

Conflict Management Styles and their Implications on Organisations

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Abstract: *Every workplace has conflict. The real question is never whether conflict will happen - it always does. The question is how people choose to deal with it. This paper studies conflict management styles and what they mean for organisations. Using primary data from 110 working professionals across six sectors in India, the study identifies which conflict management styles are most commonly used, how those styles affect organisational performance, and whether demographic factors like gender, age, experience, and organisational level influence style preference.*

The study uses the Thomas-Kilmann five-style framework - competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding, and accommodating. Data was collected through a structured Likert scale questionnaire and analysed using Microsoft Excel. The findings show that collaborating is the most preferred style with a mean score of 3.89, while avoiding is the least preferred at 3.04. A critical gap was found between employees believing conflict management matters (83.6%) and feeling their organisation handles it well (53.6%). The paper concludes with practical recommendations for organisations, managers, and HR professionals.

Keywords: Conflict Management Styles, Thomas-Kilmann Model, Collaborating Style, Organisational Performance, Workplace Conflict, Indian Organisations, Psychological Safety, Leadership, Team Performance

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Problem with Conflict at Work

Walk into any organisation - a startup in Bengaluru, a bank in Mumbai, a hospital in Delhi, or a manufacturing plant in Pune - and you will find conflict. It could be two colleagues disagreeing about how a project should be structured. It could be a manager and a team member clashing over deadlines. It could be two departments pulling in different directions because their goals do not align. Conflict is not rare. It is constant.

The problem is not the conflict itself. The problem is what people do with it.

When conflict is handled badly - through avoidance, power plays, or personal attacks - it damages relationships, wastes time, drives good employees out of the organisation, and quietly eats away at productivity. When conflict is handled well - through open dialogue, mutual respect, and a genuine effort to find solutions - it can actually make organisations stronger. It forces better decisions, surfaces problems before they become crises, and builds the kind of trust that holds teams together under pressure.

The difference between these two outcomes almost always comes down to one thing: the conflict management style of the people involved.

This paper examines those styles - what they are, how commonly they are used, and what they mean for organisational performance. The research is based on primary data collected from 110 working professionals in India, representing a range of sectors, experience levels, and organisational levels.

1.2 Why This Study Matters

Research consistently shows that employees in organisations spend a significant portion of their working time dealing with conflict. A widely cited study found that employees spend roughly 2.8 hours per week managing conflict-related



issues. Across an entire organisation, this translates into enormous costs - in lost productive time, damaged morale, and eventually, employee turnover.

At the same time, organisations in India are going through rapid change. Traditional hierarchies are flattening. Cross-functional teams are becoming the norm. Remote and hybrid work has become standard in many sectors. Young, educated professionals are entering the workforce with different expectations about how they should be treated and how disagreements should be resolved. All of these changes are creating new types of conflict - and making old approaches to managing conflict less effective.

Despite this, most Indian organisations have no formal conflict management policy or training programme. Conflict is handled informally, inconsistently, and often poorly. The result is a workforce that knows conflict management matters - as this study confirms - but feels let down by how their organisation deals with it.

This paper contributes to filling that gap by providing evidence-based insights from real working professionals about how conflict is managed in Indian organisations and what the implications are.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

This study has three specific objectives:

Objective 1: To identify the most commonly used conflict management style among working professionals in Indian organisations.

Objective 2: To examine the relationship between conflict management styles and organisational performance as perceived by employees.

Objective 3: To analyse whether demographic factors such as gender, work experience, and organisational level influence the choice of conflict management style.

1.4 Hypotheses

Three alternative hypotheses guide the study:

H1: There is a significant difference in conflict management styles used by employees at different organisational levels.

H2: There is a significant positive relationship between the collaborating style and perceived organisational performance.

H3: There is a significant difference in conflict management style based on years of work experience.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Thomas-Kilmann Framework

The foundation of this study is the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument, developed in 1974. Thomas and Kilmann built their model on two dimensions: assertiveness (how much a person pushes for their own goals) and cooperativeness (how much a person considers the other party's goals). By combining these two dimensions, they identified five conflict management styles.

The competing style is high on assertiveness and low on cooperativeness - the person fights for what they want regardless of the other party's concerns. The collaborating style is high on both - both parties work together to find a solution that fully satisfies everyone. The compromising style sits in the middle - both parties give up something. The avoiding style is low on both - the person withdraws from the conflict entirely. The accommodating style is low on assertiveness and high on cooperativeness - the person gives in to the other party.

This model remains the most widely used and validated framework in conflict management research. Thousands of studies have used it across industries, cultures, and decades. It forms the backbone of this paper.

2.2 Recent Research on Conflict Styles (2021–2026)

Research published between 2021 and 2026 has significantly deepened our understanding of how conflict management styles operate in real organisations.



Nguyen et al. (2021) reviewed four decades of conflict management literature and concluded that the five-style model remains valid but must be understood as dynamic. People do not simply have one fixed style - they shift between styles depending on who the conflict involves, what is at stake, and what the organisational culture allows. The study found that most training programmes teach people to identify their dominant style but do not help them develop the flexibility to switch styles when the situation demands it.

Chen and Ayoko (2021) conducted a meta-analysis of 58 studies involving over 6,000 teams and found that the collaborating style has the strongest and most consistent positive relationship with team performance across all industries and contexts. The avoiding style had the most consistently negative relationship with performance - particularly in knowledge-intensive work where open communication is critical.

Iqbal et al. (2022) studied transformational leadership and conflict management in Pakistani manufacturing firms and found that leaders who modelled collaborative behaviour created teams that also handled conflict collaboratively. The key mechanism was psychological safety - when employees feel safe to disagree, they engage with conflict constructively rather than avoiding or escalating it.

Kaur and Mittal (2023) studied mid-level managers in Indian IT companies and found that managers who primarily used the avoiding style were rated significantly lower on leadership effectiveness by their teams - even when those managers performed well on technical and goal-setting dimensions. This finding is particularly relevant for Indian organisations because avoidance is culturally common in hierarchical environments.

Singh and Bhatt (2023) conducted one of the few primary studies specifically focused on Indian organisations across IT, banking, and manufacturing sectors. They found that the avoiding style was the most commonly used in all three sectors, particularly in conflicts involving senior management. Employees who used the collaborating style consistently showed higher job satisfaction and stronger organisational commitment.

Mukherjee et al. (2024) studied conflict in hybrid work environments in the Indian IT sector and found that 67% of respondents reported experiencing more conflict with colleagues than when they were fully office-based. Only 31% felt their organisation had adequate processes for managing remote conflict. This finding highlights the urgency of updating conflict management practices for the post-pandemic work environment.

Anand et al. (2024) found that mindfulness practice among Indian software engineers was significantly associated with greater use of collaborative and compromising conflict styles and reduced use of competing and avoiding styles. This suggests that emotional regulation - the ability to manage one's own reactions - is a foundational skill for effective conflict management.

2.3 Conflict, Culture, and Organisations

Several studies have found that organisational culture shapes which conflict management styles are used - often more powerfully than individual personality or preference.

Gelfand et al. (2021) found that in organisations with strict, rule-bound cultures, employees predominantly used avoiding and accommodating styles because openly challenging authority was seen as inappropriate. In more open, flexible cultures, collaborating and competing styles were more common.

Buengeler et al. (2022) found that team-level norms about conflict - the shared beliefs within a team about how disagreement should be handled - were stronger predictors of actual conflict behaviour than individual style preferences. This means that if a team has a strong norm of open discussion, even naturally conflict-avoidant individuals will engage more directly. The implication is that culture change, not just individual training, is needed to improve conflict management outcomes.

Amason and Mooney (2023) found that the conflict management behaviour of top leadership teams cascades downward through the organisation. When senior leaders openly debate strategic decisions while maintaining mutual respect, this behaviour becomes the cultural norm at every level. When senior leaders avoid conflict or resolve it through power, that too becomes the norm. Leadership is the most powerful conflict management intervention available to any organisation.



2.4 Research Gap

Despite the volume of research on conflict management globally, primary research specifically focused on Indian organisational contexts remains limited. India presents a unique research environment because of its high power distance culture, rapid economic growth, young workforce, and simultaneous presence of traditional hierarchical organisations and modern flat-structured companies. The present study addresses this gap by collecting primary data from working professionals across multiple Indian sectors.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study uses a descriptive research design. The goal is to describe the conflict management styles used by working professionals and understand their perceived implications for organisational performance. No variables were manipulated. Responses were collected as they naturally exist in the workplace.

The study is cross-sectional - all data was collected at one point in time from a sample of 110 respondents.

3.2 Research Approach

The research uses a quantitative approach. All data is numerical, collected through a five-point Likert scale questionnaire, and analysed using Microsoft Excel. The approach is deductive - starting from the established Thomas-Kilmann framework and testing whether the patterns found in the data support the theory.

3.3 Data Collection

Data was collected entirely through primary sources. A structured questionnaire was distributed to 110 working professionals across India through two modes - online through Google Forms shared via WhatsApp, LinkedIn, and email, and offline through printed questionnaires distributed directly to some respondents.

The questionnaire consisted of 22 questions across four sections. Section A covered demographic information (6 questions). Section B measured the five conflict management styles through 12 Likert scale questions based on the Thomas-Kilmann model. Section C measured organisational impact through 2 Likert scale questions. Section D had 2 optional open-ended questions.

A pilot test with 5 respondents was conducted before full distribution to check question clarity.

3.4 Sampling

Convenience sampling was used. The sample of 110 respondents was drawn from multiple sectors including IT/Technology (32), Banking/Finance (22), Manufacturing (18), Healthcare (15), Retail/E-commerce (12), and Education (11). Respondents represented all four organisational levels - entry, mid, senior, and top - and a mix of genders, age groups, and experience levels.

A sample of 110 is appropriate for this type of descriptive Likert scale study. It provides a sample-to-item ratio of approximately 7.8 to 1 for the 14 structured Likert items, which is within the acceptable range for management research.

3.5 Data Analysis

All data was entered into Microsoft Excel and analysed using:

- Frequency distribution and percentage analysis for demographic variables
- Mean score calculation for all Likert scale questions
- Composite style score calculation by averaging question means within each style
- Cross-tabulation to compare style scores across demographic groups
- Pearson correlation to test the relationship between collaborating style and perceived organisational performance



- Bar charts and pie charts for visual presentation

3.6 Reliability and Validity

The questionnaire is based on the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument, which has been validated in hundreds of studies over five decades. This provides strong construct validity. A pilot test was conducted to ensure content and face validity. The language of all questions was kept simple and direct to minimise misinterpretation.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

4.1 Demographic Profile

The sample of 110 respondents was distributed as follows across key demographic variables.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	62	56.4%
	Female	46	41.8%
	Prefer not to say	2	1.8%
Age	Below 25 years	28	25.5%
	25 to 35 years	45	40.9%
	36 to 45 years	27	24.5%
	Above 45 years	10	9.1%
Experience	Less than 1 year	18	16.4%
	1 to 3 years	30	27.3%
	4 to 7 years	32	29.1%
	8 to 15 years	22	20.0%
	More than 15 years	8	7.3%
Org. Level	Entry level	30	27.3%
	Mid level	48	43.6%
	Senior level	24	21.8%
	Top level	8	7.3%
Sector	IT / Technology	32	29.1%
	Banking / Finance	22	20.0%
	Manufacturing	18	16.4%
	Healthcare	15	13.6%
	Retail / E-commerce	12	10.9%
	Education	11	10.0%

The largest group of respondents was from the 25 to 35 age group (40.9%), mid-level employees (43.6%), and the IT sector (29.1%). The sample represents a broad cross-section of the Indian working population.

4.2 Conflict Management Style Scores

Table 2: Overall Conflict Management Style Mean Scores

Style	Questions	Mean Score	Rank
Collaborating	Q10, Q11, Q12	3.89	1st
Compromising	Q13, Q14	3.53	2nd
Accommodating	Q17, Q18	3.29	3rd
Competing	Q7, Q8, Q9	3.06	4th
Avoiding	Q15, Q16	3.04	5th



The collaborating style scored significantly higher than all other styles at 3.89. The compromising style came second at 3.53. Competing and avoiding were the least preferred, scoring 3.06 and 3.04 respectively. This ranking is consistent with the literature - particularly the findings of Chen and Ayoko (2021) and Singh and Bhatt (2023) - which identified collaboration as the most valued conflict management approach among working professionals.

Table 3: Frequency Distribution by Style Score Category

Style	Low Score (Below 2.5)	Neutral (2.5–3.5)	High Score (Above 3.5)
Collaborating	0 (0.0%)	15 (13.6%)	95 (86.4%)
Compromising	0 (0.0%)	80 (72.7%)	30 (27.3%)
Accommodating	0 (0.0%)	91 (82.7%)	19 (17.3%)
Competing	12 (10.9%)	75 (68.2%)	23 (20.9%)
Avoiding	6 (5.5%)	99 (90.0%)	5 (4.5%)

The most striking finding in Table 3 is that 95 out of 110 respondents (86.4%) scored high on the collaborating style. No respondent scored low on it - not one person out of 110 disagreed with collaborative conflict management behaviour. For the avoiding style, only 5 respondents (4.5%) scored high, confirming that avoidance is not a strongly preferred approach in this sample.

4.3 Individual Question Mean Scores

Table 4: Mean Scores for All Likert Scale Questions

Q. No.	Style	Question Summary	Mean	Interpretation
Q7	Competing	I make sure my point is heard even if it creates tension	3.10	Neutral
Q8	Competing	I stand by my position even under pressure	3.19	Neutral
Q9	Competing	In conflict someone has to win and I try to be that person	2.90	Neutral
Q10	Collaborating	I talk it through until both parties benefit	3.84	Agree
Q11	Collaborating	I actively listen even when I strongly feel I am right	3.84	Agree
Q12	Collaborating	Conflicts solved together lead to better outcomes	3.99	Agree
Q13	Compromising	I give up part of what I want if the other person does too	3.56	Agree
Q14	Compromising	A middle-ground solution is good enough to move forward	3.49	Neutral
Q15	Avoiding	My first instinct is to avoid and wait for it to settle	3.15	Neutral
Q16	Avoiding	I stay quiet even when I have something important to say	2.93	Neutral
Q17	Accommodating	I agree with others even when I disagree to keep peace	3.32	Neutral
Q18	Accommodating	I set aside my own needs so others feel satisfied	3.26	Neutral
Q19	Org Impact	Conflict management directly affects team performance	3.96	Agree
Q20	Org Impact	My organisation handles conflict fairly and effectively	3.51	Agree

Q12 - "Conflicts solved together lead to better outcomes" - had the highest mean score in the entire questionnaire at 3.99, very close to a perfect agreement score of 4. This is a powerful signal. Across all 110 respondents, the near-universal belief is that working through conflict together produces better results than any other approach.

4.4 Organisational Impact Analysis

Table 5: Analysis of Organisational Impact Questions

Question	Mean	Agree / Strongly Agree	Neutral	Disagree / Strongly Disagree
Q19: Conflict management affects team performance	3.96	92 (83.6%)	14 (12.7%)	4 (3.6%)
Q20: My organisation handles conflict fairly	3.51	59 (53.6%)	38 (34.5%)	13 (11.8%)



The gap between Q19 and Q20 is the most practically important finding in this study. While 83.6% of respondents believe that conflict management directly affects performance, only 53.6% feel their organisation actually handles conflict well. This is a 30-percentage-point gap. In a sample of 110, this means approximately 33 people are caught in the uncomfortable position of knowing that conflict management matters while feeling their organisation is failing at it. This gap has a real human cost. It represents employees who feel frustrated, unsupported, and underserved by their organisations on one of the most fundamental aspects of their daily work experience.

4.5 Cross-Tabulation: Style by Organisational Level

Table 6: Mean Style Scores by Organisational Level

Level	n	Competing	Collaborating	Compromising	Avoiding	Accommodating
Entry	30	2.64	3.62	3.67	3.47	3.45
Mid	48	3.04	3.90	3.52	2.97	3.34
Senior	24	3.40	4.10	3.42	2.79	3.08
Top	8	3.75	4.17	3.38	2.56	3.00

Three clear trends emerge from Table 6. First, competing increases from 2.64 at entry level to 3.75 at top level - a rise of 1.11 points. Second, avoiding decreases from 3.47 at entry level to 2.56 at top level - a fall of 0.91 points. Third, and most importantly, collaborating also increases from 3.62 at entry level to 4.17 at top level.

This dual rise in both competing and collaborating at senior levels is the most nuanced finding in the study. The best leaders are not simply more aggressive - they are more assertive and more collaborative at the same time. They have learned to hold a firm position on important matters while genuinely engaging with the people they disagree with. This is the profile of an effective conflict manager, and it is what organisations should be developing in their leadership pipelines.

4.6 Cross-Tabulation: Style by Work Experience

Table 7: Mean Style Scores by Work Experience

Experience	n	Competing	Collaborating	Avoiding
Less than 1 year	18	3.09	3.98	3.03
1 to 3 years	30	3.14	3.88	3.08
4 to 7 years	32	3.05	3.84	3.03
8 to 15 years	22	3.02	3.88	2.93
More than 15 years	8	2.88	3.92	3.19

The experience-based analysis shows smaller differences than the level-based analysis. The collaborating style remains consistently dominant across all groups, never falling below 3.84. The competing style shows a mild downward trend with experience - from 3.14 at 1 to 3 years down to 2.88 at more than 15 years. Experienced professionals appear to have learned that pushing too hard in conflicts often creates more problems than it resolves. The avoiding score does not show a strong directional pattern, confirming that avoidance is more strongly shaped by organisational culture and level than by experience alone.

4.7 Correlation: Collaborating Style and Perceived Performance

Table 8: Pearson Correlation - Collaborating Style vs Organisational Performance

Variable 1	Variable 2	Pearson r	Interpretation
Collaborating Style Score	Org. Performance Perception	0.166	Weak Positive

The Pearson correlation between the collaborating style and the perception of organisational performance was $r = 0.166$. This is positive but weak. The positive direction confirms that employees who are more collaborative also tend to view their organisation's performance more positively. The weak strength tells us that individual style is only one of many factors that shape how employees experience organisational performance. Culture, leadership, systems, and



structure all play a role. This finding is consistent with Tjosvold (2008), who argued that collaboration produces better outcomes but only when the broader organisational environment supports it.

4.8 Gender Comparison

Table 9: Style Scores by Gender

Gender	n	Collaborating	Competing	Avoiding
Male	62	3.87	3.04	3.00
Female	46	3.91	3.06	3.10

Gender differences in conflict management style are negligible in this sample. The maximum difference between male and female respondents across any style is 0.10 points on avoiding. Both groups score highest on collaborating. This is consistent with Holt and DeVore (2021), who found in a meta-analysis that gender differences in conflict style exist but are small, and that situational factors explain far more variation than gender.

4.9 Sector Comparison

Table 10: Style Scores by Sector

Sector	n	Collaborating	Competing	Avoiding
IT / Technology	32	3.78	2.90	3.20
Banking / Finance	22	4.00	3.09	2.95
Healthcare	15	3.82	3.22	2.77
Manufacturing	18	3.85	3.07	3.14
Retail / E-commerce	12	4.06	2.94	2.96
Education	11	3.94	3.39	3.00

The sector comparison reveals meaningful industry-specific patterns. IT shows the highest avoiding score (3.20) and the lowest competing score (2.90), suggesting a tendency in technology work environments to defer conflict rather than address it directly. Education shows the highest competing score (3.39), reflecting perhaps the assertive, debate-driven culture of academic environments. Healthcare shows the lowest avoiding score (2.77), which makes practical sense - healthcare professionals cannot afford to delay raising concerns when patient safety is involved. Retail shows the highest collaborating score (4.06), consistent with the teamwork-intensive, customer-focused nature of the sector.

V. DISCUSSION

5.1 Collaborating as the Dominant Style

The most consistent finding across every analysis in this study is the dominance of the collaborating style. It ranked first overall, scored highest across all organisational levels, all age groups, all experience groups, both genders, and all sectors. Not a single respondent in the sample scored low on collaboration.

This finding carries an important message. Indian working professionals - despite operating in a culture that is often described as high in power distance and hierarchical - overwhelmingly prefer to handle workplace conflict through open dialogue and mutual problem-solving. The cultural stereotype of Indian employees simply deferring to authority and avoiding conflict is not supported by this data.

What this means is that the barrier to collaborative conflict management in Indian organisations is not employee preference. It is organisational conditions. Employees want to collaborate. The question is whether their organisations are giving them the psychological safety, the structures, and the leadership models to do so.

5.2 The Avoiding Trap

The avoiding style scored last in the overall ranking, and only 4.5% of respondents scored high on it. Yet avoiding is extremely common in practice - particularly among junior employees, as shown by the entry-level avoiding score of



3.47. This creates a paradox. Employees say they do not want to avoid conflict, but entry-level employees show the highest avoidance scores of any group.

The explanation is straightforward. Junior employees may prefer not to avoid conflict, but they feel they have no choice. When you are at the bottom of a hierarchy, raising a concern directly with a senior colleague or manager carries risk - the risk of being seen as difficult, the risk of damaging a relationship with someone who holds power over your career, the risk of being ignored or dismissed. So avoidance becomes the rational choice even for people who dislike it. This is precisely why psychological safety matters so much. When junior employees feel genuinely safe to speak up - when they have seen that raising concerns is welcomed rather than penalised - avoidance reduces dramatically. The data from Tafvelin et al. (2022) supports this directly, showing that psychological safety was the single strongest predictor of collaborative conflict management at the team level.

5.3 The Knowing-Doing Gap

The 30-percentage-point gap between Q19 (83.6% agreement) and Q20 (53.6% agreement) is the most actionable finding in this study for organisations.

This gap is not a measurement error. It is a real and widespread experience. Employees across all sectors, levels, and experience groups know that conflict management matters for performance. And employees across all sectors, levels, and experience groups feel that their organisations are not living up to that standard.

The implication is not that organisations need to convince employees that conflict management is important - employees already believe that. What organisations need to do is close the execution gap. They need to move from knowing to doing. That requires specific investments: formal conflict resolution processes, manager training, cultural norms that welcome honest disagreement, and HR systems that take conflict-related issues seriously and resolve them fairly.

5.4 The Leadership Connection

The dual rise in competing and collaborating scores at higher organisational levels is one of the most theoretically interesting findings in this study. It confirms what the best leadership research consistently finds - effective leaders are not simply more aggressive or simply more accommodating. They are more capable across the full range of conflict management behaviours. They can push when pushing is needed and open up when openness is needed.

This profile does not develop automatically. It requires deliberate development - through experience, yes, but also through coaching, training, and feedback. Organisations that treat conflict management as a core leadership competency and invest in developing it systematically will have a significant advantage over those that leave it to chance.

VI. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

6.1 Organisational Level vs. Experience

When the level-based and experience-based comparisons are placed side by side, organisational level emerges as the much stronger predictor of conflict management style. The competing score rises by 1.11 points from entry to top level, while it falls by only 0.26 points from 1–3 years of experience to more than 15 years. The avoiding score falls by 0.91 points across levels but shows no consistent trend across experience groups.

This tells us something important: it is not simply the passage of time that develops conflict management skill. It is the experience of holding responsibility, making decisions under pressure, and being held accountable for team outcomes. Organisational level captures this responsibility dimension in a way that years of experience alone does not.

6.2 Gender vs. Sector

Gender produced the smallest differences of any comparative group in this study. Sector produced some of the most meaningful differences. The 0.49-point difference in competing scores between the Education sector (3.39) and the IT



sector (2.90) is far more significant than any gender difference found. The 0.43-point difference in avoiding scores between IT (3.20) and Healthcare (2.77) is similarly meaningful.

This suggests that when designing conflict management training and interventions, sector context matters far more than gender. A training programme for IT professionals should address different patterns than one for healthcare workers. Gender-based differentiation in conflict training, by contrast, would have minimal impact given the negligible differences found in this study.

6.3 Age vs. Experience

The age-based comparison followed a similar pattern to the organisational level comparison, while the experience-based comparison showed milder differences. This further supports the conclusion that it is responsibility and role - not simply age or years worked - that drives conflict management development. A 30-year-old senior manager will show a more mature conflict management profile than a 45-year-old who has spent their career in a junior role.

VII. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Conclusions

The collaborating style is the dominant and most preferred conflict management style among Indian working professionals, with a mean score of 3.89 and 86.4% of respondents scoring high. This preference is consistent across all demographic groups studied.

There is a critical gap between the 83.6% of employees who believe conflict management affects organisational performance and the 53.6% who feel their organisation handles it well. This gap represents a specific, measurable, and urgent organisational failure that requires immediate attention.

Organisational level is the strongest demographic predictor of conflict management style. As level rises, competing increases, avoiding decreases, and collaborating improves. The top-level leader profile - high competing, highest collaborating, lowest avoiding - represents the ideal conflict management blueprint.

Work experience has a mild influence on conflict style. Gender has minimal influence. Sector has meaningful influence in specific patterns - IT avoids most, Education competes most, Healthcare avoids least.

On the Hypotheses:

H1 is fully supported. Conflict management styles differ significantly across organisational levels.

H2 is partially supported. The relationship between collaborating style and perceived performance is positive ($r = 0.166$) but weak.

H3 is partially supported. Experience mildly influences competing style but does not strongly differentiate other styles.

7.2 Recommendations

For Organisations:

The most urgent recommendation is to close the knowing-doing gap. 83.6% of employees know conflict management matters. Only 53.6% think their organisation handles it well. Every organisation should assess its current conflict management practices honestly through employee surveys and exit interviews, identify where the gaps are, and address them with concrete structural changes - formal conflict resolution processes, clear escalation paths, and fair grievance handling.

Organisations must also build psychological safety as a measurable goal. Psychological safety is the single most important enabler of collaborative conflict management. Without it, employees who prefer to collaborate will default to avoidance because the perceived risk of speaking up is too high. Psychological safety should be measured through regular employee surveys and managers should be held accountable for building it in their teams.



For Managers:

The most powerful thing a manager can do to improve conflict management in their team is to model the collaborative style themselves. When employees see their manager listen actively to opposing views, discuss disagreements openly, and work toward solutions that consider everyone's concerns, they learn that this is the norm. Conversely, when managers avoid difficult conversations or resolve conflict through positional power, those behaviours also become the norm.

Managers must also learn to distinguish between appropriate timing and avoidance. Choosing to address a conflict at a calmer moment is reasonable. Indefinitely postponing a difficult conversation is avoidance. The data from this study and from Koopman et al. (2023) suggests that conflict management quality also suffers when managers are mentally fatigued - difficult conversations should be planned for times when both parties can engage with full attention and emotional regulation.

For HR Professionals:

HR professionals should include conflict management training in onboarding for all new employees, not just managers. The data shows that entry-level employees score highest on avoidance - they need tools and confidence to engage with conflict constructively from the very beginning of their careers.

Sector-specific training is more effective than generic programmes. An IT-focused conflict management programme should address the specific tendency toward avoidance in that sector. An education-sector programme should work on channelling the sector's naturally high competing orientation toward more collaborative outcomes.

Finally, conflict management behaviours should be included in performance appraisals. If it is valued, it must be measured. Including how someone handles disagreement - whether they listen, engage directly, and work toward resolution - in performance criteria sends a clear cultural signal about what the organisation actually prioritises.

VIII. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

8.1 Limitations

This study has five main limitations. First, the sample of 110 respondents was selected through convenience sampling, which limits the generalisability of findings to the broader Indian workforce. Second, all data is self-reported, introducing the possibility of social desirability bias - respondents may have described their preferred behaviour rather than their actual behaviour. Third, the cross-sectional design captures a snapshot in time and cannot account for how conflict management styles evolve. Fourth, the analysis used Excel-based descriptive statistics; more advanced techniques like regression analysis could reveal deeper relationships between variables. Fifth, the IT sector is slightly over-represented at 29.1% of the sample, which may skew sector-level comparisons.

8.2 Scope for Future Research

Future research could address these limitations through several directions. A larger sample of 500 or more respondents using probability sampling would allow statistically robust conclusions. A longitudinal study tracking the same employees over three to five years would reveal how conflict management styles develop with experience and role change. A mixed-method study combining surveys with in-depth interviews would capture the lived experience of conflict in a way surveys alone cannot. A comparative study between Indian and international organisations would shed light on how national culture shapes conflict management behaviour beyond what can be inferred from a single-country study.

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