



CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STYLES IN OIL & GAS SECTOR IN SULTANATE OF OMAN

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Oil and gas sector has been dominated the overall structural fabric of Oman's economy for the last 30 years. This sector served as the catalyst for growth in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Oman.

A descriptive study was conducted to identify the conflict management styles in this sector of Oman. Main objective was to identify and describe the various factors of conflict and conflict-management styles used in this sector to resolve interpersonal conflict. Data was collected through questionnaire schedules and unstructured interview. Data analysis and interpretation was done based on the responses of 100 respondents, in which attempts were made to contain the views of existing conflict management resolution techniques and procedures. Finally results were discussed and conflict management styles used in these companies were reported. It was found that oil & gas sector companies were either using collaborative style or accommodative style in managing conflict in lower level management. These conflict management styles were predominantly used by this sector for achieving long term goals.

Keywords: conflict, conflict management, conflict management styles, oil and gas sector of Oman,

1. Introduction

Conflict may be defined as a struggle or contest between people with opposing needs, ideas, beliefs, values, or goals. Conflict within and between teams is inevitable; however, the results of conflict are not predetermined. Conflict might escalate and lead to non-productive results, or conflict can be beneficially resolved leading to employees' satisfaction. Therefore, learning to manage conflict is integral to a high-performance team and organization.

Although very few people go looking for conflict, more often than not, conflict results because of miscommunication between people with regard to their needs, ideas, beliefs, goals, or values. Conflict management principle is that all conflicts cannot necessarily be resolved, but learning how to manage conflicts can decrease the odds of non-productive escalation.

Conflict management involves acquiring skills related to conflict resolution, self-awareness about conflict modes, conflict communication skills, awareness and establishing a structure for management of conflict in your environment. How do people respond to conflict? Fight or Flight? Physiologically we respond to conflict in one of two ways - we want to "get away from the conflict" or we are ready to "take on anyone who comes our way".

This study illustrates how the main success factor in any modern business organization is through implementing better conflict resolution strategy for realizing business objectives. Furthermore, this study traces out the functions of HR and studies in conflict management. The study covers oil & gas companies in the Sultanate of Oman.

Finally, this study highlights the conflict management in some of the existing Oil & Gas companies, in order to find out the techniques and styles preferred in handling conflicts.

2. Problem Statement

The field of conflict management is gaining importance with respect to the Omani private sector as there has been a drastic rise in the number and intensity of interpersonal conflicts in current times, especially in the Oil & Gas sector, which although present but is hidden from public view.

This study focused on conflict management in the Oil & Gas companies operating in the Sultanate of Oman to study and understand the obstacles towards conflict management, and how the personnel in this sector have to deal with it regularly. More or less, the study attempted to find resolution techniques to deal with conflict management in a convenient way to promote healthy HR practices.

3. Theoretical Concepts and Framework

There is no single definition of conflict exists, most definitions seem to involve the following factors: that there are at least two independent groups, the groups perceive some incompatibility between themselves, and the groups interact with each other in some way (Putnam and Poole, 1987). There are various definitions of conflict. There are few popular one out of those. One defines conflict as "A process in which one party perceives that their interests are being opposed or negatively affected by another party" (Wall & Callister, 1995, p. 517), and the others defines it as "An interactive process manifested in incompatibility, disagreement, or dissonance within or between social entities" (Rahim, 1992, p. 16)

3.1. Conflict Advantages

While the term conflict generally is associated with negative encounters, conflict itself is neither inherently good nor inherently bad. In fact, engaging in conflict can have positive effects on employees' relationships and organizations.

There are following considerable benefits:

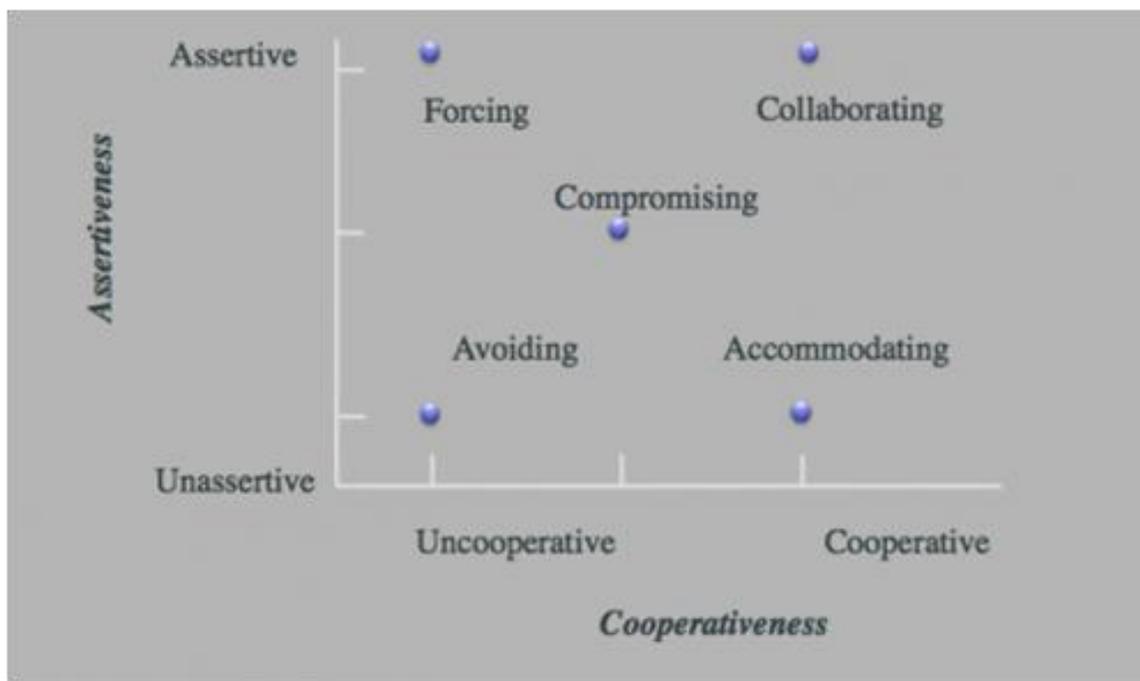
- a. Discussing conflicting views can lead to better solutions.
- b. Conflict raises awareness of what is important to individuals.
- c. Managing conflicts appropriately helps build self-esteem.
- d. Conflict requires creativity to find the best outcomes.
- e. Conflicts are challenging and exciting
- f. Conflicts encourage people to grow.

There were instances that all business has to face the conflict issue once or more than that in their organizations. Human relations managers in organizations often find themselves managing situations of inter-personal conflict.

How can individual manage disagreements and build personal and congenial relationships rather than harming them? Such disagreements or conflicts can occur between individuals, between groups or within group. To understand interpersonal conflict managing styles, following framework was adopted in this study.

4. Conflict Management Strategies and Styles

Figure 1 : Conflict management framework.



Source: Whetten, D. A. & Cameron, K. S., 2007. Developing Management Skills (7th Ed.), Prentice-Hall.

Following are five strategies from conflict management theory for managing conflicting situations.

- a. Collaborating: win/win.
- b. Compromising: win some/lose some.
- c. Accommodating: lose/win.
- d. Competing: win/lose.
- e. Avoiding: no winners/no losers.

None of them is "one-size-fits-all" solution. Which one is the best in a given situation will depend on a variety of factors, including an appraisal of the levels of conflict.

5. Literature Review

Organizational conflict is defined as the behavior intended to obstruct the achievement of some other person's goals. Conflict is therefore a product of incompatibility of goals and it arises from opposing behaviors. It can be viewed from the individual group or organization levels (Adeoti J. O., 2000)

Mullins (1999) identified three potential sources of organization conflict. They are:

- a. Individual: Such as attitude, personality characteristics of particular person, needs, illness and stress.
- b. Group: Such as group skills, the informal organization and group norms.
- c. Organization: Such as communications, authority structure, leadership style and management behaviour.

We know that individual sources of conflict often develop among groups' members and then it goes to the organizational level. It was discovered that lack of synchronization of individual goals within the organizational goals may make an individual to work contrary to the colleagues and subsequently

corporate goals of the organization. In some of the sectors, departmental conflict is more prevalent, which may lead to the organizational conflict. Ultimately, the management styles employed by the organization determine whether the conflict will be mitigated or aggravated.

The Interactionist School sees conflict as a sign of a healthy organization. It described that good managers do not try to eliminate conflict, instead they try to resolve or else keep it away from wasting the energies of their people (Woods & Peter, 1983).

Robins (1998) described conflict as a positive force and necessary for effective performance. His approach encourages a minimum level of conflict within the group in order to encourage self-criticism, change and innovation and to help prevent apathy or too great a tolerance for harmony and the status quo. A conflict is an inevitable feature of organizational life and should be judged by its own performance.

This study has taken the conflict as a natural and positive phenomenon of an effective and developing organization. Conflict is a sign of healthy organization. But conflict resolution technique finally determines the health and success of an organization.

6. Significance of Study

This study will provide practical management solutions to the conflict problems in general areas of various businesses, where it can benefit all managers. This will include the knowledge and methods of conflict management in personal domain and their impact on job satisfaction in order to increase the effectiveness of the organization.

The study will help in the following:

- a. Develop skills of the individuals, and increase their knowledge in managing conflicts.
- b. Develop skills of the managers within the organization to improve relations between superiors and subordinates.
- c. Develop skills required to resolve conflicts and disputes amongst individuals and groups.

7. Objectives of the Study

1. To present an overview of the conflict management in the oil and gas sector in Sultanate of Oman.
2. To describe the conflict management styles in oil and gas companies in Sultanate of Oman.
3. To analyze the conflict management style followed by these companies.

8. Scope of the Study

The study deals with the subject of conflict management from an academic point of view. The study will allow gaining some knowledge about the conflict management issues, significance, and recent techniques used to resolve it effectively.

Furthermore, the study will aid in obtaining an essential data of conflict management existing in the Sultanate of Oman Oil & Gas sector. This will help in understanding the conflicts handling method used. It would help to understand and implement suitable conflict management style in this sector.

9. Research Methodology

9.1. Research Design

The Research design is purely and simply the framework of study plan, which guides the collection and analysis of collected data. Descriptive Research design was used for this research based on adoption of survey method.

9.2. Sampling Design

Convenient sampling method was adopted for this study, because most of the Oil companies were reluctant in sharing their data due of work deadlines and other procedural constraints.

9.3. Sample Size

The size of the sample was 100.

9.4. Data Collection Method(s)

Both data collected primary and secondary, were pre-designed to fulfill the requirement of this study.

- Primary data: The data collected were through Questionnaire and interview methods.
- Secondary data: The data collected through the following:
 1. Internal sources.
 2. Books, articles, Journals, etc.
 3. Internet.
 4. Other official sources and records.

Survey method was adopted with the help of questionnaire schedule to collect the data for the study. Questionnaire was distributed to a number of Omani oil & gas sector establishments of lower level management employees. The lower level employees selected in the study belonged to

the supervisory staffs and the staffs below that designation.

Other companies in the same field were approached, but their results were not enclosed in this study due to the uncompleted questionnaires. More than Three hundred questionnaire forms were distributed to thirteen companies at in this sector, but the filled questionnaires received within the time frame were only one hundred questionnaires from six companies.

The numbers of response from the six companies were:

- Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) = 29
- National Oilfield Supply Company LLC (NOSCO) = 5

- Oman Sea PetroServices LLC (OSPS) = 22
- Oman Oil Marketing Company (OOMC) = 17
- Mideast Integrated Drilling & Well Services Co. LLC (MIDWSCO) =15
- MB Petroleum Services LLC (MB) = 12

The questionnaire was designed to suit the lower level management of Oil and Gas business sector, with an aim to identify the existing conflict management style used. Therefore, standard questionnaire of twenty five items were set to ensure the finding results. The questionnaire results and findings are tabled below.

10. Results and Findings

Table 1: (Answer Key)

Accommodating (Question No.)	Avoiding (Question No.)	Collaborating (Question No.)	Competing (Question No.)	Compromising (Question No.)
1	3	2	6	7
13	5	4	8	9
17	14	12	10	11
19	18	15	21	16
22	25	20	24	23

Source: Khanka. S.S. (2010), Organizational behavior (Text and Cases), 4th edition, S. Chand publication, pages no. 310-311.

Table 2: Total points in each conflict management style

Accommodating (Question No.)	Avoiding (Question No.)	Collaborating (Question No.)	Competing (Question No.)	Compromising (Question No.)
405	243	308	281	296
321	293	391	292	332
421	336	406	266	370
354	314	402	265	401
318	280	322	252	352
Total Points =1819	Total Points =1466	Total Points= 1829	Total Points= 1356	Total Points= 1751

Table 3: Percentage response based on grand total

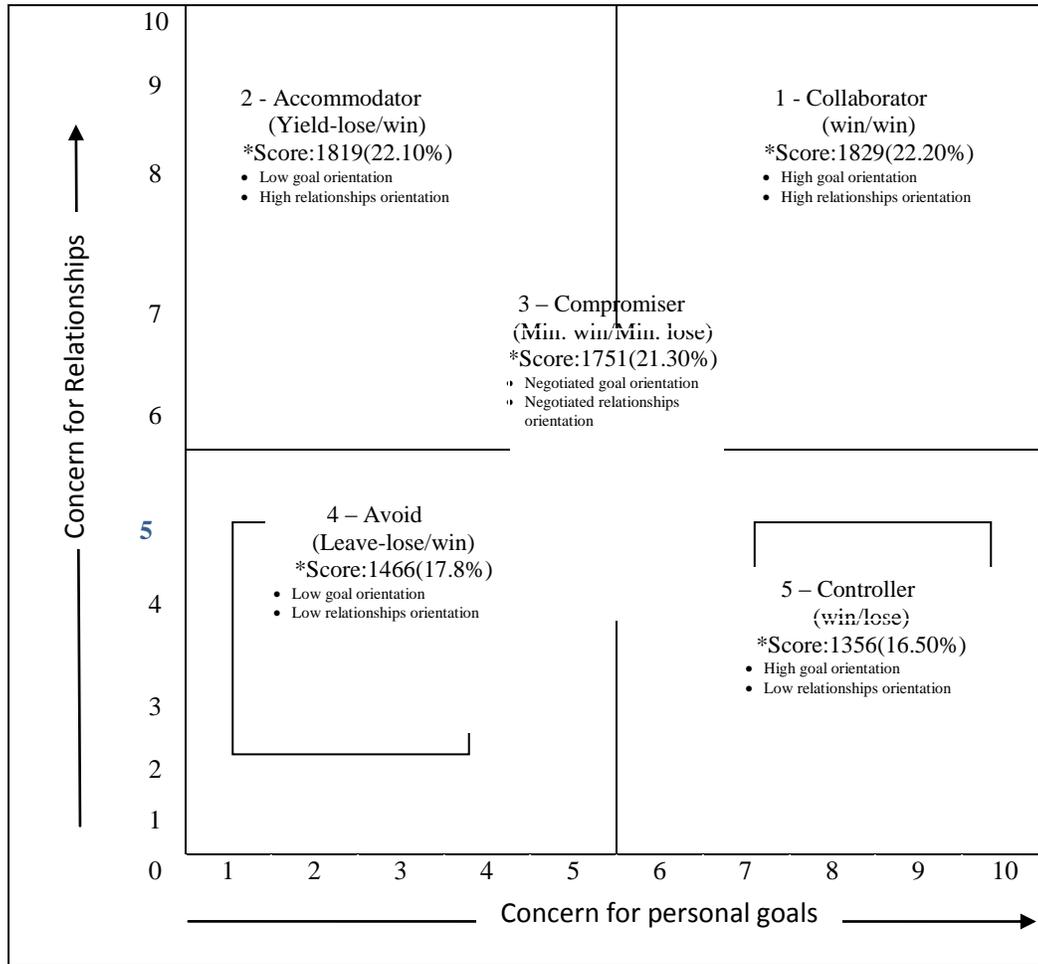
CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STYLE	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE
Accommodating	1819	22.1%
Avoiding	1466	17.8%
Collaborating	1829	22.2%
Competing	1356	16.5%
Compromising	1751	21.3%
Grand Total	8221	100%

Table 4: Ranking to Conflict management styles in Oil sector

CHOICE	CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STYLE	SCORE
1st	Collaborating	22.2%
2 nd	Accommodating	22.1%
3 rd	Compromising	21.3%
4 th	Avoiding	17.8%
5 th	Competing	16.5%



Figure2 : Conflict management styles.



Source: Jay Hall's, Conflict Management Survey, the Woodlands, Texas: Telemetrics International 1969.

11. Result & Discussion

The result from the data indicated that most of the surveyed lower level employees' in this sector have chosen collaborating style as main conflict management style within their organization. 22.2 % respondents feel that

their conflict resolution style is collaborative in nature. The employees of these companies using such style of conflict management feel that they always achieve their needs and goals within time limit. In addition, these employees are highly confident with their knowledge regarding their work. This particular style of conflict management resolve conflict issues between

and among parties with more openness and satisfaction within the organization.

The benefits of the using the collaborating conflict management style is to provide appropriate solutions to occurred conflicts and integrate both parties interest. The creative way of finding the solutions is based on their personal and work place experience of handling conflict.

Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that, the Omani Oil & Gas companies are in the development circle with a great understanding of the other party need and maintaining their own goals and objectives.

The second used style on resolving conflict in the sector was accommodating style. It was used with a high ratio of 22.1% by the respondents of lower level management employees in this sector. This gives a clear understanding that both collaborating & accommodating styles were functionally used with minor differences. The employees of such companies implementing the accommodating style of conflict management are much concerned of building social credits rather than their own interest.

The accommodating style employees are highly maintaining and believing of social relationship's respect more than their own interests. The accommodating style users are keen towards a desire of meeting the others needs at the expense of the personal own needs. This is an interesting finding on conflict management in this sector.

The third chosen style to manage conflict is through compromising. 21.3% respondents fall under such conflict management style. This gives an indication that the employees link up with this style are hesitant and reluctant in approaching the conclusive solution to manage interpersonal conflicts.

Occasionally it is important to enforce this style by the employees when the attainments of goals are more essential and desired for the department and organization. Those employees always attempts to solve the encountered conflicts through negotiation to obtain the minimum gain and with a minimum losing in order to keep both parties partially satisfied.

The compromising conflict management style is useful when the cost of conflict is greater than the cost of losing ground. This style is more suitable, when an adequate and strong challengers are at a standstill and when there is a deadline approaching.

The fourth selected option in the conflict management was the avoiding style by 17.8% of the respondents. This reflects that the employees going with this style have the lowest attraction to solve the conflicts, and they disregard the negotiations as a method to resolve the conflict. These employees do not pay any attention to obtain an acceptable solution to the conflict due to their own mind set. In addition, employees are more likely to avoid any involvement in decision making. Other interpretation of this style is that the employees have low goal orientation along with low relationship's orientation. This style of conflict management is not a good sign of a healthy and developing organization

The last chosen style by the Oil & Gas business sector employee's was competing style. 16.5% respondents fall under such category. In this style employees are highly aggressiveness to meet their goals at other party's expense. They are distressed and usually function from a place of power, position, rank, expertise or persuasive ability. This style can be useful when there is an urgent situation, where a quick judgment needs to be done. However, it can leave people feeling bruised, unsatisfied and

resentful when used in fewer urgent situations. This conflict management style is also a concern for this sector in Oman.

The result of conflict management styles in this sector showed that equal number of lower level employees resolved their conflict with collaborative and accommodative styles respectively. This was a very interesting finding in the area of interpersonal conflict in this sector. Findings were not very conclusive. The reason behind such result could be because of the awareness related to the interpersonal resolution technique among those lower level employees. That's why they were having a collaborative style in resolving conflict. The accommodative styles chosen by almost equal number of employees suggested that they were not much versed with the interpersonal conflict resolution concepts and techniques. The result also implied that awareness among the employees and organizational interests were not favorable on such issues.

12. Conclusion

The conflict represents the complexity of organizational relationship and Interaction among workers. Conflict is a healthy sign not a negative process. Moreover, Conflict management involves acquiring skills related to conflict resolution, self-awareness about conflict modes, conflict communication skills, awareness and establishing a structure for management of conflict in an organization.

However, the study was focused on the lower level employees in Oil and Gas sector in Oman. The study found various style of conflict management used to resolve the conflict in this sector. The results of the study might be complementary to the goals of the organization. It was found that the collaborating style and accommodative style

were the main style used in the conflict management within such organization in this sector. The other three styles were also in practice to resolve the conflict in few of the oil companies in this sector. The result indicated that most of the lower management staffs in this sector are using collaborative styles of conflict resolution but at same time accommodating style is also in practiced by large number of lower level employees. The conclusive result regarding one particular conflict management style used by the lower management staffs can only be drawn with large number of sample and by including more oil and gas companies in future study.

13. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, specific recommendations are as follows:

1. The Oil & Gas sector should have more transparency in dealing with the conflict resolution among lower level employees.
2. They must enhance the understandings of conflict management through various seminars, workshops and orientation courses in order to increase the knowledge and effectiveness in handling interpersonal conflict.
3. They should implement a regular conflict management evaluation policy to find the prevailing conflict management style and try to improve the employees relations based on organizational objectives.

14. Directions for future study

The study to identify conflict management styles was focused on the lower level employee in Oil and Gas sector in Oman. The findings were not purely conclusive but interesting. It may be taken as an indicator of the conflict management styles adopted by the employees in this level because of small sample size and low response rate.

Further study could be carried out with larger sample to identify and validate the conflict management styles in Oil and Gas sector companies. Participation and co-operation should come from all companies in Oman to have a conclusive finding in this area. A separate analysis on lower and middle level could also be carried out to identify the difference of conflict management styles in two hierarchies for bringing further clarity and understanding in this domain.

Bibliography and References

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2. Mullins, L. J. (1999), Management and Organisational Behaviour. Harlow: Prentice Hall

Annexure 1:

QUESTIONNAIRE

As part of the study, I would like to gather some information from you, which will help me in depth study of my project. I would be obliged if you cooperate in filling the questionnaire. Since the questionnaire is being used for academic purpose, the information gathered will be strictly confidential.

There are following 25 statements. Select your response using the five – point ranking scale for all 25 statements and mark your closest agreement on each statement.

The five point Rating scale is:

1. Do not agree at all

2. Mildly agree

3. Moderately agree

4. Strongly agree

5. Extremely agree

1. I try to solve conflicts by finding solutions that benefit both me and other person

Do not agree at all Mildly agree Moderately agree Strongly agree Extremely agree

2. I sometime go along with suggestions from other members even I don't agree

Do not agree at all Mildly agree Moderately agree Strongly agree Extremely agree

3. I keep my option to myself rather than disagree with others

Do not agree at all Mildly agree Moderately agree Strongly agree Extremely agree

4. I integrate good ideas of others to arrive at a joint decision

Do not agree at all Mildly agree Moderately agree Strongly agree Extremely agree

5. I try to keep away from issues where there is disagreement

Do not agree at all Mildly agree Moderately agree Strongly agree Extremely agree

6. I try to use my influence to get my ideas accepted



Do not agree at all Mildly agree Moderately agree Strongly agree Extremely agree

7. To reach an agreement, I give up something in exchange for others

Do not agree at all Mildly agree Moderately agree Strongly agree Extremely agree

8. I depend on my own expertise to make decision

Do not agree at all Mildly agree Moderately agree Strongly agree Extremely agree

9. To resolve an impasse, I try to find a middle course

Do not agree at all Mildly agree Moderately agree Strongly agree Extremely agree

10. In negotiation, I hold on to my position rather than give in

Do not agree at all Mildly agree Moderately agree Strongly agree Extremely agree

11. I give and take so that a decision is arrived at

Do not agree at all Mildly agree Moderately agree Strongly agree Extremely agree

12. To resolve the issues in the best possible way, I involve all concerns in the decision

Do not agree at all Mildly agree Moderately agree Strongly agree Extremely agree

13. I try to satisfy the opinion of others

Do not agree at all Mildly agree Moderately agree Strongly agree Extremely agree

14. I try to avoid open differences to be discussed openly with others

Do not agree at all Mildly agree Moderately agree Strongly agree Extremely agree

15. I try to work with others to meet mutual expectations

Do not agree at all Mildly agree Moderately agree Strongly agree Extremely agree

16. I prefer to negotiate to arrive a compromised decision

Do not agree at all Mildly agree Moderately agree Strongly agree Extremely agree

17. I try to respect others opinion to arrive at a decision

Do not agree at all Mildly agree Moderately agree Strongly agree Extremely agree

18. I try to stay away from disagreement with others

Do not agree at all Mildly agree Moderately agree Strongly agree Extremely agree

19. I try to help others to make decision in their favor.

Do not agree at all Mildly agree Moderately agree Strongly agree Extremely agree

20. I try to propose some middle course to break the deadlock, as and when it is there

Do not agree at all Mildly agree Moderately agree Strongly agree Extremely agree

21. I try to hold on to my solution to the problem

Do not agree at all Mildly agree Moderately agree Strongly agree Extremely agree

22. I try to give concessions to others to arrive at a decision

Do not agree at all Mildly agree Moderately agree Strongly agree Extremely agree

23. To reach an agreement, I try not to stick to my difference with others



Do not agree at all Mildly agree Moderately agree Strongly agree Extremely agree

24. To get the decision on my terms I like to use my power

Do not agree at all Mildly agree Moderately agree Strongly agree Extremely agree

25. To make others not to feel hurt, I try to withheld my disagreement to myself

Do not agree at all Mildly agree Moderately agree Strongly agree Extremely agree

Source: Khanka. S.S. (2010), Organisational behaviour (Text and Cases), 4th edition, S. Chand publication, pages no. 310-310.