

## A study on relationship between conflict management styles and organizational agility: A case study of Ilam state University, Iran

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### ABSTRACT

The aim of present study is to explore the relationship between various styles of conflict management and organizational agility in Ilam state university. The study is quantitative one, having developmental orientation and comparative approach, which applies the strategy of survey research with an aim of exploration and description. It is implemented as single point and utilizes questionnaire as data collecting tool. The population and sample of the study include 425 and 205 individuals, respectively. The sample size is determined through Cochran's formula and random sampling method has been used for sampling. In order to perform the data analysis, descriptive and inferential statistics as well as Spearman and Kendall test in SPSS were utilized. The results of the study reveal that there was a positive and significant relationship among four styles of conflict management (avoiding, forcing, compromising, and yielding), however there was no significant relationship between integrating conflict management and organizational agility.

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## 1. Introduction

Agility means having the ability in successful and fast responding and reacting to environmental changes. All organizations and enterprises have to look for agility in competition of 21<sup>st</sup> century because modern organizations are facing with increasing pressure to look for new techniques of efficient competition in dynamic global markets. Agility promotes an organization for supplying products and services with high quality and, consequently, it becomes a factor in the organization's productivity (Dowlat Modeli, 2008). Many existing organizations are working in an environment, whose fast changes obliges them to have adaptive strategies. In fact, the problem that how organizations can have successful performance in a dynamic and unpredictable is a subject considered as the most important challenge of today's world. Although there are various solutions such as timely production, reengineering, virtual organizations, and networking, agility of the organization is among the most popular one. In such environment, agility has become an important

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capability, which has significant effects on organization's performance (Ravichandran, 2007). Many factors such as conflict management style in the organization have effect on organization's agility. Conflict management includes a process for recognizing suitable role of conflict among groups and appropriate utilization of technics for removing or stimulating it in organization's productivity. In conflict management, conflict is a valuable source of human released energies that a manager can apply for renovation of the organization's atmosphere and environment and in the way of growth for to reach organization's goals (Shiri et al., 2012). Therefore, the primary objective of this work is to explore and to analyze the relationship between conflict management and organizational agility and its secondary ones are to examine and to analyze the relationship of different conflict management styles (forcing, avoiding, integrating, yielding, and compromising) with organizational agility.

## **2. Literature Review**

In this part, the concepts associated with organizational agility and conflict management is explored separately.

### *2.1. Organizational agility*

Agile in dictionary means fast movement, prompt ,active, and agility means the ability of moving quickly, easily and being able to contemplate in quick and wise manner (Ganguly et al., 2009). The history of agility is traced back to slump in United States industries. Respecting slump in United States industries and losing competitiveness in during 1980s, in 1990 congress of America decided to put some necessary measures. In this way, the concept of agility was based in 1991 (Kettunen, 2008, 8-10). A group of experts and professors at the University of Lehigh in state of Pennsylvania and on behalf of Ministry of defense gathered to examine the industries of United States to determine appropriate strategies for the success of industry. The result of its attempt was a report with a title 21<sup>st</sup> manufacturing enterprises (Cunha & Putnik, 2006, 2-6). Today, organizational agility is among the most essential features of acquiring the ability of changing processes and business models (Doz & Kosonen, 2010, 10-11). Agility is the result of being informed about the changes in all aspects (recognizing opportunities and challenges) in both inside and outside environments, which in spite of appropriate capability in applying sources for responding these changes in proper time and with flexible manner relating with organization's ability to perform it, takes effective form (Braunscheidel & Suresh, 2006, 6-9).

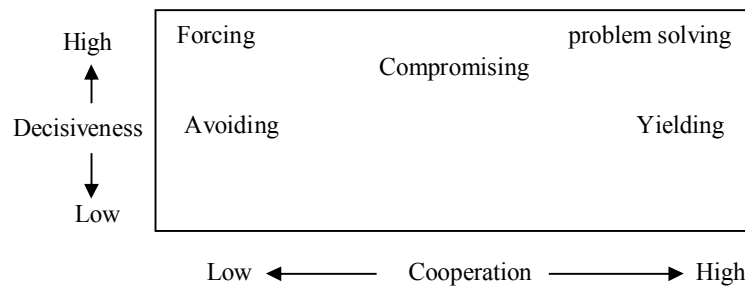
Jackson & Johansson (2003) divided agility capabilities into four axes of capabilities of product changing, having competency in changing operations, internal and internal cooperation and finally staff, knowledge, and creativity. First axis is associated with strategies relating with products and necessary operations for reacting towards changes and market uncertainty. Competency of changing operations into competencies provides methods and techniques required for short-term and long-term change management in production systems. The axis of cooperation and collaboration is associated with the ability of departments of an organization in cooperation and organization's capability (as a whole) to collaborate with customers and suppliers.

Youssef and colleagues (1999) considered competitive bases of agility in speed, flexibility, innovation, forecasting, quality, profitability. They distinguished between three axes of agility in different levels of organizations. Component agility states to personal (individual) sources (employees, machineries, and management). Micro agility refers to firm while macro agility denotes an inter-organizational level.

## 2.2. Conflict management

Conflict is a subject that engaged man's mind more than any other things, except for god and love. Conflict is a process in which a person intentionally tries to frustrate attempts of another one through inhibition, whose result is disappointment of person in achieving to his/her objectives or advancing interests (Robins, 1990, 211-2). A social psychologist considers conflict as an apparent inconsistency in actions, goals, and believes. The elements of conflict in all levels from couple disputes to racial issues mostly have rooted in communities' cultural issues. In any situations of conflict that people involve in destructive processes, they would reach any consequences other than desired ones. Among these destructive processes, social scams and distorted perceptions can be mentioned (Myers, 1998).

There are three different perspectives towards conflict: traditional view, view of human relations, and interactive view. Interactive people divide conflict into functional and dysfunctional conflicts. Functional conflict is a conflict, which support group's objectives and improves its performance. Dysfunctional conflict is a destructive conflict that threatens organizational interests and declines group's performance (Les, 2001, 11). Afzal Rahim suggested five styles for dysfunctional conflict management. Respecting two dimensions of decisiveness and cooperation and they are demonstrated in Fig 1. (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2004).



**Fig. 1.** styles of conflict management

*Cooperation and problem solving:* It is tried in problem solving both sides reach to their interests, collaboration and sharing information are important aspects that would be respected by both sides to attain a suitable and cooperative solution (Ruble & Thomas, 1976, 145).

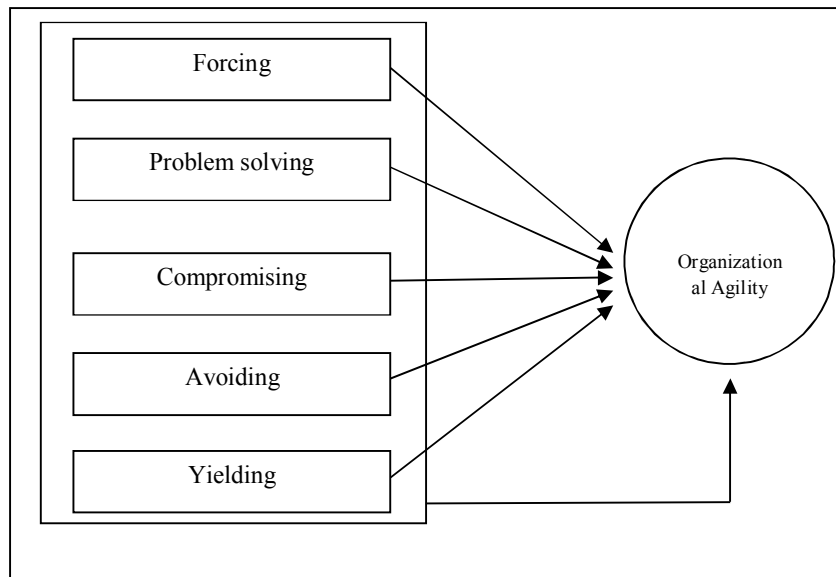
*Avoiding:* since decisiveness and cooperation are places in a low level, it is tried to avoid any conflicts.

*Forcing:* when one of sides has more impetus for satisfying his interests and doesn't care about satisfying other's interests, tries to remove the conflict in any way.

*Yielding:* When both sides involved sides want to calm down their opponent, may be one of sides wants to prefer others interests over his. It is a kind of flexibility (yielding) in behavior when one of sides sacrifices.

*Compromising:* in compromising there is no distinct winner or loser. It is a middle mode, in which each side privilege to solve disputes.

Therefore, the research conceptual model in is illustrated in diagram 2.



**Fig. 2.** The conceptual model

### 2.3. Research hypotheses

Research hypotheses consist of:

*Main hypothesis:*

There is a significant relationship between conflict management styles at Ilam state university.

*Secondary hypotheses*

1. There is a significant relationship between integration style of conflict management and organizational agility at Ilam state university.
2. There is a significant relationship between cooperation style of conflict management and organizational agility at Ilam state university.
3. There is a significant relationship between forcing style of conflict management and organizational agility at Ilam state university.
4. There is a significant relationship between avoiding style of conflict management and organizational agility at Ilam state university.
5. There is a significant relationship between compromising style of conflict management and organizational agility at Ilam state university.

### 3. Research methodology

Present study is an applied research in terms of objective and a field library one in terms of data collecting method.

#### 3.1. Population and sample of study

The population of the study consists of staff of Ilam state university including 425 individuals. Applying Cochran formula and random sampling method proportional to sample size, 205 individual were selected as sample size that in next part the sampling method would be explained. Sample size was determined using Cochran's formula as follows (Podsakoff et al., 2003):

$$n = \frac{Nz^2pq}{(N-1)d^2 + z^2pq}$$

where

$N$  is the size of population,  $n$  is the sample size,  $Z$  is the abscissa of the normal curve that cuts off an area at the tails (equals 1.96 in the desired confidence level, e.g., 95%),  $P$  is the estimated proportion of an attribute that is present in the population. In addition,  $q$  is the percentage of individuals that lack of respected attributed of the population ( $q=p-1$ ) and finally,  $d$  is the acceptable margin of error that is estimated 0.05 here. Therefore, in present study, 240 questionnaires were distributed, among which 213 questionnaires were returned. For analyzing, 205 completed questionnaires were used.

### 3.2. Data analyzing and measuring tool

In present study, a standard questionnaire measures the relationship between conflict management styles and organizational agility based on five point Likert's scale (strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, strongly disagree) provided by researchers. This questionnaire consists of two parts; first part includes 15 questions relating to measuring conflict management styles with adoption of Afzal Rahim's questionnaire (1983) and second part includes 30 questions relating with measuring organizational agility using measurement questionnaire for identifying organizational agility designed by Azar and Pishdar (2011). In order to examine questionnaire's validity, face validity was applied. That is, the questionnaire was given to 10 experts (professors) with relevant field and they were asked to comment upon questions and their capability on evaluating respecting objective and then some minor corrections were done and finally, the validity of questionnaire was confirmed. In order to evaluating reliability of questionnaire, a sample of 30 questionnaires was distributed among population, and Cronbach's alpha coefficient was measured using SPSS. Estimated Cronbach's alpha was 0.87 and 0.93 for questionnaire of conflict management and questionnaire of organizational agility, respectively that indicates it has suitable reliability.

### 3.3. Data analysis

In order to achieving the objective and answering research's hypotheses, applying analyzing method s of Spearman's correlation and Kendall in SPSS was considered to be suitable.

## 4. Research results

In order to testing above hypotheses, Spearman's and Kendall's test were applied. To do so, first these tests were applied for examining main hypothesis and then to examining other hypotheses. Results of measuring correlation between research variables are presented in Table.1.

**Table 1**  
Measuring correlation of research variables

Independent variable	Dependent variable	Frequency	Kendall test		Spearman's test		Result of testing hypothesis
			Correlation coefficient	(sig)	Correlation coefficient	(sig)	
Conflict management	Organizational agility	205	0.36	0.000	0.48	0.000	accepted
Integration style of conflict management	Organizational agility	205	0.067	0.175	0.071	0.31	rejected
Cooperation style of conflict management	Organizational agility	205	0.137	0.006	0.186	0.008	accepted
Forcing style of conflict management	Organizational agility	205	0.246	0.000	0.332	0.000	accepted
Avoiding style of conflict management	Organizational agility	205	0.246	0.000	0.362	0.000	accepted
Compromising style of conflict management	Organizational agility	205	0.233	0.000	0.310	0.000	accepted

#### 4.1. Testing main hypothesis

There is a significant relationship between conflict management and organizational agility. According to the results of Table.1, the value of Kendall's correlation is equal to 0.36 and the value of Spearman's correlation is equal to 0.48 and the correlation is significant in the significance level of 0.01, which means there is a significant relationship between conflict management and organizational agility and by respecting the positive value of Kendall and Spearman's correlation value, there is a positive relationship between conflict management and organizational agility.

#### 4.2. Testing secondary hypotheses

*There is a significant relationship between integration style of conflict management and organizational agility.*

According to the results of Table 1, the value of Kendall's correlation is equal to 0.067 and significance level is 0.175. In addition, the value of Spearman's correlation is equal to 0.071 when the significance level is 0.31. The correlation in significance level of 0.01 is not significant, which means that there was no significant relationship between integration style of conflict management and organizational agility.

*There is no significant relationship between cooperation style of conflict management and organizational agility.*

According to the results of Table 1, the value of Kendall's correlation is equal to 0.137 and significance level is equal to 0.006. In addition, the value of Spearman's correlation is equal to 0.186 where the significance level is equal to 0.008. The correlation in significance level of 0.01 is significant, which means that there is a significant relationship between cooperation style of conflict management and organizational agility.

*There is no significant relationship between forcing style of conflict management and organizational agility.*

According to the results of Table 1, the value of Kendall's correlation is equal to 0.246 and significance level is 0.000. In addition, the value of Spearman's correlation is 0.332 in significance level of 0.000. The correlation in significance level of 0.01 is significant, which means that there is a significant relationship between forcing style of conflict management and organizational agility.

*There is no significant relationship between avoiding style of conflict management and organizational agility.*

According to the results of Table 1, the value of Kendall's correlation is equal to 0.265 and significance level is equal to 0.000 and also the value of Spearman's correlation is 0.362 in significance level of 0.000. The correlation in significance level of 0.01 is significant, which means that there is a significant relationship between avoiding style of conflict management and organizational agility.

*There is no significant relationship between compromising style of conflict management and organizational agility.*

Based on the results of Table 1, the value of Kendall's correlation is equal to 0.233 and significance level is 0.000. In addition, the value of Spearman's correlation is 0.310 in significance level of 0.000.

The correlation in significance level of 0.01 is significant. It means that there is a significant relationship between compromising style of conflict management and organizational agility.

## 5. Discussion and conclusions

Organizational agility has high importance for becoming successful in today's changing world. An agile organization has some characteristics that focus upon information, yielding (flexibility), creativity, decreasing hierarchy, eliminating overhead costs, considering key capabilities. Various studies have considered the role of organizational agility as an independent or dependent variable. However, the relationship between conflict management and organizational agility has been neglected. This study was conducted with the aim of examining the relation between conflict management styles and organizational agility in Ilam state university. The results of the study have indicated that there was a significant relationship between four styles of conflict management and organizational agility, but the relation between integrating style of conflict management and organizational was not verified. Based on the results of present study, it would be desired that managers may apply the style of conflict management based on styles of avoiding, forcing, compromising, and cooperation respectively, which has more consistency with organizational agility. However, it is recommended to avoid applying integrating style of conflict management.

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