

## 5 Interpersonal Conflict Management Styles of Jordanian Managers

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Writers on organizations have long stressed the need for an organizational science applicable to non-Western as well as Western cultures. In a review of the literature M. N. Kiggundu, J. J. Jorgensen, and T. Hafsi ( 1983: 68 ) state that "there is a great deal of interest in the utilization of administrative theory and techniques in developing countries . . . [as] demonstrated by the sheer volume of published material on the subject." Despite this interest, however, conflict management practices in nonWestern cultures have remained a much neglected topic of study. Indeed, Kiggundu, Jorgensen, and Hafsi report that although conflict management was one of the categories chosen for the analysis of the literature with respect to topics, it had to be dropped later because of lack of coverage.

Conflict management has received increasing attention in the organizational literature during the last two decades because of a shift in attitudes toward conflict in organizations. The traditional view of conflict as something harmful has changed to a view that sees conflict as a reality of organizational life. S. Robbins ( 1978) has actually argued that functional levels of conflict are conducive to innovation and higher quality decisions. K. W. Thomas ( 1976:889) notes that "social scientists are coming to realize--and to demonstrate--that conflict itself is no evil, but rather a phenomenon which can have constructive or destructive effects depending on its management." Hence, the emphasis has shifted toward an understanding of different styles of managing conflicts.

How conflicts are managed would seem to be of importance to organizations outside of Western countries as well. This is especially true in countries undertaking ambitious public development programs or

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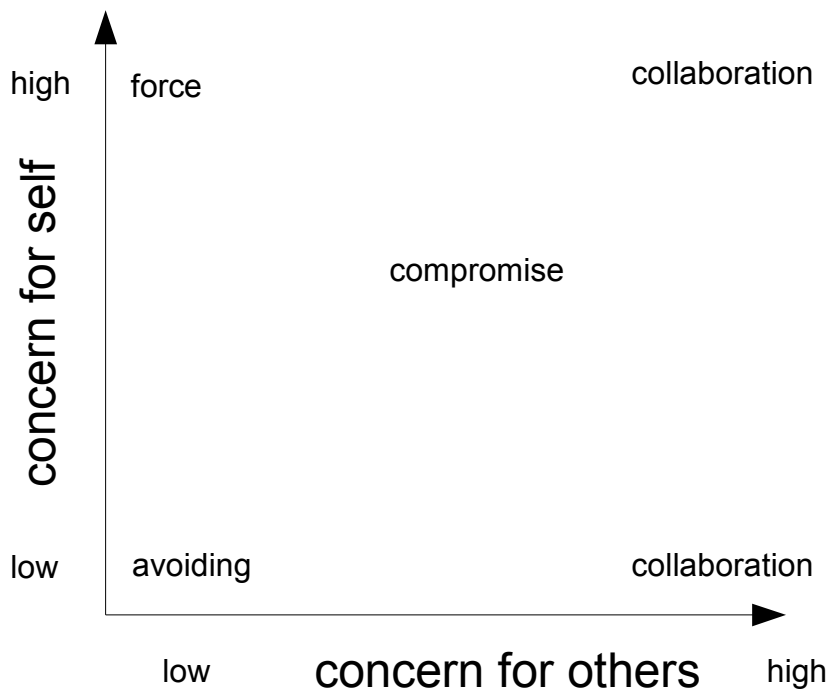
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encouraging private firms to open up to new technologies or markets. We need to understand how managers in different cultures deal with conflict as part of a larger concern for developing an organizational science having an international appeal. The present study aims at finding out about the interpersonal conflict management styles used by managers in one Middle Eastern country, Jordan.

Jordan is a country in transition from a traditional to a modern, industrialized society. Unlike petroleum-rich Arab countries on which most writing on Arab management styles has focused, Jordan strives for modernization with limited resources. Most economic activity centers around agriculture, mining, and manufacturing of chemicals, cement, paper, textiles, and food. Most finished goods are imported from abroad, but more and more are being locally produced, under the protection of import limitations against foreign competition. The state operates the public works and the utility companies, and has started agricultural development programs. The modernization this country is trying to achieve against a traditional background undoubtedly creates an interesting setting for the study of conflict in its organizations as well as other managerial practices.

Conflict occurs in several forms in an organization, including intrapersonal, interpersonal, and intergroup conflict. This study was confined to interpersonal conflicts. A model of interpersonal conflict management styles that has seen widespread use in the literature was used here too. This model, developed by R. R. Blake and J. S. Mouton ( 1965) and refined by Thomas ( 1976), identifies five different styles of managing conflicts: avoiding, accommodation, forcing, compromise, and collaboration or problem solving. These styles can be interpreted in terms of orientation toward conflict situations along two dimensions ( Thomas 1976). The first dimension represents the degree (high or low) to which a person attempts to satisfy personal concerns. The second dimension represents the degree (high or low) to which that person attempts to satisfy others' concerns. [Figure 5.1](#) illustrates how the different styles emerge as combinations of these two dimensions.

Forcing results from the production-oriented management styles that Blake and Mouton have identified in their managerial grid. It involves competitive behaviors and the use of power to have one's position accepted, even if it means ignoring the other's concerns. At the other extreme, accommodation represents overlooking or playing down the existing differences and trying to satisfy the other party's wishes. In between these two extremes lies compromising, or splitting the difference, with both parties giving up something in order to find a middle ground. Avoiding, a style reflecting low concern for self and others, takes the form of withdrawal, sidestepping the issue, or shying away from its open discussion. Collaboration, which is high in both dimen-



**Figure 5.1** A Two-Dimensional Model of Five Interpersonal **Conflict** Management Styles  
 sions, involves facing the conflict, bringing all pertinent issues and concerns out into the open, and as a result, reaching a solution that integrates the different points of view.

Preference for these different styles has been shown to be influenced by a number of variables, including personality, the topic of conflict, and organizational factors such as the incentive structure and norms ( Thomas 1976; Renwick 1975). The present study likewise is aimed at learning how the likelihood of using each style was affected when certain contextual variables were altered. Two variables were chosen for analysis: the authority relation between the parties and the topic of conflict.

The authority position of the other party to conflict, that is, whether that party is a superior, subordinate, or peer, seems to influence a manager's style. In a large-scale survey, M. A. Rahim ( 1986) found that managers were primarily obliging with superiors, collaborative with

subordinates, and compromising with peers. Rahim explains these findings in terms of the constraining impact of hierarchical relations on the behavior of members in an organization. Organizations in Middle Eastern countries have often been characterized by centralized, authoritarian leadership ( Badawy 1980; Wright 1981). One might therefore suspect the authority position of the other party could be an even more potent source of influence on the **conflict** behavior of managers in a Middle Eastern country such as Jordan.

Studies in the United States have also shown that conflict management styles are affected by the topic and the source of conflict. Renwick ( 1975) found a tendency to use problem solving when salaries, promotions, or performance appraisals were involved, and to rely on compromise in dealing with conflict concerning personal habits and mannerisms. She further reported that disagreements originating from substantive factors such as differences in knowledge or factual material were more likely to be openly acknowledged and confronted than affective conflicts that had their sources in personality or attitude differences. E. Phillips and R. Cheston ( 1979) also found problem solving to be used more in conflicts caused by communication failures and structural factors such as conflicting objectives, than in conflicts resulting from incompatible personal goals or values. The impact of culture needs to be examined here again. The organizational atmosphere in Latin America and the Middle East has been described as embodying a personal tone of administration and emotionally involved relationships ( Bourgeois and Boltvinik 1981; Badaway 1980). Would this result in more assertive styles in dealing with conflicts involving personality issues than those concerning organizational policies or salaries?

The present study aims to understand responses to conflict situations within the culture studied. Studying the impact of topic and party jointly is expected to reveal more about how these managers adjust their styles in different contexts than when these variables are studied separately. Our understanding of conflict management styles in this specific culture will be enhanced, however, if we also make comparisons with the United States, where a wealth of studies exists.

## **THE STUDY AND ITS RESULTS**

### **Subjects**

Data were collected from managers in ten private and five public organizations in and around Amman, the capital city, which contains about 40 percent of the country's population. The organizations included natural resources administration units, development agencies, manufacturing and mining firms, and service organizations. In organizations

with more than twelve managers, a random sample of twelve managers was chosen, while in small organizations all managers were included in the study. As a result, 150 managers were chosen from among 335, and usable data were obtained from 134 of those chosen. This group was 98 percent male, an average of 40 years of age, and with an average tenure of 10 years. About half of the managers had college degrees and a third were high school graduates. Among the college graduates 35 percent had degrees in engineering and 34 percent in business and economics, with the remaining graduates being equally distributed among humanities, sciences, and law. Finally, 14 percent of the sample came from top management (vice-president or higher), 49 percent from middle management, and 37 percent from among first-line supervisors.

### **Data Collection**

Data were collected by means of a questionnaire. **Conflict** management styles were measured by statements derived from a conflict inventory developed by Rahim (1983a). These statements, representing avoiding, forcing, accommodation, compromise, and collaboration, respectively, are shown below.

1. I stay away from disagreement and avoid open discussion of differences (very likely, likely, depends, unlikely, very unlikely).
2. I am firm in my position and use my power to get my view accepted (very likely, likely, depends, unlikely, very unlikely).
3. I try to accommodate his/her wishes (very likely, likely, depends, unlikely, very unlikely).
4. I propose a solution halfway between my and his/her wishes to break any deadlock (very likely, likely, depends, unlikely, very unlikely).
5. I try to bring all of my and his/her concerns out in the open and work for a solution together (very likely, likely, depends, unlikely, very unlikely).

The respondents were asked how likely they were to use each style when conflicts involved a variety of topics. The same set of statements was repeated for each topic. Six conflict topics were identified by elaborating on a smaller set of categories used by Renwick (1975):

1. Salaries and other monetary benefits
2. Performance appraisal and promotion
3. Physical working conditions
4. Proper performance of responsibilities and compliance with rules and procedures

5. Work methods to be used and organizational policies
6. Personal habits, mannerisms, and values

Three different sets of questionnaires were prepared, each one for a different party to the **conflict**, for example, subordinates, peers, or superiors. A respondent randomly received only one of these sets, which identified both at the beginning and again when each topic was introduced, whom the party to the conflict was. Chief executive officers received only that set where the conflicting party was a subordinate.

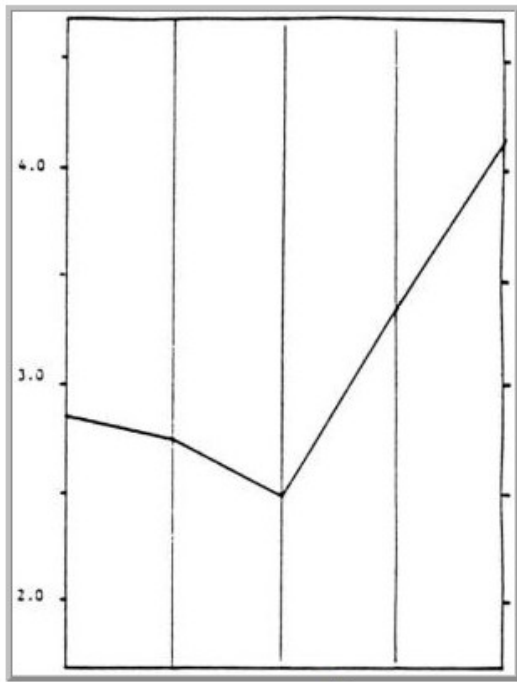
The questionnaires were translated from English into Arabic jointly by two **Arab** colleagues of the author who were proficient in English. The Arabic version was then translated back into English by a third colleague to ensure reliability of translation.

## Results

A split-plot factorial design (style x topic x party) with repeated measurement of style and topic over subjects was used for analysis (Kirk 1968). This design allows for testing whether the likelihood of styles differed in general from each other, as the party to the conflict differed, as the topic of conflict differed, or as both the party and the topic of conflict differed. Once a significant overall effect was found in any of these tests, pairwise comparisons between means were conducted using Tukey's (q) statistic at .01 level of confidence.

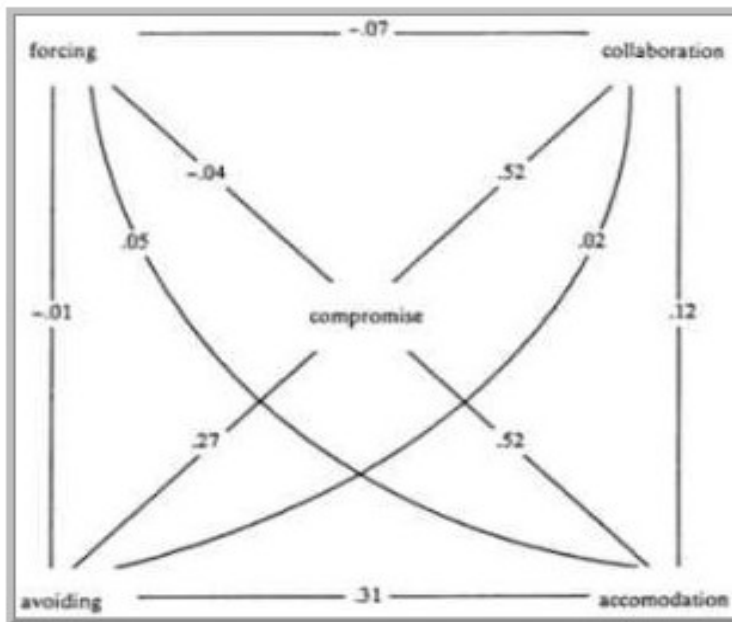
[Figure 5.2](#) shows the mean likelihood of use of the different styles in general by managers. Mean likelihood of these styles differed from each other in general [ $F(4,655) = 107.05, p < .01$ ]. Managers reported using collaboration significantly more often than compromise, compromise more often than avoiding or accommodation, and avoiding more often than forcing. The intercorrelations between the different styles are shown in [Figure 5.3](#). As can be seen from this figure, the most likely style to be used, collaboration, is positively correlated with compromise, the second most likely style. Compromise is positively correlated with all other styles except forcing. Forcing is not only the least preferred style, but also unrelated to any of the other four styles.

[Figure 5.4](#) shows the likelihood of using a style with different parties. A significant interaction effect was found between style and party [ $F(8,655) = 5.60, p < .01$ ]. Pairwise comparisons between means showed that avoiding and accommodation were less likely to be used with superiors than with peers, and compromise was less likely to be used with subordinates than with peers. Collaboration is the first preference of managers with all conflicting parties. While compromise is the second most preferred style against superiors, however, avoiding as well as compromise turn out to be the second most preferred styles against peers.



**Figure 5.2** Mean Likelihood of Use of Five Interpersonal Conflict Management Styles (n = 134) Finally, with subordinates all four remaining styles seem equally likely to be used after collaboration.

Figure 5.5 shows the likelihood of using a style when different conflict topics are involved. A significant interaction effect was found between style and topic [ $F(20,2620) = 8.76, p .01$ ]. Pairwise comparisons showed that whichever topic is involved, collaboration is the style most likely to be used. Compromise is the second most likely, and it is preferred over the remaining styles in all but two of the topics. When personal habits and mannerisms are involved, avoiding is used as often as compromise. When conflicts involve responsibilities and compliance



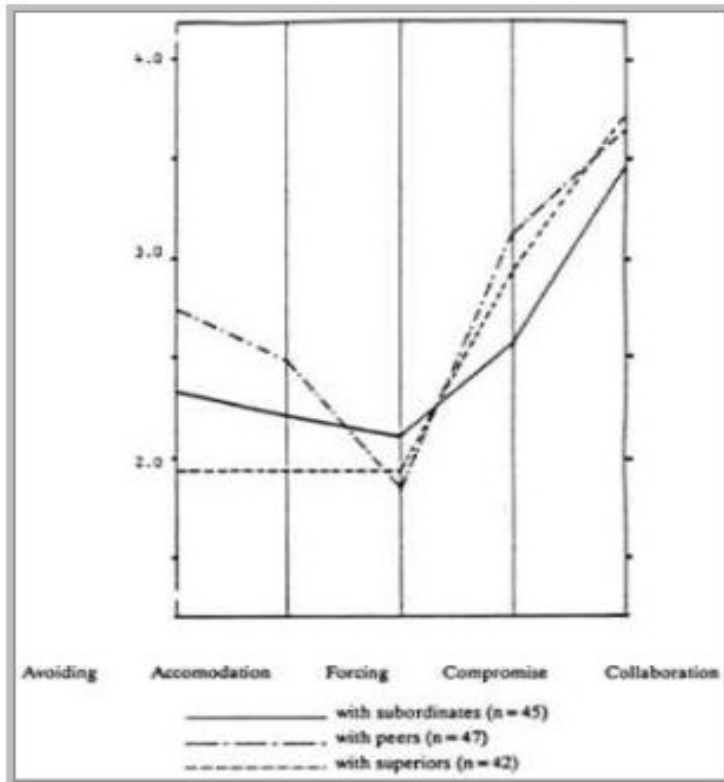
**Figure 5.3** Intercorrelations of Five Interpersonal **Conflict** Management Styles (n = 134)

with rules, forcing is as likely to be used as compromise; otherwise forcing is the least preferred style.

The joint effect of party and topic on conflict management style turned out to be significant as well [ $F(40,2620) = 3.00, p = .01$ ]. This interaction effect carries more information and should receive our attention more than the separate effects reported previously. Pairwise comparisons between means revealed some interesting contrasts. When conflicts involve salaries, performance appraisal and promotion,

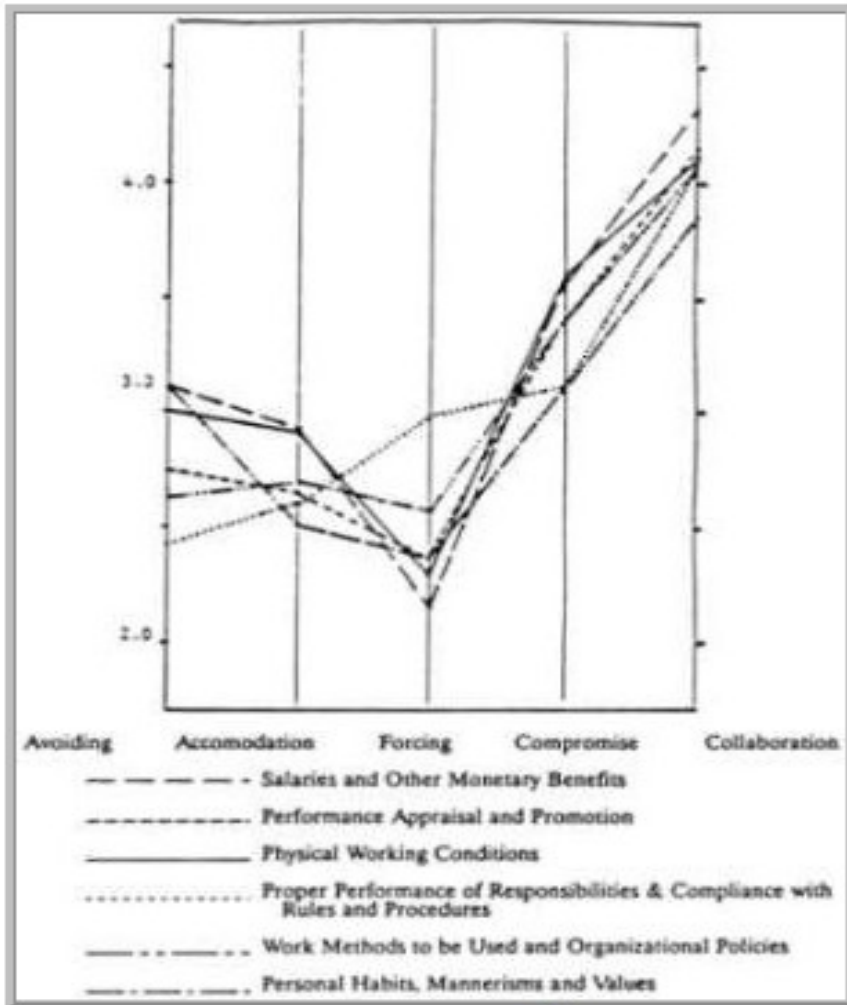
and physical working conditions, peers are avoided as compared to subordinates, and in the case of the latter two topics, as compared to superiors as well. Managers are also more accommodative toward peers than toward superiors when salaries and promotions are involved. When conflicts center around responsibilities and compliance with rules, managers use more forcing and less compromise toward subordinates as compared to superiors. A parallel tendency to use forcing toward subordinates could not be observed for work methods and organizational policies, however. When these





**Figure 5.4** Mean Likelihood of Use of Five Interpersonal Conflict Management Styles with Respect to the Other Party to the Conflict

topics are the issue, managers nevertheless use significantly less compromise toward subordinates than toward superiors or peers and less collaboration with subordinates than with superiors. Finally, on conflicts over personal habits, mannerisms, and values, managers tend to avoid peers and accommodate subordinates' wishes as compared to those of



**Figure 5.5** Mean Likelihood of Use of Five Interpersonal Conflict Management Styles with Respect to the Topic of Conflict (n = 134)

their superiors. Furthermore, they report using more forcing toward superiors than toward peers on personal habits and mannerisms.

### **THE EMERGING **CONFLICT** MANAGEMENT PROFILE FOR JORDANIAN MANAGERS**

A consistent result obtained in the study across all parties and topics is the preference for collaboration. The prerequisite for this style is the acknowledgment of a conflict and open discussion of all the relevant issues. If there is such open discussion of differences, the parties are expected to eventually reach novel solutions satisfying both of their concerns. My observations during more than two years in Jordan actually confirm this initial tendency to discuss differences. Whether such discussion actually led to integrated solutions is another matter. Meanwhile, the following conflict episode, the most involved confrontation that I observed, may illustrate at least the tendency for open discussion of differences.

This conflict took place between a dean and some faculty members, including a chairman, in a teaching institution. These faculty members were unhappy with the managerial style employed by the dean, and in particular, his lack of consultation with the chairman and the faculty. The issue found a forum in a faculty meeting chaired by the dean, where some members freely stated their displeasure with the dean's style. Particular reference was made to a decision by the dean to recruit and place a couple of teaching assistants (actually prospective faculty members) on his own without consulting the department. In the meeting, where the two assistants were also present, the dean's style was openly criticized and the qualifications of the new recruits were questioned in detail. The dean's response was that it was within his formal powers to decide such issues. (He was actually serving as acting chairman for that department during the short span when the decision was made.)

This conflict found another forum with a meeting of the faculty and the dean with the president. The dean's style and all aspects of the conflict were discussed and once again, although this time in less candid terms. The president eventually agreed with the dissenting faculty that such decisions should be consultative, which seemed to calm the dissidents and close the issue. The recruits kept their jobs, however, and the dean got his term extended. The chairman later became the assistant dean. The centralized form of administration, being so pervasive in these institutions, did not undergo any change.

A tendency for open, heated, and prolonged discussion and debate is characteristic of this culture. In organizational life subordinates easily take issue with superiors on organizational policies or some personal concern, clients pressure public employees for some form of special

treatment, who in turn get into lengthy arguments on the correct course of action, and so on. Judging from the responses shown by superiors, such **conflict** seems acceptable and within existing norms of conduct.

The high positive correlation between the collaborative and compromising styles suggests that these involved discussions are conducted somehow in conjunction with the compromising style. One interpretation of this finding is that the collaborative and compromising styles are used in sequence. According to Blake and Mouton ( 1964) and Renwick ( 1975), managers seem to use "response hierarchies" in dealing with conflicts; the dominant response is shown first, but if the desired result is not obtained, the next response in the hierarchy is adopted. Similarly, the initial response of these managers in a variety of conflictful situations may be interpreted as a tendency to "discuss" the matter. If this initial method does not seem to work, a manager may fall back on the next most preferred style, which was compromise in our case.

There is a problem with this interpretation, however: collaboration and compromise are not considered to be readily compatible styles in theory. Thomas ( 1976:902), for example, points out that "Bargaining may reduce the trust, candor, and flexibility required for problemsolving [i.e., collaboration] . . . [and] the disclosures made during problem-solving and the positive affect generated by it tend to discourage subsequent misrepresentation and bargaining." No consistent empirical evidence exists to suggest that the two styles are closely and positively related, either. Western researchers have come up with low to moderate correlations between the two styles, and with nearly as many negative correlations as positive ones ( Van de Vliert and Prein 1987).

How, then, are we to interpret the moderately high positive correlation between collaboration and compromise? One explanation is that managers who report higher likelihood of using both styles may actually use them in different conflict episodes. This explanation then rules out the possibility of incompatible styles being used in sequence. A second explanation is plausible, however, and it accounts for their sequential use in the same conflict episode. For these managers, according to this second explanation, the "open discussion of concerns" inherent in the collaborative mode may possibly have stood for nothing more than an "opener" for what eventually constituted a compromising style. Such misrepresentation is frequent in measures using self-reports of actors. Self-reports of conflict behavior, likewise, have been found to be vulnerable to social desirability bias, usually in favor of projecting a collaborative profile ( Thomas and Kilmann 1971; Rahim 1983b). In fact, Blake and Mouton ( 1964) have suggested that, because of the social desirability bias, the second most preferred style may better reflect a manager's "true" style.

My observations also support this last interpretation, that is, these discussions often constitute the initial phase of a bargaining process.

Most of these discussions eventually end up with no change in the status quo, as in the case of **conflict** among faculty described above, or in some form of give and take, but nevertheless in solutions that were apparent from the start. Rarely have I observed a new systemic solution arising from these discussions, although the problem-solving or collaborative style is expected, in theory, to help in achieving innovative solutions to problems that conflicts help to surface. The lengthy discussions that are commonplace seem rather to serve to "wear out" the other party without directly forcing the decision, a mark of the bargaining approach.

A major finding of the present survey was indeed the relative absence of forcing in the conflict styles of these managers. It will be recalled from [Figure 5.3](#) that forcing was also perceived in isolation from the other styles. These results seem to parallel those in the West, where self-reports of managers show low preference for forcing (Rahim 1983b) and where forcing is uncorrelated with the other styles (Van de Vliert and Prein 1987).

The Jordanian aversion for forcing still seems unique. For one thing, a very low level of forcing would not be ordinarily expected in organizations where centralized decision making is the norm. We will momentarily see that Jordanian organizations upheld such norms. For another, some U.S. studies have found preference for forcing in specific situations. Lawrence and Lorsch (1967) have noted that effective organizational performance may require some forcing as a back-up mode for collaboration. Phillips and Cheston (1979) have found forcing to be the more successful method when a fair, clear solution for the benefit of the organization is available. In contrast to these U.S. findings, the managers in the present sample reported using forcing toward subordinates and peers only when conflicts involved responsibilities and compliance with rules. Forcing was absent from the other topics, including work methods and organizational policies.

This tendency to avoid forcing seems to blend well with the extraordinarily slow way in which work gets done in these organizations. In addition to a general "laid-back" atmosphere, an employee may find it easy to question decisions made or methods used, resulting in detailed discussions with coworkers or superiors. Even when violations of rules are involved, such as being absent from work during work hours, tardiness, or delaying work, purposefully or not, a manager will be reluctant to use coercive means such as disciplinary action. The ideal manager is one who is soft and tolerant, and who tries to persuade subordinates when differences arise.

Lack of forcing did not necessarily imply participative decision making, however. Centralized decision making is an acknowledged characteristic of management in Jordan (Adwan 1983; Al-Faleh 1987) as well as other **Arab** countries (Badawy 1980). For example, nearly three out of four

high level Jordanian public administrators surveyed by Adwan reported that they make decisions without involving their employees. The present data, too, showed that managers are jealous in protecting their prerogatives on the issues of work methods and organizational policies, as evidenced by significantly less use of collaboration or compromise toward subordinates on these topics. A curious situation therefore emerges: power is sought and well guarded but not forcefully used in achieving organizational objectives. This finding lends some support to the argument that administration in developing countries is characterized by ritualistic formalism and lack of delegation, but "the absence of delegation does not imply that there is effective centralization, only that there is the appearance of centralization" ( Milne 1970:58).

Another **conflict** episode that I observed may help to illustrate this last point. The administration of a higher education institution had been troubled for some time with the return of faculty members from their yearly summer vacation several days later than the officially announced date. The problem mostly involved non-Jordanians (Arabs and nonArabs) who were going abroad during this time. Finally, this behavior was penalized by direct cuts in salaries in proportion to the number of days past the announced date. Each department was asked to report the return date of its members. One department, however, reported that all its members returned exactly on the announced date. A few members of the other departments were furious about the practice in general and the way it was executed. Their chairmen agreed with them, and a joint meeting involving a couple of faculty members, their chairman, and the academic vice-president was held. The vice-president listened to the complaints and discussed the matter in detail, but would not back away from the decision. When reminded that one department had given false reports, and that not only everybody knew it but it could also be easily proved, he closed the issue by saying that he could not do anything about it since he could not possibly accuse this chairman of giving false information.

While this case supports the argument for ritualistic formalism and the appearance of control hypothesis of R. S. Milne ( 1970), the notion of ineffective centralization may nevertheless be confined only to the formal business of the organization. When it comes to resources seen as critical or the assertion of personal power, control is not in appearance but in reality as well. A university president, for example, may not always ensure that policy decisions are being implemented throughout the university, but will have total control over who gets into the university housing. The control of critical resources may be the actual reason for acquiring power in the first place. But the reasons for not using this power in forcing the accomplishment of organizational goals require further exploring.

A plausible explanation for lack of forcing may be a general aversion to confrontation and use of force prevalent in the culture. Islam preaches patience and getting things done through consent, without breaking hearts. These values find their way into managerial practice, giving it a benevolent-autocratic character. For example, even under the open conflict of interest that exists in the process of collective bargaining, it is management, be it in the private or the public sector, more than the workers or their associations, who bears the responsibility of solving the dispute without escalation into strikes and lock-outs ( Copur 1984).

Values alone may not be sufficient, however, to explain fully the very low level of forcing found. As an Arab colleague who had served in high government posts remarked when discussing the present results: "They will use forcing if they can." The difficulty of using forcing in many cases may well be due to the artificiality of the modern organization and its policies in a traditional society. A complex organization calls for universalistic practices, to use Parsons's ( 1951) terminology, from employees who are accustomed to specific ways of relating to each other in traditional cultures. It becomes very difficult for individuals to strip organizational role relations from the role relations that exist in the larger society. Family relations, for example, interfere with formal relations in the organization, as Nusair ( 1982) demonstrated in his study of Jordan Valley Authority. Status differences between families may also create incongruence with the organizationally defined status differences. The artificiality of formal organizational practices is further reinforced by the fact that performance may not always be perceived as directly related to strict adherence to modern management practice. A minimally competitive environment existed for most private firms in Jordan, for example, largely due to import regulations. Government agencies, likewise, are mostly beyond public scrutiny. All of this amounts to a reduction in the relative importance of modern organizational practices and policies. As models of conflict behavior would suggest ( Thomas 1976), when stakes are low under low conflict of interest, so is the tendency to use forcing. A manager working within such a societal and organizational context may be well advised not to force abstract managerial principles upon peers and subordinates and, as a result, make a lot of enemies in what Almaney ( 1981) has described as a "vengeful" society.

The present sample of managers also seems to avoid peers more than they do superiors or subordinates on the issues of salaries, performance appraisal and promotion, and physical working conditions. Renwick ( 1975) had found a problem-solving approach to salaries and performance appraisal in a U.S. study. But no further study has been done on the differential treatment of these topics when dealing with superiors versus peers. An attempt will be made here to explain the present findings on the basis of Thomas' ( 1976) theoretical model. According to this

model, avoiding behavior will emerge under conditions where parties have mostly conflicting interests but the stakes involved are low. Stakes are low when a party is not dependent on the other for the satisfaction of important concerns, as well as when an issue is unimportant. The higher likelihood of avoiding found against peers when salaries, promotions, or working conditions are involved would make sense because of the low stakes involved in this relationship. For the resolution of these issues, a manager is usually dependent on superiors not on peers, and manifest conflict is hierarchical, although the conflict of interest is basically among peers.

A similar tendency to avoid peers more than superiors is observed when personal habits, mannerisms, and values are involved. If we interpret this finding according to Thomas' model it would mean that personal style is more important when the other party is a superior. Thomas' model also predicts that assertive behavior would emerge when higher stakes are involved. This indeed seems to be the case with these managers, who use more forcing and minimal accommodation toward superiors when personality issues are at stake. The impact of culture is evident here, as these findings seem contradictory to the situation that exists in the West. In her U.S. studies Renwick found that issues of personal habits and mannerisms are likely to get compromised. Phillips and Cheston ( 1979), on the other hand, have reported more use of forcing, mostly toward subordinates, on personal conflict involving value differences.

The present findings seem to be consistent, however, with the overall personal tone of administrative relationships in and around organizations in Jordanian culture. As explained earlier, personal relations play a more important role in shaping behavior than formal, organizationally prescribed relationships. Furthermore, the culture places extraordinary emphasis on pride and face saving ( Almaney 1981; Patai 1983). Any degrading form of treatment, particularly from somebody whose superiority rests in formally conferred rights, would therefore be quite unacceptable.

A conflict episode between a cabinet minister and a visitor provides an example of this sensitivity. This visitor, a member of one of the large families in the country, got quite nervous for having been kept waiting for nearly an hour by the minister. He responded to this degrading behavior on the part of the minister by walking into his office, as the minister was being interviewed by a team of researchers, and telling him of his frustration. The minister responded by telling the intruder that he should wait as long as necessary for him to finish his business, and asked him to get out of the office. The visitor left, hinting, however, that they were not finished with each other yet!

The emerging profile for this sample of managers from Jordan may



be summarized as follows. These managers exhibited a tendency to discuss freely any disagreements they had with coworkers, superiors, and subordinates, and seemed to seek settlement of these differences through discussion and compromise. Persuasion was preferred over forcing, which seemed to contradict the prevalent organizational norms for centralized action. Hierarchical conflict seemed to occupy the energies of these managers more than conflict with peers. Direct conflict with peers was typically avoided, as exemplified in conflicts over salaries, promotion, or working conditions. Discontent on these issues was taken up the hierarchy. Hierarchical relations were also a sensitive spot for conflict over personal habits and mannerisms. Personal conflict with a formal authority figure was often taken as a matter of pride and received due reaction.

### **THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS**

The theoretical implications of the present study lie mainly in the field of comparative management. It has long been recognized by writers in this field that cultural forces in the environment play an important role in shaping behavior in the organization ( Ronen 1986; Kiggundu et al. 1983). Kiggundu et al., for example, state that "In general, each time the environment is involved, the theory developed for western settings does not apply, because it assumes contingencies that may not be valid for developing countries. . . . To the extent that contingencies for the utilization of administrative science in developing countries differ from those of industrialized countries, the transfer of management knowledge and technology ( . . . ) should emphasize process rather than content theories ( . . . ) and methods" (p. [81](#)).

The present study supported the notion of external cultural forces shaping the behavior of managers in the area of conflict management. But more important, the study provided a specific application in support of Kiggundu et al.'s last suggestion that process rather than content theories should be emphasized. While the findings differed in several respects from Western ones, they still found their interpretation in theory relating conflict behavior to variables such as degree of conflict of interest and the stakes involved. In a different culture, these theoretical relations still seem to hold explanatory power; only the specific content of these variables, that is, the meaning they assume changes. For example, the stakes involved in conflicts over personal habits and mannerisms seemed to be quite high in a traditional society like Jordan. Hence, the impact of culture may have to be dealt with at the stage of deriving specific hypotheses from theories that may have a more universal applicability.

On the practical side, the study may have implications for managerial

practices of foreigners doing business in the Middle East or in their relations with managerial counterparts in subsidiaries. A comparison of the stylistic differences between Jordanian and U.S. managers may be helpful in this regard. Based on the present study and U.S. findings ( Renwick 1975; Phillips and Cheston 1979; Rahim 1986), the following two main differences seem to emerge between the two countries.

First, a high level of sensitivity exists in Jordan over issues involving personal habits, mannerisms, and values, especially toward those in power positions. Managers seem to be well aware of these tendencies, and show signs of accommodation toward subordinates on personality issues. These tendencies contrast with Phillips and Cheston's findings on U.S. managers, who seemed most assertive toward subordinates when value differences emerged. Contrary to what Renwick concluded from her data from the United States, the Arab managers studied also seemed to be more assertive on affective issues, such as personal habits and mannerisms, than on substantive issues, such as work methods, organizational policies, rules, and procedures, when authority figures were involved.

Second, relatively low levels of forcing exist down the hierarchy over substantive issues, despite centralized decision making. In the United States, low levels of forcing seem to accompany participative decision making. Furthermore, Rahim's discriminant analysis results indicate that conflict behavior of subordinates toward superiors is characterized by higher levels of accommodation in the United States. Hence, managers in the United States seem to elicit accommodative responses from subordinates while exercising participative styles of management. The same combination does not seem to hold for managers in Jordan. Infrequent use of forcing down the hierarchy is coupled here with low levels of accommodation on the part of the subordinates. Consequently, Jordanian managers seem to rely more on persuasion and "selling" than on participation or authoritative command in managing differences with subordinates.

These stylistic characteristics of Jordanian managers may contrast with popularly held views of Arabs in the West, formed largely through media coverage of political conflicts in the region. This is not to imply that conflictful behavior was uncommon among the managers studied. To the contrary, discussion, disagreement, and bargaining seemed to be quite natural parts of organizational life, and are likely to take place in business or interorganizational role relationships of foreigners with Arab managers. But even when intense bargaining is involved, this is best done in style: in a soft manner without giving an impression of hostile and deliberate use of power.

The importance of resisting temptations to force for fast results cannot be overemphasized here. As A. Ali ( 1987) has observed, "familiarity with

sociocentric and family-tribal orientations is indispensable for understanding the decision making process in Arab society. Those who are not informed about Arab values tend to get frustrated in slowdowns in decision making" (p. 100). A Western manager, who feels under pressure to get things going may still be wiser to avoid forcing issues. This is a society that lives in a long-term time frame, and here long-term relations may need to be preferred to short-term results. Understanding Arab conflict management processes should also help foreigners be more empathetic with their Arab counterparts. These Arab managers cannot be very results-oriented even if they wanted to; they have to work through their differences by a process of extended discussion, persuasion, and compromise.

A foreigner may also have to be careful not to turn a difference into a personal matter with the other party. Forcing the issue will invariably turn into a personality conflict in this culture. So will insensitivity to the rituals, behavioral norms, and values of Arabs. A thorough knowledge of these cultural specifics seems necessary, and various books, articles, and films on doing business with Arabs can be useful training material. Just as personal frictions may render conflicts unmanageable, friendship, even when not so deep, may make likely conflicts disappear in this culture. It is no wonder that most training material on the Middle Eastern culture emphasizes establishing good personal relations before getting down to business.

As critical as interpersonal relations in this culture may be, competence in relating to members of a foreign culture is not easily acquired. Foreign managers who do not feel confident in this area may do well by not trying to solve their own differences. It may be best for them to let Arab managers deal with their subordinates or peers, as they are far better equipped in the art of persuasion and compromise required for handling differences in this culture. The centralized nature of managerial practice prevalent in Arab organizations comes in handy here, as it may be sufficient for foreign managers to deal only with their high level Arab counterparts.

In addition to practical implications for foreigners, the study points to an important problem facing the attainment of organizational effectiveness in Arab countries. A tendency to openly acknowledge and discuss disagreements is an admirable property for managers in any society. If also coupled with more information sharing and participative decision making, which are lacking today (Badaway 1980), these conflict management styles may well be strengths for the future. But effective organizational performance would also require enforcement after such discussion results in a thorough analysis and a solution. Observers of Arab culture have argued that Arab society is basically an expressive, verbal society (Ajami 1981; Almaney 1981; Patai 1983), reluctant when

it comes to action. A related potential problem in the area of conflict resolution was discovered here, and it deserves further study. The present survey was essentially a descriptive study, and its data collection methods emphasized breadth rather than depth. Future in-depth studies on the effectiveness of the different styles, not only from the point of view of the individual employees but also the larger organization, would be welcome additions to our present knowledge of this problem. Also worth investigating are mediation and third party roles in handling conflicts within organizations, methods which, according to Patai (1983), have a long tradition in Arab society.

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