Abstract
Data from 139 respondents from major industries revealed that subordinates were more satisfied with their superiors’ supervision through the exercise of integrating and to a lesser extent, compromising and obliging styles. On the contrary, subordinates who perceived their superiors as primarily using avoiding style were found to be less satisfied. The age of the superior serves to only marginally moderate the relationship between compromising style in which older superior exercise of compromising style tend to lead to a higher level of satisfaction with supervision. Interaction effect of gender seemed to result in a less satisfied subordinate when they were supervised by female superior employing compromising style although in general, such style should lead to a more satisfied subordinate. On the other hand, the effect of integrating style on satisfaction with supervision is magnified when this style is used by a female superior. Result also confirmed the moderating effect of hierarchy as its usually neutral effect on satisfaction with supervision by the exercise of obliging style was negated in the case of superior at higher hierarchy level.

Keywords: Organization behavior; Managerial supervision; Conflict handling styles; Satisfaction; Age; Gender; Hierarchy level; Moderation effect.

JEL Classification Codes: L2; M54.

1. Introduction
Conflict is said to be at the heart of organization’s problems. Thus, the study of conflict resolution is persistently relevant. In any organizational setting, managers should be aware of various approaches in handling the conflict to mitigate its negative effect on subordinates’ performance or job satisfaction (Churchill, Ford & Walker, 1976; Fisher & Gittelson, 1983; Van Sell, Brief & Schuler, 1981; Rahim & Buntzman, 1989). Positive interpersonal relationship at workplace is said to be able to increase subordinates’ satisfaction and subordinates with higher level of satisfaction are more likely to be committed to the organization (Brown & Peterson, 1993).

Conflict management skills are necessary for an individual to perform effectively at any level within organizations. Unfortunately, there is inadequate attention given in looking at moderating effects of age, gender and hierarchy in relation to conflict handling styles and satisfaction with supervision. While there are other likely moderators, the authors have targeted these variables because of their relevance to the work situation is noteworthy and their potential impact is evidently great. The age, gender and hierarchy level provide understanding of why individuals behave and function differently in work situations (Gist, 1987; Gist & Mitchell, 1992). Age may be one reason for such individual differences (Gist & Mitchell, 1992). Research has documented that attitudes are more stable in older people, while younger people’s attitudes are likely to be more ‘impressionable’ and easily changed (Alwin & Krosnick, 1991).

Gender can also be an important variable in conflict handling styles. They are several findings from psychology and other areas (e.g. Ruberey, Smith & Fagan, 1997) indicating that gender can be considered a
relevant moderator variable between the relationship of conflict handling styles and satisfaction. With increasing number of women holding decision making positions in organizations (Powell, 1988), coupled with the obvious importance of conflict management skills in providing effective managerial supervision, there has been increased focus on the possible existence of gender differences in the ability to manage conflict. This is a step away from the usual predilection that managerial role is often associated with possession of masculine rather than feminine characteristics (Brenner, Tomkiewicz & Shein, 1989; Powell & Butterfield, 1979).

There are several findings that suggest women have a more cooperative orientation to conflict management than men (Rahim, 1983a; Rubin & Brown, 1975). Others suggest that women are more competitive (Bedell & Sistrunk, 1973; Rubin & Brown, 1975). According to the gender role perspective (Bem, 1974; Bem & Lenney, 1976; Spence & Helmreich, 1978), differences in conflict management behavior of men and women may be linked to biological sex that explained how individuals behave in certain circumstances (Cook, 1985). Our research focus more broadly on gender differences in dealing with conflict which may provide a more effective means of explaining individual differences in conflict management style rather than biological sex.

Knowing how conflict handling styles relate to these variables will enable the superior to change or maintain his/her conflict styles to achieve desirable outcomes. Hence, this study seeks to answer the following research questions.

- Are there any significant differences in subordinates’ satisfaction with supervision when subjected to different conflict management styles?
- Can superior’s age and hierarchy level moderate the relationship between conflict handling styles and subordinates’ satisfaction with supervision?
- Is there any difference in conflict handling styles in women and men? Or does gender moderate the relationship between conflict handling styles and satisfaction with supervision?

The theoretical framework of this study is based on the interaction among variables as depicted in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Model of Moderators of Conflict Handling Style and their Interactions**

2. Literature Review

This section discusses the relevant constructs and variables as well as their interactions involving: (1) Conflict handling styles; (2) Age, gender and hierarchy as moderators, and (3) Supervision with satisfaction as outcome.
2.1 Typologies of Conflict Handling Styles

The first conceptual scheme for categorizing conflict revolved around a simple cooperation-competition dichotomy followed the intuitive notion that styles can be a single dimension i.e. competition or selfishness (Deutsch, 1949, 1973). However, the limitation of single-dimension model is that it fails to encompass styles that involve high concern for both self and other, and styles that involve neither high concern for neither self nor others (Ruble & Thomas, 1976; Smith, 1987; Thomas & Kilmann, 1974; Pruitt & Rubin, 1986).

Subsequent theorists then drawn on a new two-dimensional grid for classifying the styles as suggested by Blake and Mouton (1964, 1970) which is a self-oriented and other-oriented concern. Other authors have labeled the two dimensions differently (e.g., Thomas & Kilmann, 1974; Rahim, 1983a, 1986; Thomas, 1976; Pruitt & Rubin, 1986; Van de Vliert & Hordijk, 1989), but the basic assumptions have remained similar. Although it has also been debated that individuals select among three or four conflict styles (Pruitt, 1983; Putnam & Wilson, 1982), but evidence from confirmatory factor analyzes concluded that the five factor model has a better fit with data than models of two, three and four styles orientations (Rahim & Magner, 1994, 1995).

The styles of handling interpersonal conflict on two basic dimensions: concern for self and concern for others is among the most popular styles of handling conflict used in research (Gross & Guerrero, 2000; Rahim, 1985, 1986, 2001; Rahim & Buntzman, 1989; Rahim & Magner, 1995). In fact, Rahim and Bonoma’s (1979) model was based on Blake and Mouton’s (1964) grid of managerial styles as well as the Thomas-Kilmann (1974) MODE instrument. This work leads them to identify five specific conflict styles as shown in Figure 2. Rahim (1983a, 1986, 2001) defines styles of handling conflict as integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding and compromising. It was Rahim’s (1986) idea that “organizational participants must learn the five styles of handling conflict to deal with different conflict situations effectively” (p.30). The five conflict styles that emerge from various combinations of these two dimensions are described below:

![Figure 2: The Styles of Handling Interpersonal Conflict Concern for Self](image-url)

**Integrating Style**
High concern for self and others reflects openness, exchange of information, and examination of differences to reach an effective solution acceptable to both parties. This style concentrates on problem solving in a collaborative manner. Thus, the integrating style is believe to be both effective and appropriate in managing conflicts and, therefore, is perceived as highly competent (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967; Tutzauer & Roloff, 1988).

**Obliging Style**
Low concern for self and high concern for others style is associated with attempting to play down the differences and emphasizing commonalities to satisfy the concern of the other party. Obliging is associated with accommodating behaviors. It can be used as a strategy when a party is willing to give up something with the hope of getting something in exchange from the other party when needed (Blake & Mouton, 1964).

**Dominating Style**
High concern for self and low concern for others style has been identified with win-lose orientation.
Within interpersonal context, the dominating (competing/distributive) style has been found to be associated with low levels of effectiveness and appropriateness (Blake & Mouton, 1964).

Avoiding Style
Low concern for self and others style has been associated with withdrawal when a person fails to satisfy his/her own concern as well as the concern of the other party. This style is useful when the issues are trivial or when the potential dysfunctional effect of confronting the other party outweighs the benefits of the resolution of conflict.

Compromising Style
Intermediate in concern for self and others style involves give-and-take whereby both parties give up something to make a mutually acceptable decision. It may be appropriate when the goals of the conflicting parties are mutually exclusive or when both parties who are equally powerful (e.g. Labor and management). This style may be of some use in dealing with strategic issues, but heavy reliance on this style may be dysfunctional.

2.2. Moderating Effects of Age, Gender and Hierarchy Level

Age
Studies by Posner (1986) and Hignite, Margovio and Chin (2002) found that age does account for differences in conflict management styles. McKenna and Richardson (1995) suggested that with increasing age respondents have a clear tendency to become more assertive. In fact, they found that older peoples do indicate a collaborative style. Yan and Sorenson (2004) examined conflict in Chinese family business, found that the differences in age strengthen the use of avoiding and accommodating styles of handling conflicts. However, another study found that there is no relationship between age and conflict management styles (Konovsky, Jaster & McDonald 1998). These diverging finding may indicate the importance of age in the working environment in changing perceptions and the use of conflict resolution style.

A number of converging work force issues makes improving our understanding of how age can affect conflict styles and work satisfaction. Employees of all ages continuously upgrade their skills in order to work effectively (Paul & Townsend, 1993). These trends suggest the need for a coherent, well-grounded understanding of the impact of age on job outcomes to use as a basis for constructive work force management. However, conceptual reviews (Davies, Matthews & Wong, 1991; Rhodes, 1983; Welford, 1985) and meta-analyses (Waldman & Avolio, 1986; McEvoy & Cascio, 1989) of research on age suggest that searches for simple conclusions have not been fruitful. As with satisfaction, tenure can be a confound, and controlling for it tends to reduce or eliminate age-related differences in work outcome (Kacmar & Ferris, 1989). Researchers (Labouvie-Vief & Chandler, 1978; Waldman & Avolio, 1993) have begun to call for a contextual approach to study the effects of age on work outcome potential. Similarly, McEvoy and Cascio (1989) have suggested the appropriateness of further investigation of potential moderator influences on age-performance relations.

Gender
Researches exploring gender differences in conflict management style has been escalating but the findings were inconsistent. Some studies suggest that women have a more cooperative to conflict style than men (Rahim, 1983a). Others suggest that women are more competitive (Rubin & Brown, 1975). Brewer, Mitchell and Weber (2002) found that two predominant modes of handling conflict for both men and women were compromising and avoiding, although the greatest tendency for men was compromising and for woman is avoiding. Hignite et al. (2002) found that gender produced some significant differences in using conflict resolution styles. Specifically, they found that females had significantly higher scores on the construct of collaboration than did the male subjects.

There is evidence that male are more dominating and less compromising than female in conflict situations (Imler, 1980; Kilmann & Thomas, 1977). While few researchers have investigated the relationship between gender role and conflict management style, those who have done so found that (a) feminine individuals disapproved of conflict more than masculine (Baxter & Shepherd, 1978), (b) androgynous individuals reported more frequent use of integrating or compromising styles than feminine or undifferentiated individuals (Yelsma & Brown, 1985), and (c) masculine individuals were more likely to
report a dominating style, while androgynous individuals were more likely to report an integrating style (Portelo & Long, 1994). Thus, since it is clear that gender roles do not conform to the principal of biopsychological equivalence (Korabik, 1990), many previous studies of the relationships between biological sex and conflict style in organizational are open to reinterpretation.

In addition, gender would appear to be a significant way that human beings differ in relationship to conflict resolution style. Similarly, within the workplace, how one chooses to resolve conflict may be affected in large part that intuitively, individuals of different genders, different cultural backgrounds and employees within the workplace would appear to solve conflicts in very different ways. In handling conflict, women unlike men favour accommodating strategies (Greeff & De Bruyne, 2000; Rubin & Brown, 1975) whereas men unlike women prefer to be more confrontational (Rosenthal & Hautaluoma, 1988), aggressive (Kilman & Thomas, 1977) and competitive (Rubin & Brown, 1975). There is also evidence that suggests men are more avoiding in their style of conflict management than are women (Greeff & de Bruyne, 2000; Mackey & O’Brien, 1998; Haferkamp, 1991). Haferkamp (1991) believes that this later finding accords with gender role expectations, as men are considered less able to manage relationships and are expected to remain calm and in control. Furthermore, many men experience anxiety in social settings, and this may make men more likely than women to avoid conflict (Levant, 1996; Heavey, Layne & Christensen, 1993; Gottman & Levenson, 1986).

In studies involving managers, conflict management styles do not converge as much with gender role expectations (Korabik, Baril & Watson, 1993). While it is true that many earlier studies in gender differences in handling negotiations showed that women were less competitive and more accommodating (Rubin & Brown, 1975; Rosenthal & Hautaluoma, 1988) and that men were less cooperative and more dominating (Vinacke, Mogy, Powers, Langan & Beck, 1974), recent studies report little or no difference between the way male and female managers handle conflict (Korabik et al., 1993; Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Watson & Hoffman, 1996). Not all contemporary findings are consistent, however. There are studies that still indicate gender-specific preferences (Brewer et al., 2002; Korabik et al., 1993) as well as studies that find men more accommodating (Rahim, 2001) and women more avoiding (Brewer et al., 2002). Female avoidance of conflict, however, probably has more to do with power differentials than with gender differences (Korabik et al., 1993; Randel, 2002; Watson & Hoffman, 1996; Stockard & Johnson, 1992).

**Hierarchy level**

Hierarchy level indicates the position ranking of superior in terms of reporting structure. Several studies have acknowledged that organizational hierarchy may be important contributors to conflict management style (Brenner, 1982). Watson (1994) found that high-level individuals used a competitive style, whereas low-level individuals tended to cooperate. Empirical findings concluded by Putnam and Poole (1987) that preferences for conflict styles differ across hierarchical levels with superiors exhibiting forcing styles and subordinates preferring avoidance, smoothing and compromise.

Moreover, employees may use different conflict management styles according to the organizational level. Rahim (1985) found that respondents choose different styles with different levels. They used obliging style with supervisors, integrating style with subordinates, and compromising style with peers. Brewer, Mitchell and Weber (2002) study found out that upper organizational status individuals were higher on the integrating style, while lower status individuals reported greater use of avoiding and obliging styles. Moreover, Tjosvold and Okum (1979) found that lower power subjects act more cooperatively and are more obliging than high-power subjects. McKenna and Richardson (1995) found that those respondents already in positions with some authority and responsibility tend to operate in an authoritative manner.

Hierarchy level appears to be positively correlated with satisfaction with all aspects of the job (Cranny, Smith & Stone, 1992). Most researchers have found that job satisfaction increases as the level of the job increases within an organizational hierarchy (e.g., Adams, Laker & Hulin, 1977; Kornhauser, 1965; Smith & Brannick, 1990; Super, 1939). However, some researchers have found negligible associations between job satisfaction and job level (e.g., Bretz, Boudreau & Judge, 1994; MacEachron, 1977). It has even been reported that job satisfaction decreases as job level increases (e.g., Bourne, 1983; Mossholder, Bedeian & Armenakis, 1981). The nature of the relation between job level and job satisfaction is important to both
researchers and practitioners. Job level sometimes can be merely a potential contaminant in a job satisfaction study, as when different jobs are combined in a study without concern for level.

2.3 Satisfaction with Supervision
Numerous research findings suggest that conflict management style is related to various aspects of employee satisfaction are of interest and represent an important extension to the job satisfaction literature (Johnson, 1993; Locke, 1976). Smith, Kendall and Hulin (1969), in their Cornell JDI (Cornell Job Descriptive Index) described five areas of satisfaction: the work itself, the supervision, the co-workers, the pay and the opportunities for promotion on the job. Since the theme of the present study is on the superior-subordinate relationships, the job-facet satisfaction is most relevant to satisfaction with supervision. The conflict handling styles which superior uses in supervising their subordinates can have a broad impact on the subordinates’ attitude towards work. Many studies recorded that supervision to the extent that the superior exercises dominating and avoiding is found to have a negative impact on the subordinates’ satisfaction (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoeck & Rosenthal, 1964; Likert, 1961).

3. Research Hypotheses
Organizational conflict researchers (e.g. Rahim & Buntzman, 1989; Burke, 1970; Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967; Likert & Likert, 1976) generally assert that superior who exhibits integrating, compromising and obliging styles are more prone to foster a cordial dyadic relationships among superiors and subordinates. However, later study by Rahim and Buntzman (2001) indicate that obliging style was not related to satisfaction with supervision. On the other hand, other studies recorded that superiors’ use of avoiding style is linked to negative effect on subordinates’ satisfaction (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoeck & Rosenthal, 1964; Likert, 1961). Organizational behavior researchers such as Churchill, Ford and Walker (1976) noted that age was related to conflict handling style. Several studies tend to suggest that older employee tend to use more collaborative style. As such age can moderate the relationship. Thus, it can be hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 1: Superior’s integrating and compromising styles have direct and positive effect on the subordinates’ satisfaction with supervision. This relationship is moderated by age.

Al-Ajmi (2007) study indicated that female is more likely to avoid conflicts than male respondents. Brewer, Mitchell & Weber (2002) found out that obliging style is more related to female superior. Focusing on the more common and effective style of conflict handling style i.e. compromising style, most researchers (Rahim & Buntzman, 2001; Korabik, Baril & Watson, 1993; Tutzauer & Roloff, 1988; Wall & Galanes, 1986; Vigil-King, 2000), unambiguously concluded that such approach certainly result in greater satisfaction with supervision. As research also points to the conclusion that women favor accommodating strategies (Rubin & Brown,, 1975, Content, 1986; Rosenthal & Hautaluoma, 1988; Nelson & Lubin, 1991; Greeff & De Bruyne, 2000) which is akin to compromising style, it is likely that intervening relationship exist between compromising style, gender and satisfaction with supervision. As such the following hypothesis is proposed.

Hypothesis 2: Superior’s compromising style is positively associated with subordinates’ satisfaction with supervision. This relationship is reversed when the exercise of such style is made by the female superior.

Superiors in the higher hierarchy level is said to be using more integrating style and less on obliging style (Brewer, Mitchell and Weber (2002). There are several studies show that subordinates’ satisfaction with supervision is deteriorated when superior is in the higher rank (Bourne, 1983; Mossholder, Bedeian & Armenakis, 1981). This infers that superiors in higher position tend to communicate with subordinates using their authority rather than other means of influence (McKenna & Richardson, 1995). Taking this into consideration, the following relationship is hypothesized:

Hypothesis 3: Superior’s obliging style is not associated with subordinates’ satisfaction with supervision. This relationship is moderated by hierarchy level.
4. Research Methodology

Sampling Design
Sampling frame is generated from the Federation of Malaysian Manufacturers (FMM), Construction Industry Development Board (CIDB), and Malaysian Trade and Commerce Directory. Respondents chosen to answer the survey questionnaires were executives, managers and professionals. Random sampling procedure was used in selecting the samples from the large database.

Research Instruments
All data used in the study consist of responses to questionnaire items. Measures of the relevant constructs were taken from previous studies and are discussed here.

Conflict Handling Style
Conflict management styles were measured by using the Form C of ROCI-II (Rahim, 1983a). This multi-item instrument contains 28 items using a 5-point Likert scale to assess subordinates’ perceptions on supervisor’s style of handling conflict.

Age and Gender
Age is measured using statements such as “Please state your age” and “What is the age of your immediate superior?” Gender is stated in the category form i.e. 1 = Male; 2 = Female.

Hierarchy Level
Hierarchy level is defined as the number of layer of authority structure below the top manager in an organization. With the top manager or managing director assigned as level one in the organizational hierarchy, this means that the higher score for this scale reflects the lower hierarchy level.

Satisfaction with Supervision
The instrument used to measure satisfaction with supervision is the updated version of the original Job Descriptive Index (JDI; Smith et al., 1969) which was later revised by Roznowski (1989).

Data Analysis Techniques
Reliability of the scales was estimated by calculating Cronbach’s Alpha. Age, hierarchy, and gender-related comparisons with respect to the three dependent measures were performed by means of t-testing. The research questions concerning the interaction between conflict handling styles and satisfaction was tested by means of hierarchical regression analysis. The testing of research question was performed against an error rate of .10.

5. Research Results and Discussions

Sample Characteristics
From the total of 145 responses received, data from 139 respondents were usable. By ethnic group, 42% of the respondents were Chinese, 38% were Malay, 17% were Indian, while other races made up the rest. By gender, 53% were male and 47% were female. In terms of age, the highest proportion of respondents fell into the 23-30 years age group. They accounted for 63% of the total number of respondents. On the whole, the education level of the respondents was high. This was reflected in the position or the type of occupation held by the majority of the respondents. The average salary of the respondents was higher than the population’s average. On average, the respondents had worked in the present company for 4 years.

The survey also revealed the information about the respondents’ superiors. 76% superiors reported in the survey were males. On average, the superiors had worked in the organization for 11 years – far longer than the subordinates’ average. Most of the superiors were holding high positions in the company with 33% of them in the first hierarchical level. Their educational level was also strikingly high, with 90% of them having had tertiary education.

Validating the Scales
The standardized Cronbach Alpha for each subscale is provided in Table 2. The internal consistency reliability coefficients for all the scales were satisfactory (Nunnally, 1978). All the scales had coefficient Cronbach Alpha greater than .78.
Table 2: Summary of Scale Items and Measure of Scale Reliabilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scales</th>
<th>Cronbach Alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conflict Handling Styles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrating</td>
<td>.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obliging</td>
<td>.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compromising</td>
<td>.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominating</td>
<td>.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoiding</td>
<td>.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderating Variables</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hierarchy level</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction with Supervision</td>
<td>.86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: n.a. Indicates alpha is not applicable

Testing of Hypotheses

**Hypothesis H1** predicts that superior’s integrating and compromising styles have direct and positive effect on subordinates’ satisfaction with supervision. It is further hypothesized that the relationship is moderated by superior’s age. To test the moderation effect of age on conflict handling styles and satisfaction with supervision, a moderated regression analysis was performed by including the interaction term of the conflict styles and satisfaction. Table 3 presents the results of the multiple regression analysis on satisfaction with superiors’ conflict handling styles and age as the main effects variables. The conflict handling styles consist of integrating, obliging, avoiding, compromising and dominating. Similar to past researchers the result indicate that integrating style has direct positive effect (Beta = 0.426, p = 0.0001) on satisfaction with supervision while the dominating style has a negative effect (Beta = -0.274, p = 0.001). The result also shows that superior age has no effect on the satisfaction with supervision (Beta = -0.064, p = 0.34) in Table 3.

Table 4 presents the moderated regression model used to test the interaction effects of superior’s age on satisfaction with supervision (R² rises by 0.025). In combination, Table 3 and Table 4 show that age has no significant effect on satisfaction with supervision but it has negative interaction effect (Beta = -0.996, p = 0.213) when integrating style is applied. The interaction effect however failed to achieve the required significant level. In contrast, albeit only marginally significant, age has a positive interaction effect (Beta = 1.127, p = 0.089) when compromising style was used. The result showed that the effect of compromising style on satisfaction with supervision is heighten when superiors’ age is older. As the interaction effect is only marginally significant, the present finding must be viewed with caution. The findings also suggested that superiors may need to adjust the conflict handling style periodically when dealing with subordinates as subordinates response differently to different conflict style and superior’s age.

Table 3: Multiple Regression of Satisfaction with Supervision onto Conflict Handling Styles and Superior’s Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>3.083</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrating</td>
<td>.426</td>
<td>4.179</td>
<td>.000***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obliging</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>.044</td>
<td>.965</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoiding</td>
<td>-.055</td>
<td>-.746</td>
<td>.457</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compromising</td>
<td>.106</td>
<td>1.308</td>
<td>.193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominating</td>
<td>-.274</td>
<td>-3.399</td>
<td>.001***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superior’s Age</td>
<td>-.064</td>
<td>-.958</td>
<td>.340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>.456</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R²</td>
<td>.430</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F ratio</td>
<td>17.568***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: * Standardized Beta are reported, *** p < 0.001
Table 4: Moderated Multiple Regression of Satisfaction with Supervision onto Conflict Handling Styles, Superior’s Age and their Interaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Beta (^a)</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>R(^2)</th>
<th>∆R(^2)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>1.380</td>
<td></td>
<td>.170</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrating</td>
<td>1.170</td>
<td>1.935</td>
<td>.055</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Obliging</td>
<td>-.172</td>
<td>-.364</td>
<td>.717</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Avoiding</td>
<td>-.301</td>
<td>-.683</td>
<td>.496</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compromising</td>
<td>-.621</td>
<td>1.298</td>
<td>.197</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominating</td>
<td>-.259</td>
<td>-.560</td>
<td>.577</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superior Age</td>
<td>-.547</td>
<td>-.852</td>
<td>.396</td>
<td>.456</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrating x Superior’s Age</td>
<td>-.996</td>
<td>1.253</td>
<td>.213</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obliging x Superior’s Age</td>
<td>.242</td>
<td>.376</td>
<td>.708</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoiding x Superior’s Age</td>
<td>.348</td>
<td>.555</td>
<td>.580</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compromising x Superior’s Age</td>
<td>1.127</td>
<td>1.590</td>
<td>.089(^+)</td>
<td></td>
<td>.481</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominating x Superior’s Age</td>
<td>-.015</td>
<td>-.026</td>
<td>.979</td>
<td>.025</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

R\(^2\)         .481
Adjusted R\(^2\) .434
F ratio        10.184\(++\)

Note: \(^a\) Standardized Beta are reported., \(^+\) p < 0.1., \(++\) p < 0.001

Hypothesis H2 suggested that superior’s compromising style is negatively associated with subordinates’ satisfaction with supervision when it is female superior who utilizes this style. The much debated gender differences in the behavioral and organizational study is tested in this research. The result in Table 5 indicates that there is no relationship between compromising style and satisfaction with supervision, but this relationship becomes negative (Beta = -.866, p = 0.050) when female is the one who exercises compromising style. This implied that compromising style is less effective and can lead to less satisfied employees when it is exercised by female superior. On the other hand, the positive effect of integrating style on satisfaction with supervision (Beta = 0.432, p = 0.001) is magnified when this style is exercised by a female superior (Beta = 0.897, p = 0.04) suggesting a significant interaction effect. This result presents an interesting paradox in the sense that the gender can affect conflict styles on satisfaction both in negative and positive ways.

Table 5: Multiple Regression of Satisfaction with Supervision onto Conflict Handling Styles and Superior’s Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Beta (^a)</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>2.576</td>
<td>.011</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrating</td>
<td>.432</td>
<td>4.261</td>
<td>.000(++)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obliging</td>
<td>-.004</td>
<td>-.054</td>
<td>.957</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoiding</td>
<td>-.059</td>
<td>-.799</td>
<td>.426</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compromising</td>
<td>.106</td>
<td>1.309</td>
<td>.193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominating</td>
<td>-.280</td>
<td>-3.522</td>
<td>.001(++)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superior’s Gender</td>
<td>.039</td>
<td>.577</td>
<td>.565</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

R\(^2\)         .454
Adjusted R\(^2\) .428
F ratio        17.574\(++\)

Note: \(^a\) Standardized Beta are reported., \(++\) p < 0.001
Hypothesis H3 predicts that superior’s obliging style is not associated with subordinates’ satisfaction with supervision. This relationship is moderated by the superior’s hierarchy level. The result in Table 7 confirms the assertion that obliging style is not related to satisfaction with supervision (Beta = -0.011, P = 0.891) but significant negative interaction effect exist when the obliging style is exercise by a higher hierarchy level superior (Beta = -0.944, p = 0.04). This implied that superior at higher hierarchy level tends to interact with subordinates using their authority rather than other means of influence (McKenna & Richardson, 1995). Whether this mode of influence is more effective in affecting better work culture is questionable since there was also a study that suggests that higher hierarchy level superior tends to favor integrating and obliging style (Aquino, 2000). The present result showed that the exercise of obliging style does not lead to more satisfaction for superior holding a higher rank. This is probably due to the reason that subordinates tend to misperceive the superiors authoritative position being used instead of their obliging style.

Table 6: Moderated Multiple Regression of Satisfaction with Supervision onto Conflict Handling Styles, Superior’s Gender and their Interaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Beta a</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>R²</th>
<th>ΔR²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>.783</td>
<td>.435</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrating</td>
<td>-.195</td>
<td>-.625</td>
<td>.533</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obliging</td>
<td>.324</td>
<td>1.195</td>
<td>.234</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoiding</td>
<td>-.309</td>
<td>-.1315</td>
<td>.191</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compromising</td>
<td>.587</td>
<td>2.381</td>
<td>.019++</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominating</td>
<td>-.237</td>
<td>-.899</td>
<td>.370</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superior Gender</td>
<td>.072</td>
<td>.136</td>
<td>.892</td>
<td>.454</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrating x Superior’s Gender</td>
<td>.897</td>
<td>2.081</td>
<td>.040++</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obliging x Superior’s Gender</td>
<td>-.565</td>
<td>-.103</td>
<td>.272</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoiding x Superior’s Gender</td>
<td>.570</td>
<td>1.140</td>
<td>.257</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compromising x Superior’s Gender</td>
<td>-.866</td>
<td>-.927</td>
<td>.050++</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominating x Superior’s Gender</td>
<td>-.073</td>
<td>-.174</td>
<td>.862</td>
<td>.488</td>
<td>.024</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

R²: .488
Adjusted R²: .442
F ratio: 10.565+++ 

Note: a Standardized Beta are reported., ++ p < 0.05., +++ p < 0.001

Table 7: Multiple Regression of Satisfaction with Supervision onto Conflict Handling Styles and Hierarchy Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Beta a</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>3.297</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrating</td>
<td>.418</td>
<td>4.195</td>
<td>.000+++</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obliging</td>
<td>-.011</td>
<td>-.138</td>
<td>.891</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoiding</td>
<td>-.049</td>
<td>-.667</td>
<td>.506</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compromising</td>
<td>.111</td>
<td>1.376</td>
<td>.171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominating</td>
<td>-.307</td>
<td>-3.849</td>
<td>.000+++</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hierarchy Level</td>
<td>-.090</td>
<td>-1.362</td>
<td>.176</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

R²: .462
Adjusted R²: .437
F ratio: 18.055+++ 

Note: a Standardized Beta are reported., +++ p < 0.001
6. Conclusion

Overall, the results of this study were quite agreeable with the hypotheses based upon other organizational studies involving qualified and professional people. The research instruments used in this study were tested and found to be reliable in our Malaysian work environment. The results provided some tentative, but hopefully useful guidance for organizational conflict management.

The results revealed that superior’s age only marginally moderated the relationship of satisfaction with supervision on conflict handling styles when it involved the use of integrating style. Although age has no effect on satisfaction with supervision, it has a negative interaction effect when integrating style is used. On the other hand, satisfaction with supervision was heightened when compromising style was used by older superior. Thus, it might be necessary for superiors to modify his/her conflict handling style when dealing with subordinates especially when their age difference is contrasting. The second hypothesis was supported where gender moderated the relationship between subordinates’ satisfaction with supervision on conflict handling styles. Female superiors’ exercise of compromising style tend to worsen the subordinates’ satisfaction while on the contrary, the use of integrating style tend to magnify the satisfaction with supervision. This counter-intuitive finding would invite further enquiry on gender effects. The result also confirmed that superior’s uses of obliging style did not affect employees’ satisfaction. In fact, employees were less satisfied when this style was used by superior in higher hierarchy level. This could be due to the reason that subordinates may interpret superior’s action as exerting more authoritative position than obliging style when dealing with them.

The implication derived from the present study suggests that age, gender and hierarchy level can affect the use of conflict handling styles. Knowing these factors can help managers to use the appropriate styles to reduce job dissatisfaction and job conflict. It is obvious that the present study encourages more researchers to empirically examine the causes and effects of conflict in the workplace. The results of this study also offer an interesting opportunities for future research to focus on identifying other important respondent characteristics and more importantly, on understanding the processes by which such variables impact on person perceptions. In future studies, attempts should be made to incorporate additional endogenous variables such as compliance and performance of subordinate which are more indicative of the organizational outcomes. It addition it may be useful to further examine whether the perception of superior conflict handling styles carry the same attitudinal and behavioral implication across the demographic variables such as gender, role status, race and etc.

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### Table 8: Moderated Multiple Regression of Satisfaction with Supervision onto Conflict Handling Styles, Hierarchy Level and their Interaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>R²</th>
<th>ΔR²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
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<td>.077</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrating</td>
<td>-.056</td>
<td>-.234</td>
<td>.815</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obliging</td>
<td>.363</td>
<td>1.783</td>
<td>.077</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoiding</td>
<td>-.098</td>
<td>-.529</td>
<td>.598</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compromising</td>
<td>.244</td>
<td>1.263</td>
<td>.209</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominating</td>
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<td>.005</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hierarchy Level</td>
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<td>-.534</td>
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<td>.462</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrating x Hierarchy Level</td>
<td>.994</td>
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<td>.032</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obliging x Hierarchy Level</td>
<td>-.944</td>
<td>-2.034</td>
<td>.044</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoiding x Hierarchy Level</td>
<td>.127</td>
<td>.297</td>
<td>.767</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compromising x Hierarchy Level</td>
<td>-.319</td>
<td>-.742</td>
<td>.459</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominating x Hierarchy Level</td>
<td>.500</td>
<td>1.504</td>
<td>.135</td>
<td>.494</td>
<td>.032</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

R²: .494
Adjusted R²: .448
F ratio: 10.758+++  

Note: * Standardized Beta are reported., + p < 0.05., +++ p < 0.001
References


