

Gender of Boss, Giving and Receiving Positive Strokes and Conflict Management Styles: A Study of Associates Working In Indian Organizations

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Abstract— Positive stroking (recognition, compliments, and touch) is an identified driver of workplace motivation and healthy interpersonal relationships, but does this hold true in a cross gender scenario. Will a female employee like touch stroke by male boss or vice-versa? If no or yes; does this hold true for all females or males in general or they can still be differentiated? The present study was conducted with this premise. A sample of 160 associates working in various Indian organizations were taken. They were mapped on their conflict management styles and giving and receiving positive strokes with boss. The study revealed some very interesting results. Firstly overall, The Competing males and females enjoy to be bragged by boss of opposite gender. Collaborating and Competing males prefer positive touch stroke from boss irrespective of gender, while in case of females they do not prefer touch stroke from boss of even same gender. Both males and females irrespective of any conflict management style do not prefer to give strokes when they have boss of same gender, however Competing females prefer giving 'Feel Good' stroke to the boss of opposite gender while Competing males do not want to give 'Feel Good' stroke to female boss. Many such interesting results are found and discussed in details in the present study which gives insight in to boss-subordinate relationships in case of same gender and cross gender with respect to preferred conflict management styles of subordinates.

Index Terms— Gender of Boss, Competing, Collaborating, Accommodating, Avoiding, Compromising, Verbal strokes, Touch Strokes, Giving Strokes, Receiving Strokes.

I. INTRODUCTION

The employee plays crucial role in attaining organizational goals. The employee behaviour and factors determining the same has attracted scholarly interest. The relations among employees are regulated by the social interaction encountered with each other in the organization. Every single social interaction is referred to as a stroke. Transactional analysis is the study of these social interactions between people. Eric berne gave the concept of transaction analysis and defined a stroke as 'a unit of human recognition which gives us simulation'. In general, stroke is any act of recognition for another person. Stroke can be verbal or non-verbal. There are broadly categorized as, namely positive, negative or mixed strokes. Both positive and negative strokes are found to be constructive. Positive strokes boost an employee's sense of

self-worth, which motivates and drives him. On the other hand, an employee who does not receive sufficient positive stroke is more likely to be less motivated and thus productivity decreases. Given that motivation levels are going to dwindle over time, consistent application of positive strokes in the appropriate amount might help maintain employee engagement and keep them motivated (Ali, 2015).

The capacity to manage conflict has been acknowledged as a critical management skill, and its importance continues to rise as managers are increasingly compelled to solve conflicts (Mintzberg, 1973). Though the increased research in the area of conflict management styles has improved our understanding of superior-subordinate relationship, the impact of gender on this crucial skill area remains scarce (Rowley, Hossain, & Barry, 2010). The transaction analysis can be applied for resolving conflict in the organization. It helps to understand the employee behaviour and thus attracted scholarly interest. It has become a reality that effective management is highly dependent on the ability to manage conflict successfully (Brahnam, Margavio, Hignite, Barrier, & Chin, 2005).

The rising percentage of women in working population has made it crucial to study the conflict management styles adopted by both male and female (Manyak, & Katono, 2010). Brewer et al. (2002) states that female managers may even have an edge when it comes to conflict resolution as they are more flexible in their gender role orientation for resolving conflict than individuals who are more stubborn. Thus, it is important to study the role of cross gender in superior-subordinate relationship for resolving the conflict in existence by giving or receiving adequate level of strokes. Managers can undertake conflict management styles for the purpose of managing people at work. There are five conflict management strategies, namely Competing (each party tries to win at any cost), Collaborating (working with opposing party to arrive at win-win situation), Accommodating (giving opposing party what they want), Avoiding (to ignore the conflict indefinitely), Compromising (arriving at a decision which is not favoured by either of the parties) (Prakash & Jain, 2017). The study investigates the difference in preferred conflict management style on the basis of gender of the boss while giving and receiving strokes by subordinate. The study gives insight in to boss-subordinate relationships in case of same gender and cross gender with respect to preferred conflict management styles of subordinates.

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II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Conflict is inevitable problem in today's corporate world and is unavoidably present in every human interaction. Conflicts are central to organizations. The reasons for organizational climate are disagreement, incompatibility, clash in goals and positions etc. It also affects organizational climate and performance efficiency of teams (Alper et al, 2000). Conflicts can divert people's attentions from their organizational goals. It can affect them mentally, physically and emotionally too (Hussein et al., 2019). With frequent conflicts, the overall productivity of the organization is hampered which highlights the importance of resolving conflicts on time with effective conflict management strategies. Some conflicts are good for organizational growth but the excess of disagreements and the increased frequency leads to dysfunctional outcomes. Thus, conflict management demands adoption of effective and essential strategies (Rahim, 2002).

Not all conflicts can be managed with the similar approach. It varies from person to person as per their abilities and social skills. There are various styles of handling conflicts which depends upon the situation or circumstance. The five major styles of managing conflicts includes integrating, obliging, compromising, dominating and avoiding. Therefore, the adoption of an appropriate style involves proper diagnosis and interventions. Studies show that the conflict management strategies differ among males and females. Females are more inclined to avoid and compromise which is opposite for their male counterparts (Rahim & Katz, 2020). As per Brewer et al., (2002) conflict management depends upon the gender role orientation and the key position they hold in the organization. Masculine gender role is more inclined towards having a dominating style and feminine conflict management style is avoiding the conflict. Individuals at upper level of management use creative ways of solving conflicts than lower-level management. This is often related to power differentials and it gives rise to imbalance in the socialization process (Manyak&Katono, 2010). In organizational context, position of an individual also determines their way of handling a conflict. Women who are on top management positions are more prone to peaceful organizations and possess greater conflict management skills. Thus, there is a need to involve women in decision making process and equipped with negotiation powers for better conflict handling (Aniemeka et al., 2012).

Transactional analysis is the most popular way to understand and explain the dynamics of interpersonal communication and relationship. With the help of transactional analysis, the link between human needs and behaviours can be understood. It also gives insights about the way individuals, groups and organizations are effective or ineffective in solving their problems and strengthening their relationship(Aldoghan,2014). Transactional Analysis was developed by Eric Berne and states the ways an individual transacts with others. It states that a person behaviour of an individual is regulated by three ego states namely child ego, adult ego and parent ego (Rahiman&Kodikal, 2020). Parent

ego are the set of beliefs and thoughts an individual adopts from their parents, the adult ego is more inclined to have logical and rational perspectives about things and child ego is influenced by the childhood memories and feelings (Carol, 2003). People have different kind of relationship with others and these relationships and behaviours are called as strokes in transaction analysis. The kind of stroking pattern we develop is dependent upon the stage of our life cycle, our position and our feeling about ourselves. Strokes can be positive or negative. Positive strokes include rewards, recognition, love, praise etc. and on the other hand negative strokes consist of anger, accusation and so on (Bando & Yokoyama, 2018). Awareness of strokes is necessary for social recognition and communication. Whether positive or negative, people need stroking in any manner for survival. In organizational settings, where people are mostly involved in psychological games, positive strokes are increasing human potential. Stroking determines the climate of the organization (Lukenbill,1976). Employees who often receive positive strokes from their superiors tend to work with more motivation and zeal while less positive strokes or negative strokes leads to low productivity (Ali,2015).

Objective of the Study

The main objective of this study is:

1) To see how male and female employees with different conflict management styles respond to receiving and giving positive verbal and touch interpersonal strokes to their boss of same or different gender

Research Methodology

Sample

The sample for the study includes 160 associates from various Indian organizations. The statistical technique of stratified systematic sampling was used to select the sample. To select the associates from middle management and lower management stratus, systematic sampling was used wherein every 3rd manager was picked from these strata in the organization.

Survey Instruments

Positive Stroking Questionnaire: A 16 item questionnaire on giving and receiving positive verbal and touch strokes developed by Lewis Quinby based on the classical work of Eric Berne Transactional Analysis was used. The 16 items are divided into four factors namely Giving Positive Verbal Strokes, Receiving Positive Verbal Strokes, Giving Positive Touch Strokes, and Receiving Positive Touch Strokes. The internal consistencies of stroking questionnaire coefficients were as follows: giving positive strokes- 0.71 and taking positive strokes- 0.69. The validity of the same was examined by two experts from academia.

Conflict Resolution Inventory: The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict MODE (Management of Difference Exercise) Instrument (1974) is based on the empirical work of Blake and Mouton in 1964, Lawrence and Lorsch in 1967 and Burke in 1970. This instrument is designed to measure the behavior of an individual when handling interpersonal conflict situations. It is administered individually. Two basic dimensions of behavior in situations of conflict was identified : 1) assertiveness, the degree to which one tries to satisfy

his/her own concerns, and 2) cooperativeness, the degree to which one attempts to satisfy the concerns of others (Thomas, 1974). Five methods or modes of dealing with interpersonal conflict were developed and defined by the authors to measure the basic dimensions identified. The five modes are:

1) Competing - is assertive and uncooperative in which an individual pursues his or her own concerns at the expense of others. It is power-oriented mode and the focus lies in winning (Thomas, 1974).

2) Accommodating - This mode is unassertive and cooperative and is the contradictory of competing. An accommodating individual abandon his or her own concerns to satisfy the concern of others (Thomas, 1974).

3) Avoiding - This mode is unassertive and uncooperative. In this the individual prefer simply withdraw from a situation, thereby no one's concerns are satisfied (Thomas, 1974).

4) Collaborating - is both cooperative and assertive which involves working with others to identify a solution that satisfies the concerns of all parties involved (Thomas, 1974).

5) Compromising - is the midway between cooperativeness and assertiveness. In this the individual gives up more than competing but less than accommodating. Compromising involves sharing, with both parties giving up something to develop a mutually acceptable solution.

It consists of 30 sets of paired items, with each item describing one of the conflict styles. As regards with internal consistency coefficients were reported by the authors to be .43 accommodating, .62 avoiding, .58 compromising, .65 collaborating and .71 competing. The average alpha coefficient was reported at .60 for the MODE. Ruble & Thomas (as cited in Womack, 1988) determined that the validity of the MODE is supported by correlations shown between the five styles and the two dimensions. It is also supported by correlations between the MODE scores and other related instruments (Kilmann & Thomas 1977; Womack, 1988).

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Step wise regression analysis was applied to see the effect of conflict management styles of associates on giving and receiving positive verbal and touch strokes with boss of same and different gender.

Table 1 shows that only Competing women likes to receive positive verbal strokes from female boss ($R^2=.24$, $F= 2.145$, $p= .040$). They like to be bragged by their female boss. Competing people are concentrated on their own thoughts and go by the tactics of 'My way is the high way' and therefore such females likes to be bragged by their female boss.

Further Table 1 shows that Competing, Avoiding and Accommodating females likes to give 'Feel Good' strokes to their male boss. Accommodating people are as such relationship oriented so they are inclined to make others feel good. It is interesting to note that even Competing and Avoiding females who are not very cooperative also likes to give feel good interpersonal strokes to their male bosses ($R^2=.46$, $F= 8.81$, $p= .000$). This may be because they wanted to be in good books of their boss. However, Compromising and Collaborating females don't prefer to give any type of

strokes to their male bosses. This may be so because they are very practical in their approach. Table 1 also reveals that only Competing females likes to receive positive verbal strokes from their male boss ($R^2=.24$, $F= 5.71$, $p= .000$).

When it comes to receiving positive touch strokes from male boss, Collaborating, Avoiding and Accommodating females strongly doesn't like it ($R^2=.43$, $F= 7.76$, $p= .000$). These females strongly defy and becomes uncomfortable if their male boss tries to give positive touch strokes.

Discussing the results related to male employees with male boss, Avoiding males doesn't like to give positive verbal strokes to their male boss ($R^2=.23$, $F= 2.56$, $p= .040$). Avoiding people in general prefer to avoid interpersonal situations so it is quite normal that they may not like to give any kind of interpersonal strokes.

Furthermore, Table 1 shows that males with all types of conflict management style likes to receive positive verbal strokes from male boss ($R^2=.43$, $F= 4.25$, $p= .003$), while only Competing, Collaborating and Accommodating males likes to receive positive touch strokes from their male boss ($R^2=.29$, $F= 3.58$, $p= .008$).

It is interesting to note that Competing, Compromising, Accommodating and Avoiding males doesn't like to give positive verbal strokes to female boss ($R^2=.97$, $F= 56.16$, $p= .000$) while it makes no difference for Collaborating males to praise female boss. Furthermore, Competing, Collaborating, Avoiding and Accommodating males likes to receive positive verbal strokes from female boss ($R^2=.99$, $F= 146.96$, $p= .000$). They liked when they are complimented by female boss and appreciated in public.

Also study reveals interesting results that Competing, Collaborating, Avoiding and Accommodating males likes to receive positive touch strokes from female boss while only compromising males doesn't like it at all ($R^2=.99$, $F= 184.89$, $p= .000$).

IV. CONCLUSION AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Interpersonal dynamics is a very complex phenomenon, the underlying traits and preferences of individual determines whether they like to be appreciated by others or prefer to appreciate others. Healthy interpersonal relations at workplace is a key to success at workplace especially with one's boss. Most of the time individuals are dissatisfied or unhappy because of either receiving positive strokes when they do not want it or not receiving them when they want it. The present study has made an attempt to understand this complex dynamics and presented some interesting results which can be used by managers to understand interpersonal behavior of employee-boss dyad at work. As the present study reveals that Competing females like to receive positive verbal strokes from both male and female boss, this means they want to be appreciated and bragged about no matter who is the boss. While Competing, Avoiding and Accommodating females likes to appreciate their male boss but not to their female boss. Collaborating, Avoiding and Accommodating females strongly defy even positive touch by male boss wherein Competing and Compromising females are neutral about it.

Furthermore, in case of male employees almost all of them

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likes to receive verbal and touch stroke from their male and female boss and almost all of them likes to praise female boss while this is not the same in case of male boss.

These results are an interesting revelation of how male and female employees should be motivated through interpersonal strokes like praising them individually or in public. Male employees get interpersonal satisfaction when they are praised by their bosses (of any gender) verbally or physically but in return they feel good only by praising their female boss verbally. Females on the other hand have different

interpersonal dynamics altogether. It is only Competing females who likes to be praised by their bosses (of any gender) while they may like to give verbal or touch strokes to their female boss. With the male boss, few of them gets interpersonal satisfaction from praising male boss but certainly touch stroke from male boss is not welcome at all. The managers can use the results of the present study in training on interpersonal sensitivity for healthy relationships at workplace.

Table 1: Stepwise Regression of Conflict Resolution Styles of Males and Females on Different Types of Interpersonal Strokes from their Boss of Same and Different Gender

Source	Dependent	F (sig)	R	Adj R	Un standard Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
					B	Std. Error			
Self-Female---- Boss Female									
Receiving Positive Verbal Stroke	Competing	3.21 (.019)	.35	.240	1.239	.577	1.956	2.147	.040
Self-Female---- Boss Male									
Giving Positive Verbal Stroke	Competing	8.81 (.000)	.46	.407	.367	.152	.728	2.42	.019
	Avoiding				.479	.166	1.027	2.87	.006
	Accommodating				.577	.153	1.198	3.76	.000
Receiving Positive Verbal Stroke	Competing	5.71(.000)	.36	.293	.562	.229	.807	2.458	.017
Receiving Positive Touch Stroke	Collaborating	7.76 (.000)	.43	.472	-.457	.170	-.664	-2.69	.009
	Avoiding				-.388	.189	-.753	-2.05	.045
	Accommodating				-.350	.174	-.658	-2.01	.049
Self-Male---- Boss Male									
Giving Positive Verbal Stroke	Avoiding	2.56(.040)	.23	.14	-.474	.235	-1.021	-2.12	.050
Receiving Positive Verbal Stroke	Competing	4.25(.003)	.43	.37	.883	.194	2.375	4.54	.000
	Collaborating				.877	.179	1.250	4.90	.000
	Compromising				.896	.223	1.532	4.02	.000
	Avoiding				.758	.231	1.423	3.28	.002
	Accommodating				.853	.196	1.620	4.34	.000
Receiving Positive Touch Stroke	Competing	3.58(.008)	.29	.21	.838	.282	1.740	2.97	.005
	Collaborating				.663	.259	.729	2.56	.014
	Accommodating				.730	.285	1.075	2.57	.014
Self-Male---- Boss Female									
Giving Positive Verbal Stroke	Competing	56.16 (.000)	.97	.95	-.359	.124	-.959	-2.89	.016
	Compromising				-.786	.096	-1.302	-8.17	.000
	Accommodating				-.483	.107	-1.187	-4.50	.001
	Avoiding				-.328	.078	-1.195	-4.224	.002
Receiving Positive Verbal Stroke	Competing	146.96(.000)	.99	.98	-.183	.050	-.751	-3.65	.004
	Collaborating				.336	.036	.788	9.25	.000
	Avoiding				-.201	.050	-.652	-4.03	.002
	Accommodating				.117	.043	.441	2.69	.022
Receiving Positive Touch Stroke	Competing	184.89(.000)	.99	.98	.279	.026	1.984	10.81	.000
	Collaborating				.107	.019	.436	5.73	.000
	Compromising				-.087	.020	-.382	-4.35	.001
	Avoiding				.248	.026	1.401	9.70	.000
	Accommodating				.153	.022	1.002	6.86	.000

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