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Full Length Research Paper

Gender Difference and Conflict Management strategy preference among Managers in public Organizations in South-Western Nigeria

E.O. Babajide

Dept. Of Human Resource Development, College Of Management And Social Sciences, Osun State University, Nigeria
E-mail: elsieomobaba@yahoo.com.

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This study investigate the moderating influence of gender difference and conflict resolution strategy preference on Managers` efficiency in managing industrial conflict in work organizations in South-Western Nigeria. This was for the purpose of ascertaining the relevance of gender difference and conflict resolution strategy preference to managerial efficiency towards ensuring sustainable industrial peace and harmonious labour-management relations at workplaces in Nigeria. Descriptive ex-post-facto research design was adopted for the study. A total of 185 respondents were selected for the study using purposive stratified sampling technique. A set of questionnaire titled `Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory` (ROCI) developed by Conrad (1991) and Managerial Conflict Efficiency Scale (MCES) were adopted for the study. The three generated hypotheses were tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation and t-test statistical methods. The findings of the study revealed that: A significant relationship exists between gender difference and conflict management preference of the managers($r = 0.644$; $P < 0.05$). It was also found that there was no significant difference between male and female managers` conflict management strategy preference ($t(181) = 11.08$; $P > 0.05$).The finding reveals that there is no significant difference between female and male managers` conflict management efficiency on the basis of conflict management preference of the managers ($t(181) = 10.23$; $P > 0.05$). Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that collective bargaining strategy should be encouraged as conflict resolution strategy in order to guarantee effective management of industrial conflict and harmonious labour-management relations. Also, both male and female managers should be empowered to be appointed to managerial positions and should avoid the use of coercion, competition, aggressiveness and pro-task in the course of managing industrial conflict. Rather, persuasion, compromising, relational, lobbying and participatory approaches should be employed during collective bargaining process in order to foster effective management of conflict at workplaces.

Keywords: Gender Difference, Conflict, Management strategy, public Organizations.

INTRODUCTION

Gender sensitivity has in the recent times become the focus of industrial and labour relations. Researchers have embarked on investigation regarding the existing

differences and the extent to which they exist between male and female managers concerning the preferred conflict resolution strategy. Some researchers do not

agree with the fact that gender significantly impacts the choice of conflict resolution strategy at all (Conrad, 1991; Korabic, Baril and Watson, 1993). These authors found that women managers do not differ from male managers in preferred conflict resolution strategy; but they do differ from their managerial effectiveness. However, Leah (2005) reported that gender does not have as much impact as the experience of the managers in conflict managerial strategy and managerial effectiveness in work places.

Moreover, researchers have found that multiple variables have some correlation to preferred conflict resolution strategy. One variable of great interest is the interaction of heterogeneous (opposite sex) and homogeneous (same sex) dyads in managing subordinate conflicts (Monroe, Disalvo, Lewis and Berzi, 1991; Berryman-Fink and Brunner, 1987). The authors investigated the moderating effect of gender on conflict resolution style of supervisors in relations to difficult subordinates in developed countries. The authors reported that the supervisors perceived sex of the difficult subordinates, and not the supervisor, had the greatest effect on conflict resolution style. The authors also found that male subordinates used relational leverage (confrontation) more often with a female supervisor and female subordinates used avoidance more often with male supervisors.

However, the researchers also noted that in same sex supervisor – subordinate dyads, these differences dramatically lessened. Berryman-Fink and Brunner (1987) submit that both male and female subordinates were more likely to pursue their interests in a conflict with a female supervisor and less likely to use confrontation with a male supervisor. The finding implies that managers of both genders do not possess innate conflict resolution style but that the interaction with male or female subordinate affects preferred style.

Furthermore, considering the conflict management style, Akintayo (2009) reported that female supervisors tend to use interpersonal, compromising, collaborative, accommodating, integrating, co-operative, avoiding, pro-social and communicative methods. In contrast, there is evidence that male managers tend to use more aggressive competitive, confronting, assertive, pro-task and coercive strategies more often and faster than female managers (Conrad, 2001; Akintayo, 2011; Ajaja, 2004; and Adeyemo, 2005).

Omole (2004), Sorenson and Hawkins (1995) reported that males assumed competitive conflict resolution strategy more than females; and females assumed compromising conflict resolution strategy more often in conflict than males. Conrad (1991) submits that pro-social communication is often adopted more readily and more often by female supervisors as they possess more integrative, compromising and low avoidance styles. Meanwhile, Duane (1999) disagreed with Conrad (1991)

submission in that female supervisors were found to be less likely to avoid conflict situations while male supervisors were more likely to accommodate requests than female supervisors. The study was based on small sample management officials, which had more males (35) than females (7). Also, the study did not have consideration for managerial experience and different context.

In the same vein, researchers reported that male managers preferred power and authority while female managers used communication before resorting to using power (coercion). Also, female supervisors were found to use coercion less than male supervisor and often after other resolution styles do not yield desired results (Mulac, Siebold, and Farris, 2000, Lamude and Torres, 2000). This implies that female supervisors tend to ultimately use coercion if necessary. The authors reported further that subordinates see coercive – based technique as negative while the rewarding, referent and expert-based techniques were seen as positive by the subordinates. Meanwhile, the researchers admit that their sample was non-random which may limit the level of generalization of the findings.

Reflecting on conflict management effectiveness, Faniran (2002) and Adekunle (2004) reported that male managers were found to be more effective in managing conflict situations than female. The authors further reported that working experience rather than gender of the managers has been found to have significantly influenced conflict management effectiveness. Jurma and Powell (1994) and Leah (2005) submit that both experienced male and female managers were found to be effective in conflict resolution than the less experienced male and female managers. Also, the authors argue that experienced male and female managers were found to be equally effective in managing conflict though their attitude may quite different.

The literature reviewed in this study focused on conflict resolution strategy and effectiveness with moderating effect of gender. These studies measure perceptions of differences in conflict resolution styles between the genders of the managers with limited experience. The findings of the previous studies need further empirical verification since the studies were conducted in different context and on different samples. Thus, the present study is different from the previous studies, since it is designed to investigate gender difference and conflict management strategy preference among managers in work organizations in South-Western Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

The study investigated the relationship between gender difference and conflict management style preference among managers in public organizations in South-

Western Nigeria. This was for the purpose of ascertaining the relative impact of gender difference on conflict management strategy preference towards ensuring sustainable labour management relations at workplace in Nigeria.

Objectives for the Study

Specifically, the objectives of the study are to:

- 1) Identify the conflict management strategy preferred by managers in public organizations in South-Western Nigeria.
- 2) Determine the relationship between gender difference and conflict management strategy preference.
- 3) Determine the variation in the conflict management strategy adopted by female and male managers
- 4) Ascertain the relationship between male and female managers' conflict management efficiency on the basis of conflict management strategy preference.
- 5) Proffer plausible solutions and make recommendations towards sustainability of labour-management relations at workplaces in Nigeria.

Hypotheses for the Study

The following hypotheses were generated for the study:

- 1) There is a significant relationship between gender difference and conflict management strategy preference.
- 2) There is a significant difference between male and female managers' conflict management strategy preference.
- 3) There is a significant difference between male and female managers' conflict management efficiency on the basis of conflict management strategy preference.

METHODOLOGY

Design

The descriptive ex-post-facto research design was used to determine the influence of gender difference on conflict management style preference among managers in public organizations in South-Western Nigeria.

Population for the Study

The target population for the study consists of all managers of public organizations in South-Western Nigeria. These public organizations include: Civil Service Commission; Nigerian Television Authority, Ibadan,

Ministry of Education, Holding Company of Nigeria and Ministry of Finance. Male and female managers participated in the study.

Sample and Sampling Technique

A total of 185 respondents were selected for the study using stratified purposive sampling technique. The respondents consist of 101 (62.4%) male managers and 44 (37.6%) female managers. The age range of the respondents was between 30 – 65 with mean age of 18.67 and standard deviation of 12.17. The purposive sampling method was utilized to select respondents that have spent at least five years as managers in their organizations participated in the study. Moreover, the stratified sampling technique was used to select respondents to reflect the strata of gender (Male and Female), organizations (Civil Service, Communication, Energy and Education).

Measures

Conflict Management Strategy Scale (CMS)

The researcher utilized a set of questionnaire titled 'Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory' (ROCI) developed by Conrad (1991) and adopted by Akintayo (2010) to measure conflict management. The ROCI contains 35 items which subjects respond to on a 5-point Likert response rating scale, which include; Strongly Agree (5 points), Agree (4 points), Undecided (3 points), Strongly Disagree (2 points) and Disagree (1 point). The questionnaire consists of three sections, that is, sections A and B. Section A contains demographic information about the respondents such as name of organization, age, gender, working experience, highest educational qualification and so on.

Section B consist of item relating to conflict resolution strategy preference which include: collectiveness, integrating (high concern for self and high concern for others); dominating (high concern for self and low concern for others); obliging (low concern for self and high concern for others); avoiding (low concern for self and low concern for others) and compromising (intermediate levels of concern for both self and others).

Managerial Conflict Efficiency Scale (MCES)

The MCSE questionnaire measures managerial efficiency of male and female managers' conflict resolution strategy. It also measures relationship between gender difference and conflict management efficiency. It account for variation in conflict resolution strategy and effectiveness based on gender difference. Scores for

Table 1. Pearson Correlation Table of Analysis on Gender Difference and Conflict Resolution Strategy Preferred by Male and Female Managers.

Variable	N	Mean	SD	R	P	Remark
Gender Difference	183	18.34	11.42	0.644	.000	Significant (P < 0.05)
Conflict Resolution Strategy Preference		18.71	10.87			

Table 2. Summary of t-test Analysis on Male and Female Managers' Conflict Resolution Strategy Preference.

Variables	N	Mean	SD	df	T	P	Remark
Male	103	65.37	12.21	181	11.08	.219	Not Significant (P > 0.05)
Female	80	64.53	11.49				

Table 3. Summary of t-test Analysis on Female and Male Managers' Conflict Management Efficiency based on Conflict Management Style Preference.

Variables	N	Mean	SD	df	T	P	Remark
Male	103	63.89	14.12	181	10.23	.000	Significant (P > 0.05)

each of the subscales are determined by averaging the 7 of the 35 total items, which address each conflict dimension. A high score represents a greater preference for the strategy indicated. The author (Conrad, 1991) reported 0.86 reliability co-efficient while Akintayo (2010) reported Cronbach alpha of 0.89, which was adopted for the present study.

Procedures

The researcher with the assistance of the trained research assistants, administered the questionnaire. The researcher consulted the Human Resource Managers of the selected public organizations in South-Western Nigeria for their approval and assistance in securing the interest and attention of the respondents.

Following the permission granted by the Human Resource Managers, the researcher explained all aspects of the questionnaire to the respondents and assured them of confidentiality of the information to be supplied. A total of 200 copies of the questionnaire were administered, the 185 copies duly completed and returned were collated and analyzed for the purpose of the study. It took the researcher complete five weeks of administering and retrieving of the questionnaires due to the geographical location of South-Western Nigeria.

RESULTS

The results of the data analyzed for the study were presented on the basis of the hypotheses generated for the study.

Ho1: There is a significant relationship between gender difference and conflict resolution strategy adopted by Male and Female managers.

Table 1 reveals that a significant relationship exist between gender difference and conflict resolution strategy preference ($r = 0.644$; $P < 0.05$). The finding indicates that male and female managers preferred conflict management strategy that is relative to their social roles, behaviours and characteristic associated with their genders. Thus, hypothesis one was confirmed.

Ho2: There is a significant difference between male and female managers' conflict resolution strategy preference.

Table 2 shows that there was no significant difference between male and female managers' conflict resolution strategy preference ($t(181) = 11.08$; $P > 0.05$). The finding indicates that both male and female manager's equally adopted collective bargaining with implication for participatory bargaining process. This implies that for efficient utilizations of collective bargaining strategy and sustainability of industrial peace and harmony both male and female managers adopted pattern of behaviors and characteristics associated with their gender. The result shows that hypothesis two was not confirmed.

Ho3: There is a significant difference between male and female managers' conflict management efficiency on the basis of conflict Management style preference

Table 3 reveals that there was no significant difference between female and male managers' efficiency in managing industrial conflict ($t(181) = 10.23$; $P > 0.05$). The finding indicates that both male and female managers were found to be equally efficient in managing industrial conflict in selected work organization. The results show that hypothesis three was not confirmed.

Discussion of Findings

Hypothesis one predicted that there is a significant relationship between gender difference and conflict

resolution management strategy preference of the managers. The finding shows that male managers preferred collective bargaining strategy characterized by masculine associated pattern of behaviour such as; coercion, persuasion, authoritarianism and mobilization. While female managers preferred collective bargaining strategy characterized by feminine associated behaviour with an embodiment of participatory management style such as; relational, democratic and deliberation in selected work organizations in South-Western Nigeria. This implies that there is a significant relationship between gender difference and conflict management style preference among managers in selected work organizations. The findings corroborate Akintayo (2010); Mobarak (2004), Sallick (2003) and Limond (2002) who submit that male aggressiveness and coercion during collective bargaining process usually make them ineffective in managing industrial conflict. Juliet (2003) and Clement (2004) also support the finding of the study. They contend that female relational and compromising skill acquired through family role tends to afford them opportunity to negotiate and lobby for peaceful co-existence of the organization rather than male managers that seem to be too coercive and aggressive at the bargaining table.

Hypothesis two predicted that there is a significant difference between male and female managers conflict resolution strategy preference. The finding reveals that there was no significant difference between male and female managers' conflict resolution preference. The finding indicates that both male and female managers equally adopted collective bargaining as effective mechanism for conflict management effectiveness. The finding corroborates Akintayo (2010); Berryman-Fink and Brunner (1997), Monroe, Disalvo, Lewis and Berzi (1991), Armstrong (2002) and Cleaner (2004) who submit that male and female managers preferred utilization of collective bargaining as strategy for effective conflict management in work organization. The authors report in another way round disagreed with the present finding as they argue that female managers tend to use interpersonal, compromising, co-operative, collaborative, avoiding, pro-social, and communicative approaches in the course of managing industrial conflict. While male managers often utilized more aggressive, competitive, confronting, assertive, pro-task and coercive approaches more often than the female managers, even when collective bargaining strategy is being adopted (Gibbs and Lach, 1994; Lay, 1995; Akintayo, 2004; Ajaja, 2004; Adeyemo, 2005).

Hypothesis three predicted that there is a significant difference between male and female managers' conflict management efficiency on the basis of conflict management strategy preference. The finding shows that both male and female managers were equally efficient in managing industrial conflict towards

sustainability of industrial peace and harmonious labour-management relations in selected work organizations. The finding indicates that female manager's adoption of democratic, interpersonal and relational approaches in the course of managing industrial conflict place them on efficiency scale level as well as the male managers, who tend to adopt coercive and competitive approaches. However, male managers, who preferred coercion, authoritative and persuasive approaches were equally efficient in managing industrial conflict as female managers in selected work organizations. The finding reveals that a significant relationship exists between conflict resolution strategy preferred by the managers and conflict management efficiency. The finding shows that the respondents utilized collective bargaining strategy in the course of managing industrial conflict which has often resulted to industrial peace and harmony. The finding of the study corroborates Okedara (1999); Akintayo (2010), Omole (2004), Akintayo, (2004), Korabic, Baril and Watson (1993) and Monroe, Disalvo, Lewis and Berzi (1991) who reported that collective bargaining strategy has been found to be very effective in resolving industrial conflict. The authors stressed further that communication structures during collective bargaining often facilitate freedom of expression and participation of workers in decision making process. The finding of the study implies that industrial conflict tends to be amicably resolved without resulting to strike action in work organization, when the deliberation and negotiation process on issues relating to employment relations are democratized.

CONCLUSION

The findings of the study established that a significant relationship exist between gender difference and conflict management strategy preference of managers in selected work organizations in South-West Nigerian. The findings further emphasized that both male and female managers preferred collective bargaining as mechanism for efficient conflict management. The finding further confirmed that gender and preferred conflict management strategy characterized by associated social roles, behaviours and characteristics of male and female managers are moderating forces in the course of managing industrial conflict.

However, the study submits that industrial conflict can be efficiently managed without resulting to strike action, when collective bargaining strategy is employed to embrace persuasion, lobbying, coercion, industrial democracy, effective communication style, compromising and sometimes relational. This will definitely foster sustainable labour-management relations and cordial interpersonal relationship among the workforce since participatory approach to management of conflict is

subsumed in collective bargaining process.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that collective bargaining strategy should be encouraged as conflict resolution strategy in order to guarantee efficient labour-management relations.

Also, both male and female managers should avoid the use of coercion, competition, aggressiveness and pro-task in the course of managing industrial conflict. Rather, persuasion, compromising, relational, lobbying and participatory approaches should be employed during collective bargaining process in order to foster efficient labour-management relations at workplace.

Furthermore, the both male and female managers should be empowered to hold managerial position without any gender bias or prejudice. This will allow them to contribute their own quota towards organizational growth and development. Also, this will also afford the female managers to utilize their relational skills acquired through home work management in the course of managing industrial conflict.

Besides, both male and female managers should be opportune to undergo continuing education in order to update their skills and knowledge on conflict management strategies. This could be done by organizing on – the – job and off – the – job training programmes that focus on effective management of industrial conflict and harmonious labour-management relations at workplace. This will assist in the reduction of industrial strike action and foster increased productivity at workplace in Nigeria.

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