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Are Conflict Management Styles of Gen Y Related to their Socio-Demographic Characteristics?

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Abstract- A conflict is a disagreement between two or more parties (people/group). Within organizations, conflicts are inevitable. The growth in organizational interdependence, shift to collaborative team-based structures, increased diversity, and environmental uncertainty are all factors that can lead to higher degrees of organizational conflict (Callanan & Perri, 2006). Managers today are challenged to minimize the friction caused by multigenerational workforce and maximize the assets of distinct sets of work values and styles simultaneously. (Deyoe, R. H., & Fox, T. L. (2012). In response to growing demands for workplace harmony and productivity, effective conflict management is becoming paramount (Chan et al., 2006, 289). This paper takes a look at the conflict management styles of the next generation, Generation Y, who are in midst of their education and ready to enter the workforce. It focuses on their preferred conflict management style and also explores relationship between their socio-demographic characteristics and preferred conflict management style. Thomas kilman's questionnaire was used to measure the conflict management styles of the students. A better understanding of the dominant conflict management style amongst Gen Y and the contribution of individual differences to conflict management has implications for managing employees effectively, especially for their recruitment and selection, training and development, as well as motivating and rewarding (Meier, J, & Crocker, M. (2010). The findings, implications, directions for further research and the limitations are discussed in the paper.

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Dr. Smruti Rahul Patre

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I. Introduction

Nauta & Kluwer (2004) contended that conflict is an important theme to study, both in organizations and in close relationships. In organizations, conflict may hinder productivity and job satisfaction. In close relationships it can also be a threat to relationship satisfaction and endurance of relationship. Such situations necessitates conflict to be studied empirically by gathering data on its appearance, causes and consequences, and on emotional, cognitive, motivational and behavioural aspects (Nauta & Kluwer, 2004).

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Today Workplace is populated by different generational cohorts—specifically Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials (Gen Y). With these diverse generations now in the workplace, obstacles involving respect, communication, and work styles are cropping up faster than some managers can handle them. If you're prepared, you can foster a respectful, collaborative work environment among these employees. It's now crucial and critical that management understands each generation's unique core values so they can effectively manage and lead those generations. When managers come to the point of understanding generational differences, conflicts will be resolved effectively and productivity of the organization will increase.

Gen Y is increasingly important now because of the fact that they are becoming part of workforce. Since workplace diversity in terms of multigenerations would be an inevitable phenomenon in the future, empirical studies are needed to establish the differences and to study how these generations interact while at work and how organisations can be responsive enough to understand these styles to make workplaces ready for these generations. (Mukundan et.al, , 2013). This paper therefore is an attempt to identify the styles that Gen y adopts while confronting a conflict and the influence of their characteristics on their conflict management style. The study focuses on conflict management syles of Gen Y who are in the midst of their education. The findings will provide a better understanding of the dominant conflict management style amongst gen Y and the contribution of individual differences to conflict management which has implications for managing human resources in organizational contexts, especially for their recruitment and selection, training and development, as well as motivating and rewarding. Organization development practitioners, likewise, would benefit from knowing where they are most likely to encounter different patterns of conflict styles.

II. Conflict and Conflict Management Styles

Conflict is understood differently by different people and hence there exists a number of definitions of conflict. It is an inevitable component of human activity

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(Brahnam et al, 2005) that may be viewed as a situation in which the concerns of two or more individuals appear to be incompatible (Darling & Fogliasso, 1999), and which tends to occur when individuals or groups perceive that others are preventing them from attaining their goals (Antonioni, 1998). Rahim looks it as, "An interactive process manifested in incompatibility, disagreement, or dissonance within or between social entities (i.e., individual, group, organization, etc)". Poole and Putnam (1997) define conflict as the process of interaction by interdependent individuals who perceive incompatible goals. According to Augsburger (1992), "conflict is a crisis that forces us to recognize explicitly that we live with multiple realities and must negotiate a common reality; that we bring with a role for each and for both".

During the past number of decades researchers have taken a keen interest in conflict and its impact on organizations. Researchers have focussed on a number of factors e.g. such as styles of handling conflict (Jehn, 1997; Jehn, Northcraft & Neale, 1999), resolution strategies (Van de Vliert & Euwema, 1994), conflict and justice (Ohbuchi, Suzuki & Hayashi, 2001), theories of managing conflict (Rahim, 2002), conflict of interest and objectives (Vilaseca, 2002) and conflict management techniques (Fillbeck & Smith, 1997).

Conflict styles can be defined as the style that an individual chooses to satisfy one or others (Womack, 1988). Some of the styles of the persons involved in a conflict can play a critical role (either be individuals, or as groups). Certain styles promote a search for solutions while some lead to a deadlock and result in strained relations. Several styles have been identified by theorist – one of the early theories of conflict style resolution was one-dimensional proposed by Mary P Follet (1924) where three styles were proposed – domination compromise and integration and added two more secondary styles namely avoidance and suppression. Later, Blake and Mouton (1964) developed the managerial grid, which included two dimensions: concern for production and concern for people with four styles–forcing (low-low for both, smoothing, compromising and problem solving (high- high for both). Thomas and Kilmann (1974, 1977) based on the work of Blake and Mouton labelled two components of conflict behavior as assertiveness and cooperativeness. Assertiveness was a behavior that satisfies one's own concern, and cooperativeness was a behavior that satisfies another person's concerns. These two dimensions yield the five conflict management styles of competitiveness, accommodation, compromise, avoiding and collaboration. This model has been one of the popular models. Rahim & Bonomo (1979, 1983) came with a differentiation with two dimensions namely – concern for self and concern for others which basically portrays the motivational orientation of an individual at the time of conflict. Rahim's model is based on five conflict handling approaches namely integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding and compromising. All the styles however converge into the perceptions of the conflicting parties when conflicts arise between two parties it may either lead to resignation to fate or a power struggle. Pareekh & purohit (2010) proposed that the perception of the conflicting groups should be used to understand the modes of conflict management. They suggested two modes of conflict management – approach and avoidance. Avoidance is based on fear and dysfunctional while approach is based on hope and functional. Avoidance is typified by a tendency to deny, rationalise or avoid the problem, to displace anger or aggression or to use emotional appeals while approach orientation is characterised by making efforts to find a solution by one's own efforts or with the help of others. This dimension has been used in understanding conflict styles of managers (Pareek 1987). Establishing research findings on multigenerational conflict styles is relatively at an early stage. Since workplace diversity in terms of multigenerations would be an inevitable phenomenon in the future, empirical studies are needed to establish the differences and to study how these generations interact while at work and how organisations can be responsive enough to understand these styles to make workplaces ready for these generations. This paper therefore is an attempt to identify the styles that Gen y adopts while in conflict with others.

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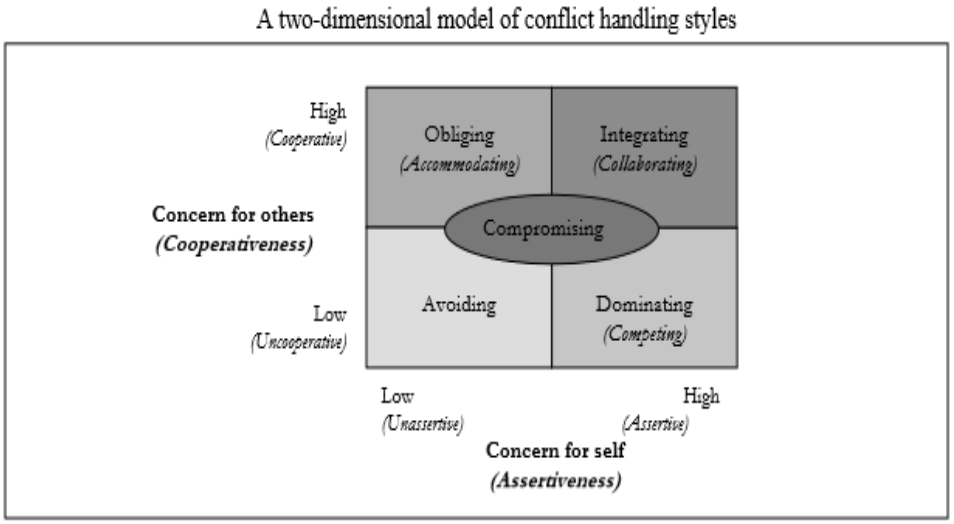

Compiled using: Rahim (1983, 369) and Thomas & Kilman (1974 in Brahnam et al. (2005, 199))

Figure 1

a) Generation defined: The four generations

One of the most accepted definitions refers a generation as "a group of people or cohorts who share birth years and experiences as they move through time together" (Kupperschmidt, 2000, p. 66). This definition, as well as other definitions defines generation as a group of people with similar views, values, and attitudes, as a result of common life experiences (Edmunds & Turner, 2005; Ryder, 1965). The effects of these life experiences are seen as fairly stable over their lives (Smola & Sutton, 2002) and can be used to distinguish one generation from another (Jurkiewicz & Brown, 1998).

b) The four generations

Macon, M., & Artley, J. (2009) has categorized four generations as below.

1. Veterans – Born in years prior to 1945, this generation is generally referred to as Veterans, Silent's, Traditionalists, Matures or Pre-Boomers
2. Baby Boomers – Born between the years 1945 and 1964, this generation is typically called Baby Boomers
3. Generation X – Born between 1965 and 1979
4. Generation Y – Born in between 1980 and 2000. It is typically called as Millenials.

c) Gen Y (Millenials) characteristics

This enormously powerful group in terms of sheer size brought up during the times of economic prosperity believes in empowerment, are networked, collaborative ,highly social and team focused, (UN report 2010) need they demand workplace relationships that cater to the their needs of social networking, work life balance and civic engagement. loyalty does not have the same meaning as their earlier cohorts had as these millennial's seek for instant gratification (Wynn 2012). Financial rewards and motivators cannot lure this generation. They seek advancement in their career and hence don't mind switching their jobs for the sake of career. They look for participation in intelligent talks and decisions which aeefct them directly. They are highly team oriented and like empowerment in their job. Hence, they do not believe in hierarchies and rather expect a mentoring role from the seniors than a supervisory role. To this generation, work is seen as an elective activity to further one's personal goals rather than a necessity (Saxena & Jain 2012). Some researchers connote them in negative manner as the "generation me" as they are sometimes described with negative connotations such as being self-centered and unmotivated .However, this cohort has emerged as the most educated, technology savvy generation ever. They have also been quoted as ones who have strong work ethics when they have landed in the right job. (Mukundan, S et al, 2013).

d) Multi generations and role of conflict

Present workplace face the biggest challenge of managing diverse workforce in terms of generations. Today, organizations have four generations working together. This brings in a lot of complexities as each generation have their own expectations of the workplace and hence perspectives differ which brings in scope for conflicts at workplace. While several generations are at the workplace they should be encouraged to deal with generational differences and adopt the right conflict styles too. Failure to do so may cause misunderstandings, miscommunications and mixed signals (Smola & Sutton, 2002). Conflicts are likely to arise between the baby boomers /Gen x and the Gen y as they would comprise a major portion of the workforce. (Mukundan, S., Dhanya, M., & Saraswathyamma, K. P. (2013).

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III. Research Methodology

Conflict management styles of Gen Y were assessed using the Thomas-Kilman instrument. The TKI (Thomas and Kilmann, 1974, 2002) is an established measure of conflict styles that is widely used in managerial training and organization development interventions. The measure contains 30 forced-choice items, each of which asks subjects to choose one of two statements as most characteristic of their behavior. The study sample consisted of 270 college students of Jamshedpur. A cross section of the sample was done in terms of the background of the students.

IV. Data Analysis

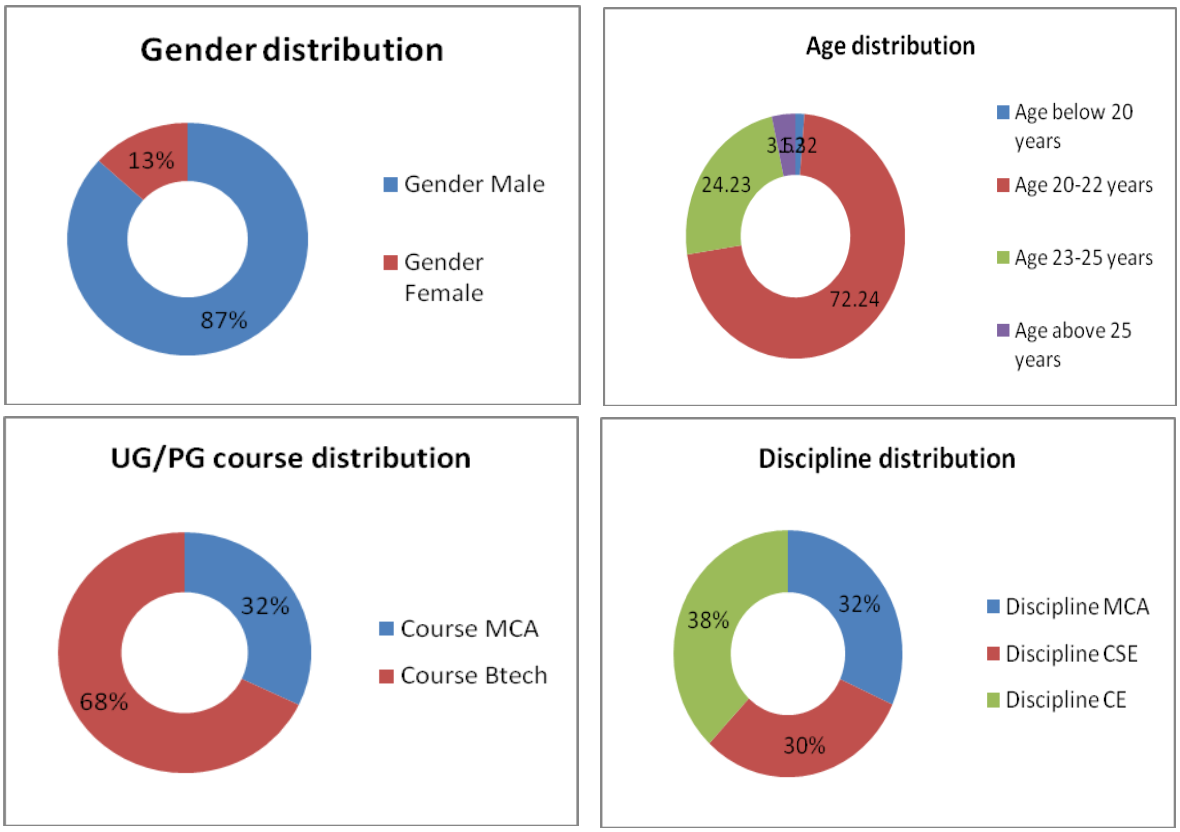
This qualitative study explored the most preferred conflict management styles of gen Y (students) and its association with the socio-demographic variables of them. There are very few studies that seek to ascertain the association between these two. Among the 300 students to whom the questionnaire was distributed, 227 filled the questionnaires completely. Chi-square test and Cramers test was used to test the association between conflict management styles and the socio demographic variables. The data was analysed using SPSS software.

a) Socio-Demographic analysis

The demographic statistics of these 227 respondents are briefly discussed below.

Gender: 87% of respondents were males whereas 13% females. *Age:* 72.24% rerspondents were aged in between 20-22 years, 24.23% in between 23-25 years and 3.52% were aged above 25 years. Since most of the students were pursuing final year B-tech, maximum were aged in between 20-22 years. *Course level:* 32.16% students were pursuing their PG course (MCA), while 67.84% were pursuing their graduation in B-tech. Students from only three disciplines of study were studied. *Academic discipline*: 37.89% students were from Civil engineering discipline, 31.72% from computer science and engineering and remaining 31.72% from MCA. *Family structure*: 65% respondents belonged to nuclear family whereas 35% to joint family. *Fathers occupation*: 57% students father were in service class, 39% in business class, 2% were farmers, 1% retired and 0.44% students father were expired. *Mothers occupation*: 92% of students mother were house wife, while 8% belonged to working class. *No. of siblings*: 3% students were single child in their family, 33% had one sibling, 29% had two siblings and 35% students had more than 2 siblings. *Placement amongst siblings*: 32% respondents were eldest among their siblings, 45% were youngest, 19% were placed in middle and 3% were the single child in their family. *Family income level*: 89% respondents belonged to a family with average income, while 11% belonged to low income family. None of the student belonged to high income family background.

Chart 1: Frequency distribution of demographic variables



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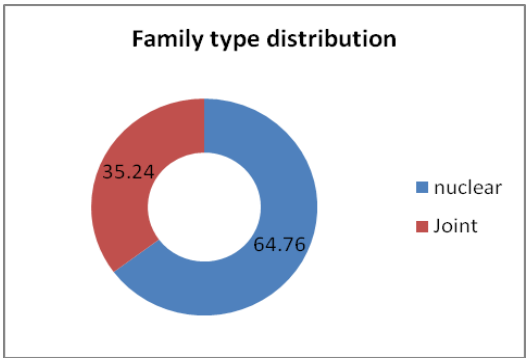
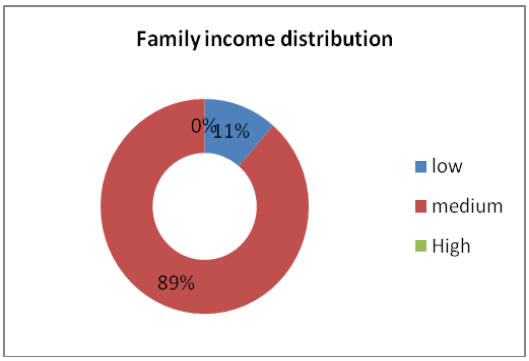
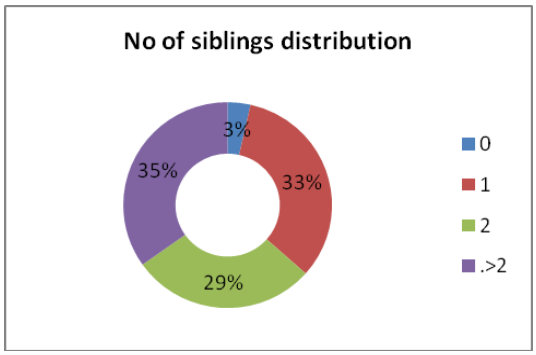
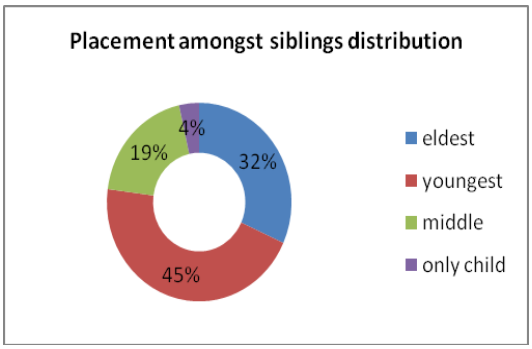
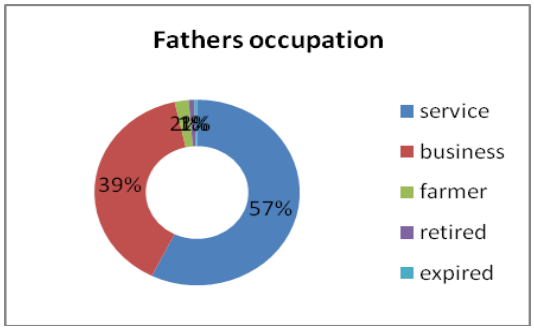
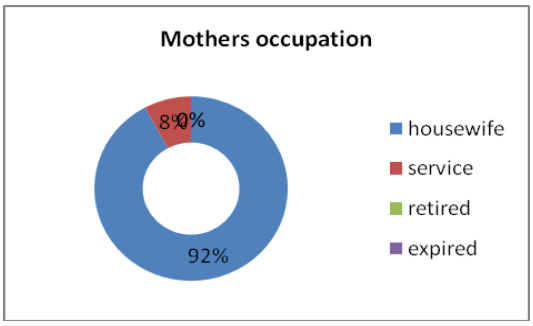








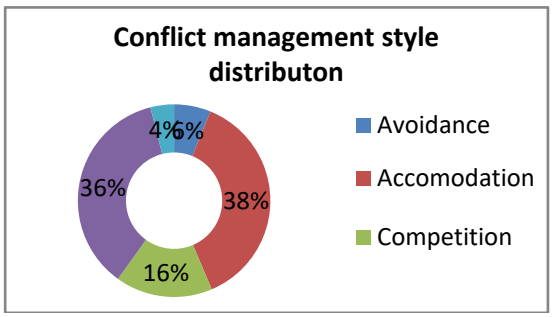




b) Conflict Management Style in Gen Y

Table 1: Frequency distribution of conflict management styles of Gen Y (students)

Variable	Style	N	%
Style	Avoidance	14	6.16
	Accommodation	85	37.44
	Competition	37	16.29
	Collaboration	82	36.12
	Compromise	9	3.96



It is seen from the table---- that the 37% students accommodate to manage their conflicts while 36% collaborate. These are the most preferred conflict management styles. The least preferred style is avoidance (3.96%), followed by compromise (6.16%). It is seen that the Gen Y students prefer giving importance to others first and then themselves in managing conflicts, which is a good sign of maintaining cordial relations in their personal and professional life. This is similar to the finding that in India the most preferred style to resolve the conflict is accommodating followed by Avoiding (Lather, A. S., Jain, S., & Shukla, A. D. (2010) but contrasts another finding which says most preferred style of Gen Y is negotiation followed by compromise (Mukundan, S., Dhanya, M., & Saraswathyamma, K. P. (2013)). It is assumed that collaborating, or integrating, styles is a better method for responding to conflict, and individuals should be trained to strive for collaboration when confronted by a conflicting situation (Weingar t & Jehn, 2000). So it can be said that Gen Y students are naturally trained to collaborate in conflicts.

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c) *Conflict management styles of Gen Y across various socio-demographic variables*

Table 2: Conflict management styles and socio-demographic variables

Variables	Avoidance (%)	Accomodation (%)	Competition (%)	Collaboration (%)	Compromise (%)	Chi	P	Cramers	P
Gender									
Males	10.3	39.08	17.76	33.5	4.56	10.12	0.03	0.21	0.03
Females	13.33	26.66	6.66	53.33	0				
Age									
< 20 yrs	0	0	0	0	0	14.58	0.05	0.17	0.06
20-22 yrs	6.21	41.61	19.87	29.81	4.34				
23-25 yrs	7.27	27.27	7.27	54.54	3.63				
above 25 yrs	0	37.5	12.5	50	0				
Course level									
MCA	5.47	26.02	6.84	58.9	2.73	25.5	0	0.33	0
Btech	6.49	42.85	20.77	25.32	4.54				
Discipline of study									
MCA	5.47	26.02	6.84	58.9	2.73	25.6	0.01	0.24	0.00
CSE	7.24	37.68	17.39	33.33	4.34				
CE	5.81	46.51	23.25	19.76	4.65				
Family Structure									
Nuclear	7.48	34.01	14.96	38.77	4.76	4.418	0.35		
Joint	3.75	43.75	18.75	31.25	2.5				
No. of siblings									
Zero	8.47	42.37	21.05	25.42	3.38	28.14	0.05	0.2	0.00
One	6.6	31.13	16.03	43.39	2.83				
Two	1.88	47.16	9.43	35.84	5.66				
>two	11.11	22.22	33.33	22.22	11.11				
Placement amongst siblings									
Eldest	5.55	43.05	19.4	27.77	4.16	12.12	0.42		
Youngest	7.76	36.89	14.56	36.89	3.88				
Middle	4.54	36.36	15.9	40.9	2.27				
Only child	0	0	12.5	75	12.5				
Fathers occupation									
Service	7.69	40	20	30.76	1.53	32.56	0.008	0.189	0.00
Bus	4.49	37.07	12.3	40.44	5.61				
Farmer	0	0	0	60	40				
Retired	0	0	0	100	0				
Expired	0	0	0	100	0				
Mothers occupation									
Housewife	5.26	38.75	16.26	35.4	4.3	5.85	0.21		
Service	16.6	22.22	16.6	44.44	0				
Retired	0	0	0	0	0				
Expired	0	0	0	0	0				

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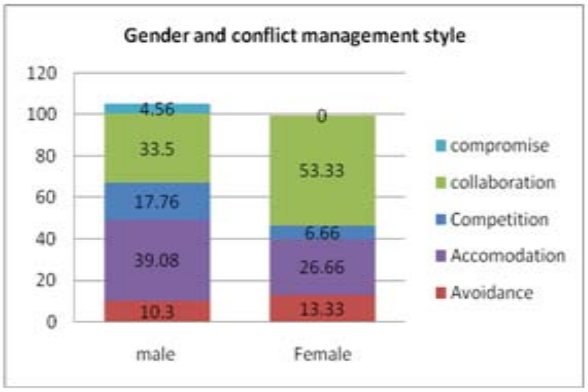
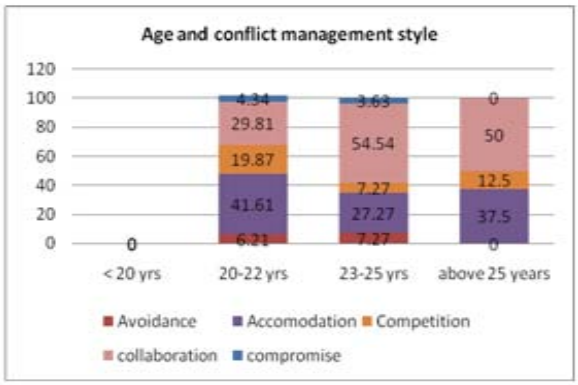
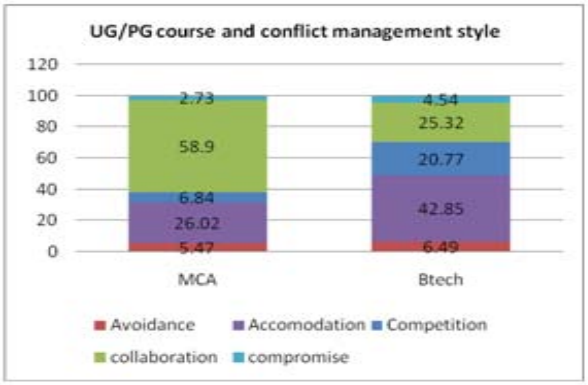
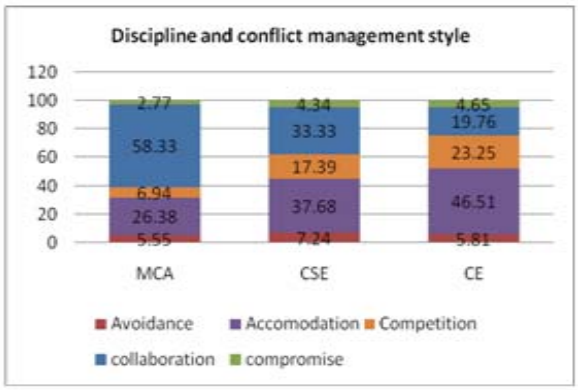
Family Income									
Low	3.84	46.15	26.92	15.38	7.69	7.4	0.11		
Medium	6.4	36.31	14.92	38.8	3.48				
High	0	0	0	0	0				

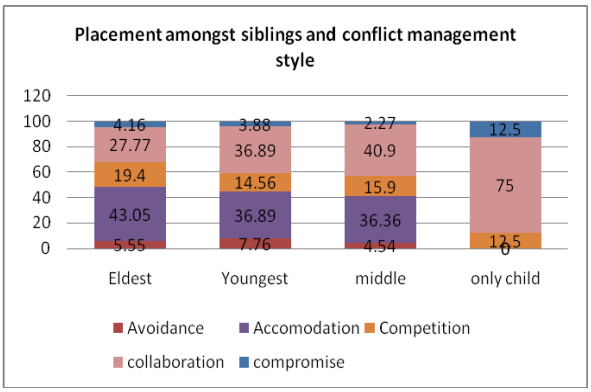
Graph 1: Socio-demographic variables and conflict management styles of Gen Y

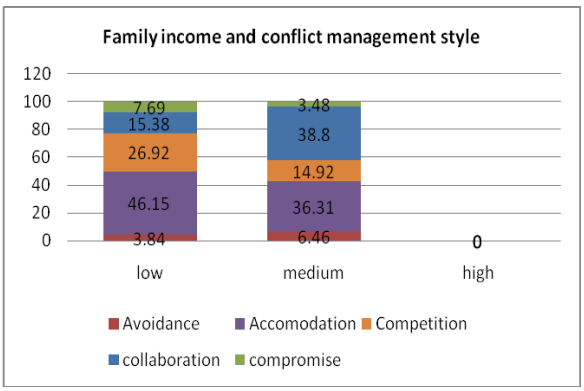












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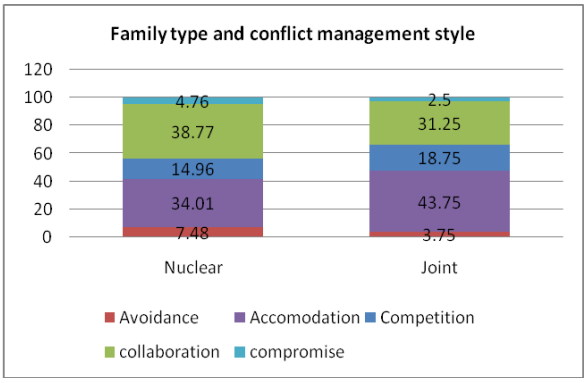

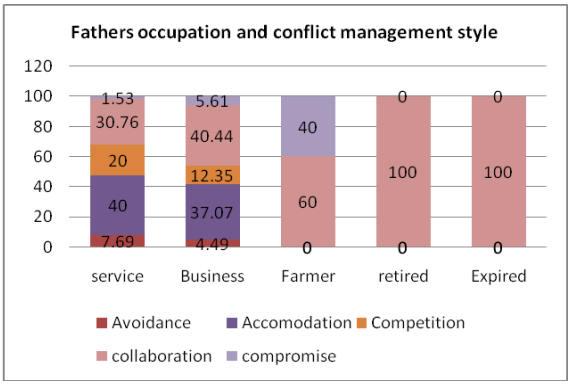

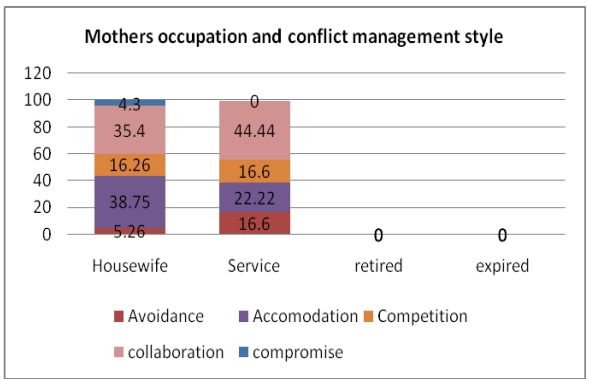

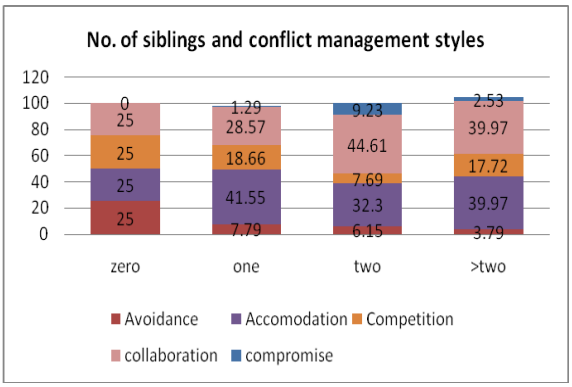

This study attempted to explore the association between conflict management style of Gen y and their ten different socio-demographic factors like gender, age, their course level of study, academic discipline, family structure, no. of siblings, placement amongst siblings, fathers occupation, mothers occupation and family income level. Table 1 shows the relationship between socio-demographic variables of the respondents and their conflict management styles.

Gender: Gender plays a strong and significant role in influencing Gen Y's conflict management style (Chi-sq=10.25, p=03; Cramers V=0.21, p=0.03). It was found that 53% females distinctively preferred collaboration (approach) style and 26% preferred accommodation style when confronted with a conflict, whereas 39% male preferred accommodation and 33% prefer collaboration style. It can be said that males prefer avoidance-approach, whereas females prefer approach-avoidance style of managing conflict. This difference could be attributed partly to the growing acceptance of women empowerment in the society and partly to the collectivist culture that Indians have. This finding partially supports the literature that male students prefer the approach modes of conflict and the females have a mixed preference of both approach and avoidance (Mukundan S., Dhanya, M., & Saraswathyamma, K. P. (2013), but contrasts to another finding which says Males tended to use the forcing or competing conflict management styles compared with their female counterparts (Lindeman et al., 1997; Polkinghorn & Byme, 2001; Osisioma, 2009). Inconsistency in the literature indicates the need for more larger scale studies on the role of gender in predicting conflict management styles. (Al Wekhian, J. (2015).

Age: Age plays a strong and significant role in determining conflict management styles.(Chi-sq=14.58, p=00.04; Cramers V=0.17, p=0.04). Gen Y students aged 20-22 years preferred Accommodation (avoidance), whereas those aged in between 23-25 years and above 25 years preferred to collaborate (approach) when confronted with a conflict. Older students were discovered to have concern for both self and the opponent in conflicting situation, whereas younger students preferred to lose against their opponent to maintain relationship. This difference across the age could be attributed partly to the maturity that develops with age and hence students look for collaborative ways to resolve a conflict. This contrasts the literature which states that the older students were discovered to use more avoiding, while younger students are more likely to be competitive in nature (Gbadamosi, O., Ghanbari Baghestan, A., & Al-Mabrouk, K. (2014).

Academic discipline and Level of course: Gen Y students conflict management style is strongly and significantly influenced by their academic discipline (Chi-sq=27.63, p=0.01; Cramers V=0.24, p=0.001. and level of course (Chi-sq=25.59, p=00; Cramers V=0.33, p=00). It was found that PG (MCA) students preferred collaboration whereas UG (B-Tech) both Civil and Computer Science engineering students preferred to accommodate in conflicting situation. This difference in conflict management style can be partly attributed to

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their age and maturity level which gives them an understanding of handling conflict in better ways. There is no available literature to study the academic influence on conflict management.

Family structure: The family structure whether joint or nuclear Gen Y does not significantly determine their conflict management style .(Chi-sq=4.41, p=0.35). It was found that the respondents from nuclear family preferred to collaborate (38.77%) whereas those from joint family preferred to accommodate (43.75%). This finding partially supports the literature that both men and women, living in joint family were found to have better adjustment than individuals living in nuclear families (Ramamurti & Jamuna, 1984). Indian joint families are considered to be strong, stable, close, resilient and enduring with focus on family integrity, family loyalty, and family unity at expense of individuality, freedom of choice, privacy and personal space (Chekki D, 1996). Hence they prefer to accommodate when confronted by conflict.

No. of siblings: It was found that number of siblings plays a strong and significant role in determining Gen Y's conflict management style. This study found that both the groups of students who were single child and also who had two siblings accommodate, whereas those having one sibling preferred to collaborate in conflicts. It was also found that those having more than 2 siblings compete to resolve their conflicts. Research says siblings serve as companions, confidants, and role models in childhood and adolescence (e.g., Dunn, 2007) and as sources of support throughout adulthood (e.g., Connidis & Campbell, 1995) which directly affect the family environment. This difference in conflict management styles with varying number of siblings can be attributed to the fact that lone child may not enjoy such environment, hence prefers to give up in conflicts, whereas those having siblings learn to manage conflicts in different ways. Like those having one sibling, may initially have more insecurity which later may develop into strong bonding and hence they may prefer to collaborate. While those having two siblings, may have to adjust a lot, resulting in accommodation style to manage their conflicts. Finally, more than two siblings is a big family, where every individual may have to fight to get their needs and wants fulfilled, hence they prefer to compete in conflicting situations.

Placement amongst siblings: The order of birth or placement amongst siblings does not significantly influence Gen Y's conflict managing style. But, it was found that the only child and those born in middle preferred to collaborate, eldest preferred to accommodate, whreas youngest preferred collaborating or accommodating. This finding is partially consistent with the literature that those born in middle are considered peacemakers, and a good resource to turn to when it comes to conflict resolution. (Robin Throckmorton, 2013). Those who are Only children never have to compete with siblings for personal attention, which makes them more confident and articulate, whereas those who are youngest are manipulative, charming, blames others, attention seekers. Eldest amongst siblings are practical, confident, and able to delegate and make rapid decisions. (Bernardo Tirado, 2011). All these characteristics influence the preferred style to manage conflict.

Parents occupation: This study explored a strong and significant relationship between students fathers occupation and their conflict management style (Chi-sq=32.56, p=0; cramers=0.189, p=.008), but mothers did not (chi-sq=5.85, p=0.21). It was found that students whose father were in service preferred to accommodate, while those in business, farming, retired and expired preferred to collaborate when confronted with a conflict. Also students whose mother was housewife preferred to accommodate whereas whose mother was working preferred to collaborate. Working women are more empowered and they give equal concerns to others as well as self while resolving conflict. Specifically, non-employed mothers' homemaker role experiences indirectly affects their toddlers behaviors (Barling, MacEwen and Nolte, 1993).

Family income: The study discovered no significant association between Family income level of Gen Y and their conflict management style (chi-sq=7.4, p=0.11). It was found that students with low family income background preferred to accommodate, whereas those with average level preferred to collaborate. This may be due to the fact that low access to resources results in giving up things and high concern for others in family. Whereas, high access to resources, may result in high concern for others as well as self. This contrasts the literature finding that low income families tend to have more acts of violence compared to others (Gelles, 1992, 1997, Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980). This means low income level should compete to resolve conflict, which is not the case here.

V. Conclusion

An understanding of the conflict management styles that Gen Y is likely to use while confronting conflict situations would be of enormous use for the superiors and human resource professionals, as they can examine the background variables of Gen Y and can seek to identify their preferred style of conflict handling at work. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the most preferred conflict resolution styles used by Gen Y and to determine the effects (if any) of demographic variables on how they respond to conflicts. The present study found that the most preferred conflict management style of Gen Y is accommodation, followed by collaboration. This shows

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that while having high concern for self, they have concern for others as well in conflicts, which is a good sign for healthy competitions and peace at large. The background of the individuals seems to be a factor in deciding the conflict style adopted as it is seen in the study. The study explored a strong and significant association between gender, age, course, discipline, academic year and fathers occupation with the preferred style of conflict management of Gen Y. While, a weak association was discovered between their family structure, family income level, no of siblings, placement amongst siblings and their mothers occupation with their conflict management style. This study was cross-sectional in nature and does not found whether individuals" conflict handling styles change over time when they join the workplace. Hence, it is recommended to conduct a future research with a longitudinal survey, with an objective to determine whether a conflict handling style used changes overtime.

VI. Future Implications

The area researched is extremely relevant in the coming years anywhere across the globe and this study was done in one country and in a small city ,therefore more empirical research needs to be done on a wider population. This paper studied the conflict management styles of a homogenoous group of young students only, therefore it cannot be generalized to a non student sample. (Smarty Mukundan et al, 2013).

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