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Gender and Conflict Resolution: Testing the Thomas-Kilmann Model among Selected Nigerian Youths

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ABSTRACT

Interpersonal Conflict is an almost unavoidable aspect of human relationships. Following a four-year observation of interpersonal conflict resolution among young people in a confined space, this study tested the Thomas-Kilmann conflict resolution model to determine the conflict resolution strategy mostly used by male and female youths in Nigeria. Employing the survey methodology, the study found among other issues that female Nigerian youths would rather use the avoidance conflict resolution strategy, while their male counterparts would rather compromise. The study made recommendations that are of significance to scholarly conversation on interpersonal conflict resolution, education, and so on.

KEYWORDS: Conflict resolution, Thomas-Kilmann conflict resolution model, Gender and conflict resolution, interpersonal communication, conflict resolution strategy

I. INTRODUCTION

Conflict is an unavoidable aspect of human relationships (Jensen-Campbell, Gleason, Adams & Malcolm, 2003; Mutica, 2015 and Islam & Rimi, 2017). Conflicts can result in both positive and negative development; hence this important aspect of human relations has received scholarly attention. A four-year observation of interpersonal conflicts in the male hostel that did not result in physical combat, and the scant literature on the use of the Thomas-Kilmann (1974) conflict resolution model in Nigeria motivated this study. This model, which involves some statements in pairs, was designed to determine respondents' most used conflict resolution strategies. The model drew inspiration from Blake & Mouton (1964) who developed 'The Managerial Grid' theory. Different individuals and possibly gender, may employ different conflict resolution strategies, depending on their personality, and conflict situations. Rubin & Brown (1975), as cited in Korabik, Baril & Watson (1993) reported that females have a more cooperative orientation to conflict than males, while males are more competitive than females. Rahim (1983b), as cited in Korabik et al (1993) found men to report being more accommodating than women and women being more collaborative than men. An objective of this study is to determine the conflict resolution strategies employed by female Nigerian youths based on the Thomas and Kilmann scale. Without necessarily comparing strategies, this study also aims to identify conflict resolution strategies that males employ in conflict situations. Models of conflict resolution have been developed by different scholars, but the Thomas-Kilmann model will be used to find out the conflict resolution strategies that are commonly employed by male Nigerian youths. Therefore, what are the conflict resolution strategies that female Nigerian youths employ, based on the Thomas-Kilmann model? Which conflict resolution strategies do male Nigerian youths employ, according to the Thomas-Kilmann model?

Shonk (2020) defines conflict resolution as a process used by two or more parties to settle their disputes. Shonk's definition presents it as a set of steps people use to settle any differences. This study is focused on interpersonal conflict resolution. Raypole (2020) defines interpersonal conflict as any type of conflict involving two or more people. This study is a test of the Thomas and Kilman model of conflict resolution strategies. Thomas and Kilmann (1974) examined the work of Blake and Mouton (1964) and re-interpreted it, to

add their take on the conflict resolution strategies model. They first created two dimensions of conflict resolution, and are assertiveness and cooperativeness. In reality, minimal resources, time restrictions, opposing values, and also incongruent goals commonly make a joint method to conflict resolution improper, unrealistic, or even impossible. Whether a joint method is possible or not, recognizing the intentions, worries, and national politics driving the dispute helps a specific far better navigate the conflict. During the time of conflict, unflinching parties seek to validate their threats. According to Nischal (2014), assertiveness is the extent to which one tries to meet their own needs in a conflict situation, while cooperativeness is the extent to which one tries to meet the needs of the other person (or people, as the case may be) in a conflict. Hence, the two dimensions gave way to the five conflict resolution styles as given by DeLong (2011) which are; competing, collaborating, compromising, accommodating, and avoidance. Competing implies strife in which one party attempts to outdo the other, consequently emerging as the winner. In this type of conflict resolution style, one or both parties will suffer damages before the conflict is resolved, provided there are no calculated reprisal attacks from the party who lost the first challenge. Collaborating on the other hand is both assertive and cooperative. It described the coming together of both parties to deal with the conflict by considering all possible outcomes. It may involve exploring the thought process of others in order to arrive at a creative solution that will eventually lead to a situation that satisfies both parties; where the parties concentrate on similar interests and not the existing differences. This style is not completed until both parties are reasonably satisfied and can fully support the solution that has been arrived at. This improves relationships. Compromising can be both assertive and cooperative, and the individual addresses the issue directly but partially. The conflicting parties seek to quickly find a middle-ground position. Here, involved parties sacrifice some personal goals for the sake of other perceived more important goals. The two parties are considered powerful because there cannot be a strong reason to compromise if one party is perceived as being in a disadvantaged position. Compromise is a style that always involves concern for oneself while also maintaining regard for the other party. The major difference between compromising and collaboration is that in compromising, both parties are fully willing to sacrifice something to partially get what they want. Here, both parties usually settle for a middle ground and accept the possible existence of losses to gain something. There is no winner nor loser with this strategy.

The accommodation style is seen as the opposite of competing. An individual ignores personal needs so that they can attend to the needs of others. It hints at selflessness and self-sacrifice, in willingly yielding to the other person's positions. Accommodation is useful when one party wants the other party to feel like they have won without a high cost involved. Accommodation is similar to the Avoidance style in that they are both used to avoid confrontation and keep the peace between both parties, while also indicating lower levels of commitment to the relationship. Accommodation tries to resolve conflict quickly by giving in to another person.

Avoidance is an unassertive and uncooperative style where the individual does not pursue either personal concerns or the concerns of other people. It may involve postponing the situation or resolution, or withdrawing from it. As presented by Van de Vliert, cited in DeLong (2011), avoidance can be valuable in four situations; where open communication is not an established part of an existing relationship; where one party does not invest the time and energy necessary to sustain the relationship. Avoidance is useful when the negative consequences of confrontation outweigh the positives. Avoidance is beneficial when one person hasn't learned how to successfully participate in collaborative conflict resolution. Avoidance is helpful when the individual deploying the strategy is in a subordinate position. The Thomas & Kilmann model was selected for this study over other models mainly because it comes along with a test, which is called the Thomas-Kilmann MODE (Management of Differences Exercises). This test makes the Thomas & Kilmann model of conflict resolution testable, and straightforwardly too to meeting the objectives of this study. While the Blake-Mouton model has 5 statements representing the 5 modes explained in the model, the Thomas & Kilmann model has 30 pairs of statements representing the same 5 modes. Another edge which the Thomas & Kilmann model had over the Rahim model is the context for which both instruments were designed. The Thomas & Kilmann model focused on interpersonal relationships while the Rahim model focused on interpersonal conflict resolution in organizations.

According to Goldfiel & Robbennolt (2006), the Dual Concern Model assumes that parties involved in conflict select their preferred methods of handling the conflict based on two dimensions, and those dimensions are: assertiveness and empathy. Assertiveness focuses on the extent to which an individual is concerned with meeting personal needs and interests. On the other end, the empathy dimension focuses on the degree to which an individual is prepared to address and satisfy the concerns and interests of the other party. Essentially, the Dual Concern Model – as the name suggest/s is based on two dimensions, which are the concern for one's needs and the concern for another's needs. Individuals involved in a conflict will examine both dimensions, and then use whatever results they get from those examinations to select the methods which they would use to handle the

conflict. The model is then useful to the study, as it proposes that either of the two concerns will determine the conflict resolution strategy choice. The dual concern model is similar to the Thomas & Kilmann model in the sense that its two motivations -which are a concern for self and concern for others

II. METHODOLOGY

The research design for this study is the quantitative research design, and the survey method was employed to gather data. This study aimed to test the Thomas-Kilmann conflict resolution model, which contains different pairs of statements from which respondents are to choose the ones which resonate with them more. This study was conducted within Lagos and Oyo states, Nigeria. The population deployed the stratified purposive sampling technique that involved youths residing in Lagos and Oyo states. The youths chosen for this study were undergraduates in the two States. The total number of respondents for this survey was 1500. The survey used the Thomas-Kilmann MODE which is made of up thirty pairs of statements, with each statement in each pair representing one of the five conflict resolution strategies in the model. Each strategy was represented by 6 recurring statements across the 30 pairs, with different combinations in each pair. The respondents were asked to select one statement from each pair. Results were analyzed to show which of the five strategies is most employed by each respondent.

Data Presentation and Discussion of Findings

CONFLICT RESOLUTION STRATEGIES EMPLOYED BY FEMALE NIGERIAN YOUTHS IN THE SOUTHWEST, BASED ON THE THOMAS-KILMANN MODEL: This question examines the preferred conflict resolution strategy of female Nigerian youths in southwestern Nigeria. The question examines the frequency of each of the resolution strategies that female Nigerian youths employ

Table 1: Conflict resolution strategies employed by female Nigerian youths.

<i>Style1</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Avoidance	315	42%
Accommodation	143	19%
Collaboration	120	16%
Compromise	97	13%
Competition	75	10%
Total	750	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2021

The data gathered and presented in the Table 1 revealed that 315 female respondents which represent 42% make use of the Avoidance conflict resolution strategy, while 143 (19%) deploy the accommodation conflict resolution strategy. Collaboration conflict resolution strategy was preferred by 120 respondents which represent 16%, while 97 (13%) make use of the compromise conflict resolution strategy. Competition conflict resolution strategy had the fewest frequency of use, as only 75 respondents (10%) reported its use. From the foregoing, it can be deduced that the conflict resolution strategy mostly employed by female Nigerian youths is the Avoiding strategy. This strategy involves either postponing the situation or resolution or ignoring the entire situation entirely. According to DeLong (2011), the avoiding strategy is particularly useful when there is no open communication as an established part of the relationship. DeLong also argues that the avoiding strategy is used when someone refuses to invest the required time to work through the differences in the relationship.

According to Bluffton edu. (n.d.), the avoiding strategy is also used when the issue is very trivial, of little importance, or importance to only one of the parties involved. Individuals may decide to withdraw from the conflict and its resolution if they perceive that the matter is not ‘worth it.’ There is also an assertion that the strategy can be used when trying to cool tensions for a bit, before coming back to the issue. This particularly works when one can see that the situation is not heading towards any successful resolution. When asked to provide reasons for their conflict resolution strategy choice, the majority that selected avoidance said they choose to withdraw from the conflict momentarily or completely to work things out with the person later or use avoidance to assert their position. This finding disagrees with Van de Vliert, cited in DeLong (2011), who submitted that avoidance can be valuable where open communication is not an established part of an existing relationship; one party does not invest the time and energy necessary to sustain the relationship; negative consequences of confrontation outweigh the positives; and or when one person hasn’t learned how to successfully participate in collaborative conflict resolution; and that avoidance is often used by a subordinate party in a conflict situation. The avoidance may be either completely or for a little while – rather than work with the other person, or try to enforce their wishes.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION STRATEGIES EMPLOYED BY MALE NIGERIAN YOUTHS IN THE SOUTHWEST, BASED ON THE THOMAS-KILMANN MODEL

This question tests for the preferred conflict resolution strategy of male Nigerian youths in southwestern Nigeria. The question examines the frequency of each of the resolution strategies that female Nigerian youths employ

Table 2: Conflict resolution strategies employed by male Nigerian youths.

Style2	Frequency	Percentage
Compromise	210	28%
Avoidance	195	26%
Competition	165	22%
Accommodation	105	14%
Collaboration	75	10%
Total	750	

Source: Field Survey, 2021

The data gathered and presented in the Table 2 demonstrated that 210 male respondents which represent 28% do make use of the Compromising conflict resolution strategy, while 195 (26%) deploy the avoidance conflict resolution strategy. Competing is adopted by 165 respondents which represent 22%, while 105 (14%) make use of the accommodating conflict resolution strategy. Collaboration conflict resolution strategy had the fewest frequency of use, as only 75 respondents (10%) reported its use. The findings of this study disagree with the findings of Rubin & Brown (1975), as cited in Korabik, Baril & Watson (1993) who reported that females have a more cooperative orientation to conflict than males, while males are more competitive than females. Rahim (1983b), as cited in Korabik et al (1993) found men to report being more accommodating than women and women being more collaborative than men.

III. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study set out to test the Thomas & Kilmann model on both male and female Nigerian youths. It was discovered that the female Nigerian youths would rather use the avoidance conflict resolution strategy, while their male counterparts would rather compromise. It may therefore be tentatively concluded that Nigerian youths employ both avoidance and compromise conflict resolution strategies. It is interesting to note that collaboration did not rank highest for each gender. It is therefore recommended that young people be taught the importance of collaboration in conflict resolution. It is also recommended that another study be conducted to establish the conflict resolution strategies used by adults within the same region. This will show if age and or other factors contribute to the choice of conflict resolution strategy.

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