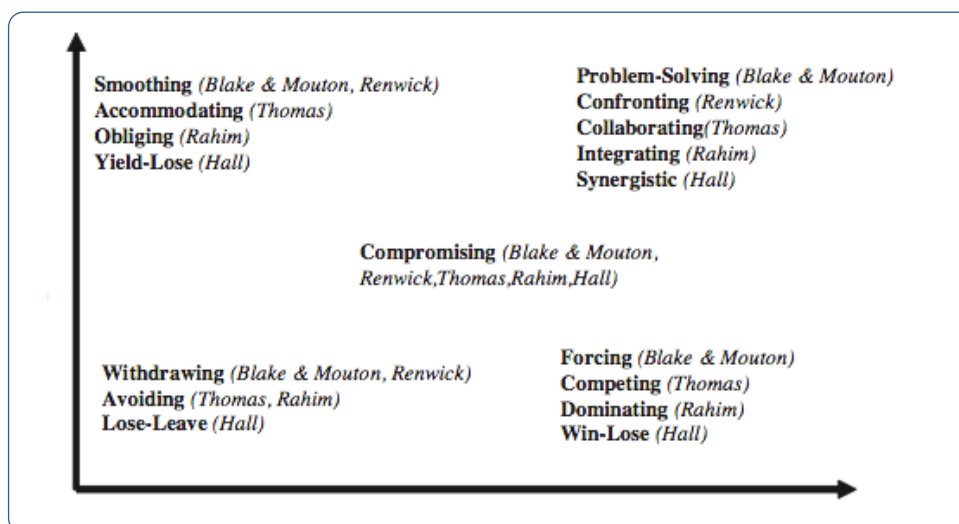


Figure 1. Conflict Resolution Strategies (Holt and De Vore, 2005)

There are variables that effect the conflict resolution strategies/ negotiation styles which are culture, gender and power positions. In this paper, culture and gender differences will be analyzed in terms of Thomas and Kilman’s conflict resolution strategies.

2. Culture

Interpersonal relationships are influenced by the cultural diversities. But cultural differences became an important research topic in the last few decades after the globalization and multiculturalism has occurred in a high rate (Kaushal and Kwantes, 2006). Culture can be defined as ‘shared learned

behavior and meanings that are socially transferred in various life-activity settings for purposes of individual and collective adjustment and adaptation' (Marsella, 2005). O'Reilly (1989) stated that culture is valuable because of two reasons; to fit of culture and strategy and the increased commitment by employees to the firm. These values give the organization a competitive advantage. Cultural differences can be in many perspectives as organizational culture and ethnic culture. In this section, ethnic cultural differences will be analyzed.

According to Hofstede (1980), individualism and collectivism is the key element for the cultural differences in term of the values. The cultures can be divided into two as collectivist and individualist cultures. The concept of the duality of the cultures is still known as a basis for how styles of conflict resolution may vary across cultures. Individualistic cultures use assertive methods when solving a conflict. The individualistic cultures can be count as US, USA, Canada, Australia and Germany. They are more concerned with self than the others, they use strong verbal communication, less emphasis on internal aspects of communication and less concern with the needs of others. Individualistic cultures mostly use collaborating, comprising and competing conflict resolution strategies (Holt and De Vore, 2005).

In collectivist cultures people are more likely to use avoiding strategy for maintaining positive relationship (Kausal and Kwantes, 2006). Collectivist cultures are China, Japan, Korea and Middle East countries. The needs of the group is more important than the individual. They use accomodating and comprimising strategies but oftnre they use avoiding strategy to save face. Most researchers claimed that Chinese managers rely more on an avoiding style because of their high value on comformity and tradition while American managers rely more on a competing style because of their high value on individual achievement. The study of Holt and De Vore (2005) have shown that there is a high difference between strategies used by means of the standart deviations. They condusted a research and found a true difference criterion, and the results are analyzed according to this criterion. This showed us the results falling outside the range draw attention as shown in Figure 2.

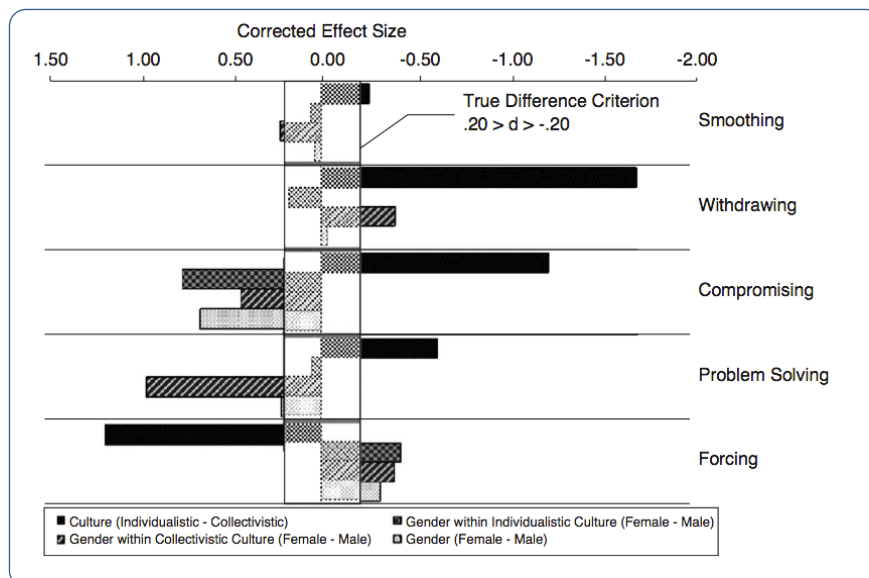


Figure 2. Corrected effect size of conflict resolution styles (Holt and De Vore, 2005)

The graph of Holt and DeVore (2005) includes both culture and gender but in this paper gender will be analyzed later. The right side of the graph is collectivist cultures and the left side is individualistic cultures. As seen from the graph, collectivist cultures use mostly avoiding and comprimising conflict resolution styles and individualistic cultures use forcing conflict resolution style.

2. Gender

During the World War II (1939-1945) women began to enter the workforce to produce needed supplies for the war effort. And in recent years nearly half of the employees are female in organizations. And in last two decades the differences between the verbal and non-verbal communication skills and the negotiation styles have been an important topic in the academic literature. Till 2000's there were

perceptions about the difference of the outcome of the negotiation between genders. The perception is men reach more successful negotiation solutions and female women tend to end the negotiation without a solution. In 70's women have found to be softer negotiators than men. The soft negotiation style of women causes them to hit the glass ceiling (Faes, 2010). Men perceived as more assertive, aggressive, independent and task oriented. Women perceived as more unselfish, caring and concerned with socio-emotional issues. But after 2000's the focus point of the researches have changed. There is a small amount of contradictory evidence that show the negotiation conclusions are based on gender differences. Gender is not a predictor of the outcome of the negotiation (Faes, 2010). The differences in the outcome can be analyzed from situational, perceptual and behavioral differences perspectives and most importantly differences in the communication style.

Gender differences can be analyzed as cross-cultural differences and it is not surprising that they use different conflict resolution styles.

'Men and women are fundamentally different creatures....women are often not comfortable talking about what they are worth. They'll go in to pitch a project and naturally put a lower value on it than men do' (Almer, 2000).

Male negotiators mostly choose forcing and problem solving styles during a conflict. For female relationships are more important so they use mostly avoiding, compromising and accommodating styles (Holt and DeVore, 2005). Women often use open communication pattern and leads them to use compromising negotiation style. They are more concerned with the other party's needs and interests; they are better listeners than men. In setting objectives, male negotiators set higher objectives than women but women are more realistic than men. Men negotiators use more tactics and distributive style for conflicts. A recent study of Feas (2010) has reached some conclusions about male and female behaviors in a negotiation. Some of them are as follows,

- Male negotiators set higher objectives than female negotiators
- Female negotiators tend to reach higher outcomes but also they are more likely to reach no results than men
- Male negotiators use more tactics than female
- Female negotiators often use open communication
- Male negotiators use competitive tactics more frequently.

The studies have shown that there are no contradictory evidence that shows there is a difference in the outcome of the negotiations of men and women. Women are not softer or less effective (Wachter, 1999). The difference is between the negotiation styles which women use accommodating and compromising styles, and men use competitive style. Female negotiators tended to be more cooperative than male negotiators, but also more responsive to the behavior of their negotiating partner. Women are more motivated by maintaining relationships, while men are more attracted by competition on status. The different power situations of men and women is both a predictor of outcome of the negotiation, gender is not a predictor.

3. Discussion

There were many perceptions about the difference in the outcome of the negotiation in terms of different cultures and genders. But after 2000's the focus point of the researches have changed. There is a small amount of contradictory evidence that show the negotiation conclusions are based on gender differences. The conclusions are based on situational, perceptual and behavioral differences and the differences in the communicating style.

Culture and gender differences can play a big role in communication. These two components can lead to misunderstandings in the interpretation of both verbal and nonverbal communications due to different cultural beliefs and styles of communication between genders. Culture and gender differences do not change the outcome but negotiations styles can. So, different negotiation styles are analyzed in this paper based on gender and culture. Two variables are analyzed because gender differences can be count as cross-cultural relations.

As a conclusion, Asian cultures are collectivist cultures and use avoiding, compromising and accommodating negotiation styles. Relationship with the other party is very important and also more important than the outcome. Similarly, women use accommodating and compromising negotiation styles not to give harms to the relationship with the other side. Different cultures and women entered the organizations very late and they both use accommodating, avoiding strategies to save face. Relationships are the most important thing and Asian cultures and maintaining relationships motivates women.

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