# STRATEGIC INTENTIONS FOR HANDLING CONFLICT: DOES PROACTIVE PERSONALITY OR SELF-MONITORING MATTER?

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between the five modes of handling organizational conflict (as measured by the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument) and the two personality factors of self-monitoring and proactivity. Participants in this study were a mix of 157 undergraduate and graduate students from a large public university located in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. Results show that self-monitoring was not significantly correlated with any of the five conflict handling strategies. Proactivity did show a significant positive association with the competing and collaborating styles, and a significant negative correlation with avoiding and accommodating styles. Implications for future research are discussed.

## INTRODUCTION

An inescapable fact of life in organizations is that interpersonal conflict occurs on a routine basis (Amason, 1996; Amason, Thompson, Hochwarter, & Harrison, 1995; Jameson, 1999; Pondy, 1992; Wall & Callister, 1995). Further, the presence of this conflict can have positive benefits for an organization if it is managed properly (Jameson, 1999; Pelled, Eisenhardt, & Xin, 1999; Rahim, 2001, 2002; Rahim, Magner, & Shapiro, 2000; Wall & Callister, 1995). In its positive form, conflict can stimulate organizational members to action, can make individuals and organizations more creative and innovative, and can be a source of feedback regarding critical relationships, the distribution of power, and the problems that require management attention. Interpersonal conflict can also bring focus to problem areas within an organization, which can then lead to improvements within the organization (Amason, 1996; Pondy, 1992).

Given the linkage between appropriately handling interpersonal conflict and improvements in organizational performance (Amason et. al., 1995), it is not surprising to find that research over the past 30 years has paid substantial attention to the approaches individuals deploy in handling conflict and to the underlying factors, both person-based and situational, that influence the choice of approach (De Dru & Weingart, 2003; Jameson, 1999; Rahim, 2002). The present study adds to this growing body of knowledge on individual conflict handling by assessing two personality factors: self-monitoring and proactivity. These personality variables have received only limited attention for their relationship with conflict management. Specifically, the intent of this study is to examine the linkages between strategic conflict handling intentions and individual

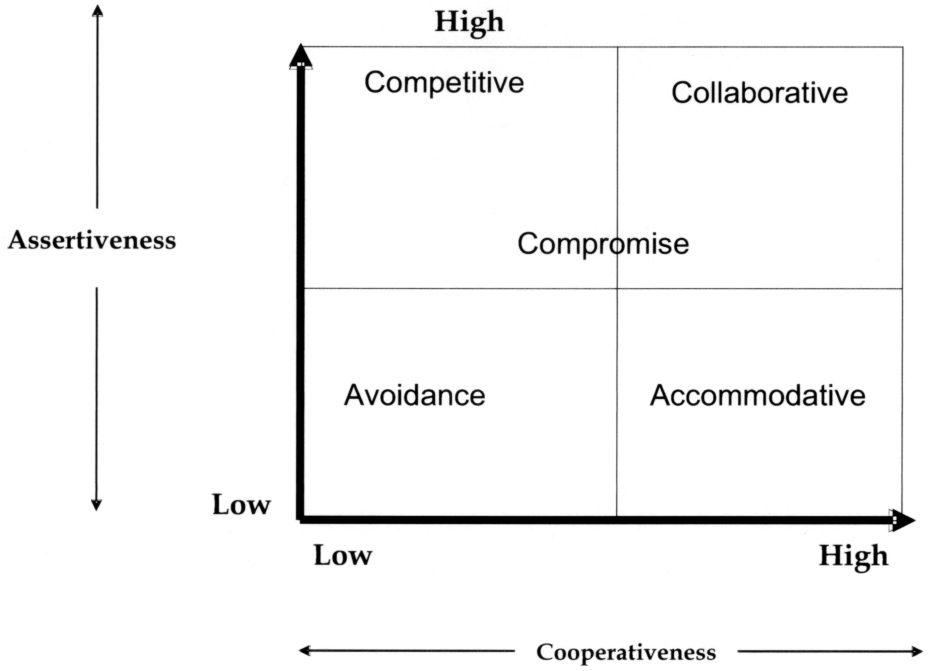
self-monitoring and proactive personality (proactivity). Both of these variables have received considerable research attention based on the belief that self-monitoring ability and proactivity are associated with, or influence, individual behaviors within the work setting. Further, it can be speculated that both of these personality factors could influence predispositions toward a particular conflict handling style.

## UNDERSTANDING INTENTIONS FOR HANDLING CONFLICT

Individual choices for responding to interpersonal conflict have generally been viewed as representing five fairly distinct categories. As originally developed by Blake and Mouton (1964), and later extended by other researchers (Rahim, 1983; Sorenson, Morse, & Savage, 1999; Thomas & Kilmann, 1974), five different orientations or styles are possible for handling conflict: competing (domination), collaborating (integration), sharing (compromise), avoiding (neglect), and accommodating (appeasement).

Thomas (1983) proposed dual dimensions that create a schematic that helps in understanding the differences among the five orientations (see Figure I). One dimension measures an individual's desire to satisfy his or her own needs, also referred to as the degree of assertiveness. The second dimension indicates a person's desire to satisfy the needs of the other party, also referred to as the degree of cooperativeness.

**FIGURE I. FIVE CONFLICT HANDLING ORIENTATIONS (FROM THOMAS – 1983)**




In essence, each of the five conflict orientations represents a unique combination of the dual dimensions: competing represents assertive and uncooperative, collaborating represents an abundance of both assertive and cooperative, avoidance is defined as unassertive and uncooperative, accommodation represents unassertive and cooperative, and sharing represents a moderate amount of both assertiveness and cooperation (Jameson, 1999; Rahim et al., 2000; Rahim, 2002). Prior research has supported the validity and the discreteness of the five styles as a function of the dual dimensions of concern for oneself and concern for others (Cosier & Ruble, 1981; Rahim & Magner, 1995; Ruble & Thomas, 1976; Van De Vliert & Kabanoff, 1990).

Assessment of an individual's dominant conflict handling style has typically been accomplished by using self-reported scores on such standardized instruments as the *Organizational Conflict Inventory* (Rahim, 1983) and the *Conflict Mode Instrument* (Thomas & Kilmann, 1974). The purpose of these instruments is to provide an index of one's self-perceived dominant orientation for handling conflict.

## PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON CONFLICT HANDLING INTENTIONS AND PERSONALITY CONSTRUCTS

The inevitability of interpersonal conflict and the potentially positive outcomes associated with it have prompted researchers to study the underlying factors that dictate how individuals respond to conflict when it arises. Over the past three decades, researchers have looked at the relationship between the five conflict handling intentions and a wide variety of personality-related variables.

For example, Kilmann and Thomas (1975) examined the relationship between Jungian personality dimensions and one's predominant form of conflict handling behavior, finding that individual differences in psychological tendencies toward conflict processes were likely to be influential in the conflict-handling mode that the individual chooses to use in a given situation. Similarly, other researchers suggest that basic psychological predispositions and differences in personality dimensions influence individual preferences for approaching and managing conflict (Antonioni, 1998; Graziano, Jensen-Campbell, & Hair, 1996; Moberg, 2001; Percival, Smitheram, & Kelly, 1992).

Table I summarizes the personality-related variables that have been studied for their linkage with conflict handling intentions. These constructs include the "big five" personality factors of extraversion, openness to experience, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and neuroticism (Antonioni, 1998; Chanin & Schneer 1984; Graziano, Jensen-Campbell, & Hair, 1996; Mills, Robey, & Smith 1985; Moberg, 2001; Percival, Smitheram, & Kelly 1992), as well as such constructs as machiavellianism (Jones & Melcher, 1982), dogmatism (Jones & Melcher, 1982), motivational needs (Bell & Blakeney, 1977; Jones & Melcher, 1982), emotional intelligence (Jordan & Troth, 2002), and several others (Jones & Melcher, 1982; Ohbuchi & Fukushima, 1997).

**TABLE I. STUDIES OF PERSONALITY-RELATED VARIABLES AND CONFLICT HANDLING INTENTIONS**

| Study | Personality Variable(s) Studied |
|---|---|
| Bell & Blakeney (1977) | Aggression, Dominance, Affiliation and Achievement |
| Jones & Melcher (1982) | Achievement, Dominance, Aggression, Affiliation, Deference, Succorance, Nurturance, Dogmatism and Machiavellianism |
| Chanin & Schneer (1984) | Jungian Personality Dimensions (MBTI) |
| Mills, Robey & Smith (1985) | MBTI |
| Percival, Smitheram & Kelly (1992) | MBTI |
| Ohbuchi & Fukushima (1997) | Aggressiveness and Self-Monitoring |
| Antonioni (1998) | Big Five Personality Factors |
| Jordan & Troth (2002) | Emotional Intelligence |

In general, these past research efforts on the linkages between personality dimensions and conflict handling intentions show how the contrasting dimensions of personality, such as the Jungian personality dimensions and the "Big Five" personality factors, might be linked with the five styles for handling conflict. In terms of overall findings, research has found the competing style to be positively associated with the Jungian function "thinking" (Chanin & Schneer, 1994; Mills, Robey, & Smith, 1985) and with extraversion (Antonioni, 1999), and negatively associated with need for affiliation (Jones & Melcher, 1982) and agreeableness (Antonioni, 1999). The collaborating style has been to found to be positively associated with extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience (Antonioni, 1999), need for achievement (Bell & Blakeney, 1977), and high emotional intelligence (Jordan & Troth, 2002). The avoiding style has shown a positive association with agreeableness and neuroticism (Antonioni, 1999), and a negative association with extraversion, openness to experience, and conscientiousness (Antonioni, 1999). Finally, the accommodating style has shown a positive association with the Jungian function "feeling" (Chanin & Schneer, 1994; Mills, Robey, & Smith, 1985) and need for affiliation (Jones & Melcher, 1982) and a negative association with extraversion (Mills, Robey, & Smith, 1985).

These findings indicate that personality dimensions likely play a role in shaping underlying predispositions toward handling conflict. As would be expected, the competing and collaborating styles show an association with extraversion, the personality factor whereby the individual displays an energetic response to interpersonal events (John & Srivastava, 1999). In contrast, the avoiding, accommodating, and collaborating styles all showed an association with agreeableness, the personality factor where the individual shows a positive or prosocial orientation toward other members within a group (John & Srivastava, 1999).

## SELF-MONITORING, PROACTIVITY AND CONFLICT RESPONSES

With regard to self-monitoring capability, individuals vary in the extent to which they can "monitor" and adjust their behaviors and the public portrayal of themselves based on contextual cues and on perceived outcomes of the behavior (Day, Schleicher, Unckless, & Hiller, 2002; Snyder, 1987). In this sense, high self-monitors tend to monitor and control the images they present to better fit with their perception of the social climate, whereas low self-monitors tend to be true to themselves, exhibiting more consistent behavior across various social contexts (Day, Schleicher, Unckless & Hiller, 2002).

High self-monitors, with their chameleon-like response to social context, can vary their behavioral response depending on the situation and the potential outcomes. As such, high self-monitors are generally viewed as better able to appropriately respond in contemporary organizational settings where social contexts are less certain, primarily due to such factors as greater workplace diversity, globalization, and vertical and horizontal company integration. Accordingly, research has found that high self-monitors are more likely to emerge in leadership roles (Day et. al., 2002; Eby, Cader, & Noble, 2003), display organizational citizenship behaviors (Blakely, Andrews, & Fuller, 2003), and be promoted within the corporate hierarchy (Kilduff & Day, 1994). Even with these positive results, other researchers have suggested that high self-monitors might not represent the most appropriate leaders, given that high self-monitors might not display the full portfolio of needed leadership skills (Bedeian & Day, 2004) or might put their own career success and self-preservation above the interests of the organization (Callanan, 2003).

As indicated previously, there has been scant research examining the relationship between self-monitoring and conflict handling styles. In a study using sixty-six male students, Ohbuchi and Fukushima (1997) found no correlation between self-monitoring and the five conflict responses, but high self-monitors did show a greater willingness to use the collaborative response only when no strong time pressures existed in the conflict situation. By its very nature, self-monitoring indicates the degree to which an individual is able to adapt behavioral responses to meet situational demands. It is not surprising then that self-monitoring would show no distinct association with any one conflict handling style. In this sense, high self-monitors would adjust their conflict responses to match the situation and its potential consequences. Low self-monitors would likely respond to a conflict episode in line with their primary type given their proclivity to "reflect their own inner attitudes, emotions, and dispositions" (Premeaux & Bedeian, 2003, p. 1542). In both cases, there would not be a clear-cut linkage between self-monitoring and any one conflict handling strategy. Given this expectation, the first hypothesis to be tested is:

**H1**: Self-monitoring shows no overall association with any of the conflict handling styles.

Like self-monitoring, proactivity has received considerable research attention as a personality characteristic that can influence individual behaviors (Bateman & Crant, 1993; Crant, 2000; Kirby, Kirby & Lewis, 2002). Individuals who display a proactive personality tend to be unconstrained by situational forces, influence environmental change, identify opportunities and act upon them, and persevere until meaningful change takes place (Crant, 2000). People with a proactive personality display aggressive, action-oriented behaviors that allow them to be agents of change who can transform an organization (Callanan, 2003). Further, proactivity is a personality trait that is often valued by organizations since it implies that the individual possessing this trait will be a force of positive change within the organization. Given its desirability within various organizational contexts (Seibert, Kraimer, & Crant, 2001), it would be of interest to know the linkage, if any, between proactivity and the various strategic options for handling conflict.

While the relationship between proactive personality and conflict handling styles has not been assessed directly, there have been studies that examined constructs that could serve as proxies for proactivity. For example, Jones and Melcher (1982) looked at the linkage between such variables as dominance (need to control others), aggression (to attack contrary points of view), and Machiavellianism (active manipulation of others) and conflict handling styles. Although none of these constructs exactly mirrors the proactivity variable, they do all indicate a degree of aggressive behavior. As expected, Jones and Melcher (1982) found that all three showed a positive correlation with the "confronting" or competing style of dealing with conflict.

Given the nature of the competing and the collaborative styles (both manifest a high degree of assertiveness in conflict situations), it could be expected that proactivity would have a significant association with both competing and the collaborative styles. Given this expectation, the second hypothesis to be tested is:

**H2**: Proactivity shows a significant positive association with the competing and collaborating conflict handling styles, and a significant negative association with the avoiding and accommodating styles.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Participants

Subjects for this study (*N*=157) were a mix of undergraduate and graduate business students from a large state university located in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. Participation in the research was voluntary and was part of normal coursework and instruction in various management courses. Students were not coerced nor given incentives to participate and all responses were anonymous. Further, subjects had not been exposed to coursework in conflict management prior to participation in the research. Demographic information for the participants is included in Table II.

**TABLE II. PARTICIPANT CHARACTERISTICS AND TKI CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STYLES**

| *N*=157: 137 undergraduate and 20 graduate students<br>Gender: 58% male and 42% female<br>Average Age: 24.4 years | | |
|---|---|---|
| Conflict Management Style (from the TKI) | | |
| | Number | Percentage |
| Competing | 36 | 22.9 |
| Collaborating | 16 | 10.2 |
| Compromising | 35 | 22.3 |
| Avoiding | 41 | 26.1 |
| Accommodating | 29 | 18.5 |
| Total | 157 | 100.0 |

### Assessment Materials

A survey was used to collect data for the study. Participants completed the survey on their own and at their own pace. Strategic intentions for handling conflict were measured using the Thomas-Kilmann Mode Instrument (the TKI). The TKI is based on Blake and Mouton's (1964) conceptual model and reports scores for each of the five modes or styles. The TKI is viewed as easy to administer and is relatively uncontaminated by social desirability effects (Womack, 1988). The TKI has been used extensively both in research and in training, and it is the most widely used instrument for determining conflict resolution style. In terms of content, the TKI is a forced-choice instrument that consists of thirty forced-choice paired statements, where the respondent is asked to choose a preference between the two statements. Example statements include: "I try to find a position that is intermediate between his/hers and mine." or "I assert my wishes." Scores are calculated for each of the five conflict modes or styles ranging from 0 to 12. Individuals were classified in terms of their dominant strategic intention for handling conflict based on their style with the highest score as given by the TKI. In the few cases where the TKI scores were tied for two particular styles, individuals were classified based on their most significant score in relation to the scores of the original norm group as given in the TKI manual

(Thomas & Kilmann, 1974). Table 2 shows the overall pattern for dominant conflict handling style as given by results from the TKI.

Although the TKI has been used widely, Cronbach alpha coefficients for the instrument have been found to be relatively modest (Volkema & Bergmann, 1995; Womack, 1988). Cronbach alpha coefficients for the TKI in the present research were consistent with the results cited in a number of research studies (Chanin & Schneer 1984; Womack, 1988).

For measurement of the proactive personality variable participants responded to a shortened (10 items) version of Bateman and Crant's (1993) original Proactive Personality Scale. Seibert, Crant and Kraimer (1999) designed this shortened version of the scale and reported a Cronbach alpha value of .86. For the present study the Cronbach alpha was .88. Self-Monitoring was measured by a revised 18-item true-false version of the original Self-Monitoring Scale (Snyder, 1974). Cronbach alpha for this scale has been reported at .75 (Kilduff and Day, 1994), and for the present study it was .70. The self-monitoring score represents the likelihood that the participant belongs to the high or the low self-monitoring category. Sample questions include: "I am not always the person I appear to be." and "I can only argue for ideas that I already believe."

## DATA ANALYSIS

Correlations were calculated based upon the total self-monitoring and proactivity scores for each participant along with scores in each of the five conflict handling styles. Table III shows the mean scores, standard deviations, and Pearson correlations for all of the main variables included in this research.

**TABLE III. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS AND INTERCORRELATIONS AMONG CONFLICT-HANDLING INTENTIONS AND PERSONALITY TYPES**

| Variable | *M* | *SD* | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. COMPETING | 5.49 | 3.110 | | | | | |
| 2. COLLABORATING | 5.76 | 2.228 | .038 | | | | |
| 3. COMPROMISING | 6.87 | 2.021 | -.273** | -.131 | | | |
| 4. AVOIDING | 6.01 | 2.717 | -.500** | -.505** | -.137 | | |
| 5. ACCOMMODATING | 5.78 | 2.426 | -.546** | -.311** | -.166* | .115 | |
| 6. PROACTIVITY | 39.05 | 6.005 | .325** | .184* | .019 | -.287** | -.284** |
| 7. SELF-MONITORING | 25.96 | 3.442 | -.113 | .025 | -.023 | .099 | .017 |

*Note:* $N = 157$. ** $p < .01$ * $p < .05$

As stated previously, individuals were assigned their dominant conflict handling style based upon the TKI mode with the highest overall score. Table IV summarizes the information on the five styles and includes the average proactivity and self-monitoring scores for each of the dominant conflict handling modes.

**TABLE IV. MEAN PERSONALITY AND CONFLICT-HANDLING SCORES BY CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STYLE**

| | Designated Conflict Management Style | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Category | Competing | Collaborating | Compromising | Avoiding | Accommodating |
| Competing | 9.55 (1.63) | 6.11 (1.74) | 6.11 (1.94) | 4.03 (2.13) | 4.06 (1.49) |
| Collaborating | 5.37 (1.93) | 9.19 (1.28) | 5.56 (2.03) | 4.63 (1.71) | 5.06 (2.08) |
| Compromising | 4.40 (1.94) | 6.06 (1.94) | 9.29 (0.99) | 5.11 (2.11) | 5.17 (1.95) |
| Avoiding | 3.98 (2.57) | 4.44 (1.72) | 6.34 (1.39) | 9.27 (1.34) | 5.93 (2.20) |
| Accommodating | 3.97 (2.46) | 4.97 (2.01) | 6.38 (1.50) | 5.72 (1.77) | 8.86 (1.25) |
| Proactivity | 41.61 (4.47) | 39.31 (8.90) | 39.76 (5.53) | 37.29 (6.13) | 37.28 (5.06) |
| Self-Monitoring | 25.61 (3.12) | 26.81 (3.62) | 25.88 (3.60) | 26.39 (3.73) | 25.52 (3.18) |
| *N* | 36 | 16 | 35 | 41 | 29 |

*Note*: Standard deviations are in parentheses.

The next step in the analysis was to determine whether the average scores for the self-monitoring and proactivity variables differed significantly among the five conflict handling styles. Each ANOVA procedure measures the effect of a specific personality variable on the choice of conflict handling style. The five styles are assumed to be different populations of personality scores; the personality scores are the independent or measurement variables. Since the proactivity and self-monitoring variables are constructed on different scales and interpreted differently, two one-way ANOVA tests were deployed.

Based upon Hypothesis 1, it would be expected that the ANOVA would detect no significant difference in self-monitoring scores across the five conflict handling styles. However, in line with Hypothesis 2, it would be expected that the ANOVA procedure would indicate a significant difference between mean proactivity scores over the five styles. More specifically, it is expected that a pair-wise comparison test (such as Scheffé) would indicate that average proactivity scores were higher with the competing and collaborating strategies and lower with the avoiding and accommodating styles. Scheffé's test was selected because it is more rigorous than other pair-wise comparison tests; that is, we are less likely to make a Type I error by rejecting the null hypothesis of equal means if that is true. It is less likely to allow us to assume that the means are different if they are not. In addition, there is no requirement that the samples be equal in size. Scheffé's test assumes that the ANOVA results indicate a difference in means.

## RESULTS

In line with Hypothesis 1, Table III shows that self-monitoring was not significantly correlated with any of the five conflict handling styles. In support of Hypothesis 2, Table III shows the

proactivity variable with a significant positive correlation with the competing and collaborating styles, and a significant negative correlation with the avoiding and accommodating modes.

Results of the first ANOVA procedure, as shown in Table V, support Hypothesis 1; there is no evidence of a significant difference between mean self-monitoring scores among conflict handling styles. Scheffé's test is inappropriate here since it presumes that the ANOVA procedure found a difference in means.

**TABLE V. ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE RESULTS: MEAN PROACTIVITY SCORE BY CONFLICT-HANDLING STYLE**

| | Proactivity Score | |
|---|---|---|
| Conflict Handling Style | *M* | *SD* |
| Competing | 41.61 | 4.47 |
| Collaborating | 39.31 | 8.91 |
| Compromising | 39.83 | 5.53 |
| Avoiding | 37.29 | 6.13 |
| Accommodating | 37.28 | 5.06 |

*Note:* $n = 157$; $F(4,156) = 3.52$, $p<.01$. Using the Scheffe' test, only the mean proactivity scores for the competing and avoiding styles were significantly different, $p< .05$.

The second ANOVA procedure indicates a significant difference in the average proactivity scores between conflict handling styles. That is, at least one of the conflict handling modes has a mean proactivity score that is significantly higher or lower than others. Table VI summarizes the results.

**TABLE VI. ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE RESULTS: MEAN SELF_MONITORING SCORE BY CONFLICT-HANDLING STYLE**

| | Self-Monitoring Score | |
|---|---|---|
| Conflict Handling Style | *M* | *SD* |
| Competing | 25.61 | 3.12 |
| Collaborating | 26.81 | 3.62 |
| Compromising | 25.77 | 3.60 |
| Avoiding | 26.39 | 3.73 |
| Accomodating | 25.52 | 3.18 |

*Note:* $n = 157$; $F(4,156) = .64$. Results were not significantly different.

The Scheffé Test generally reinforces the results of the correlations. Specifically, there were no significant mean differences for self-monitoring between any of the five conflict styles. For proactivity, differences between the mean scores for the competing mode and the avoiding mode indicated that the mean for competing was significantly (at the .036 level) greater in that case. In contrast with the correlation analysis, no significant mean differences were found between the collaborating mode and those of avoiding and accommodating styles. The size of the

collaborating group was smaller (16) and the standard deviation was high, which might explain the difference between these results and those of the correlations.

## DISCUSSION

In support of the first hypothesis, no significant correlation (positive or negative) was detected between any of the five conflict handling modes and the personality variable of self-monitoring. The results of this study are in line with results found by Ohbuchi and Fukushima (1997). By nature, high self-monitors adjust personal behavior to match situational demands and likely would not cling to any pre-wired conflict-handling mode. As stated previously, self-monitoring indicates the extent to which an individual can adjust behaviors in response to perceived situational demands and potential outcomes of a social situation. In fact, high self-monitors normally express their opinion in a public forum only when they perceive that doing so would enhance their public standing (Caligiuri & Day, 2000). In contrast, low self-monitors exhibit behaviors that would serve to display their true underlying values (Premeaux & Bedeian, 2003). Based on these findings, it is not surprising then that self-monitoring would show no distinct association with any one conflict handling style. High self-monitors would adjust their conflict responses to match the situation, while low self-monitors would likely respond to a conflict episode in line with their primary type.

Also, as hypothesized, significant correlations were demonstrated between proactiveness and four of the conflict handling styles. Specifically, proactiveness was positively correlated with the competing and collaborating modes and was negatively correlated with the avoiding and accommodating modes. In addition, significant mean differences for the proactiveness variable were detected for the competing style in contrast with the avoiding style. By definition, individuals with a proactive personality display assertive behaviors and tend not to be constrained by perceived limits/boundaries of given situations (Crant, 2000). Thus, it is not surprising that proactivity is positively correlated with the conflict handling strategies (competing and collaborating) where assertiveness is at the highest. In contrast, individuals with relatively lower proactivity would likely display lower assertiveness and the results of this study are supportive of that expectation.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR ORGANIZATIONS

This study adds to the growing body of literature on how the self-monitoring personality variable might influence individual behaviors in work settings. The present research indicates that self-monitoring is not associated with any one conflict handling style. Thus, it appears that self-monitoring might allow individuals to be unconstrained to any one style, but instead allows for choices in conflict style based on situational dictates.

In this sense, high self-monitors exhibit the appropriate blend of assertive and cooperative behavior, depending on the perceived outcome or outcomes of a particular conflict situation. This characteristic makes high self-monitors particularly suitable for today's business environment due to expanding social contexts, extensive business integration (vertical and horizontal), workplace diversity, and globalization. Since high self-monitors are sought after to perform an increasing number of "boundary-spanning" roles in business (i.e. bridging the gaps among disparate functional disciplines), they are more likely to be promoted within the corporate hierarchy into leadership positions (Day et al., 2002). Note, however, in an exchange of letters, Bedeian and Day attempt to reconcile the natural behavior of high self-monitors with the

behavior required of leaders. In these letters, Bedeian expresses skepticism about the suitability of high self-monitors as leaders and ultimately concludes that additional research is required (Bedeian & Day, 2004). In this regard, research has found that high self-monitors can be so concerned with appearances that they are capable of deceit in order to enhance their status and image (Premeaux & Bedeian, 2003). In contrast, low self-monitors are more concerned with staying true to their underlying value system (Premeaux & Bedeian, 2003). This contrast is important to understand at a time when the corporate world remains shaken by public breaches of ethical conduct, where the mentality of business managers and executives to "go along to get along" enabled or exacerbated that conduct.

With regard to proactivity, the results of this study seem to present a dichotomy to organizational managers and leaders. More precisely, prior research has shown a strong positive link between proactive personality and a number of organizationally desired outcomes (Crant, 2000; Seibert et al., 1999; Seibert et al., 2001; Kirby et al., 2002), including improved job performance, increased job involvement, and a more active engagement and resolution of organizational problems. From an opposite perspective, the results of this study show that individuals with a high degree of proactiveness are potentially inclined to engage in assertive behaviors (competing or collaborating) when choosing a conflict handling strategy. Thus, while organizations might express a desire for employees with higher degrees of proactivity, and might even be able to train them to be more proactive (Kirby et al., 2002), they also might not want employees who are inclined to express proactivity and assertiveness in each and every conflict situation. Indeed there are situations when the conflict styles of accommodating or avoiding would be preferred. Business scenarios where such styles are appropriate are described in Callanan, Benzing, & Perri (2006).

In this regard, organizations might want to use caution in the degree to which they seek out individuals with proactive personalities in the selection of employees and in their promotion decisions. Further, training programs that seek to elicit greater proactivity behaviors from employees should also caution that modern business management techniques favor a more contingent style, where root personality dispositions might need to be tempered by the context of the conflict situation.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH AND RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

This section highlights several areas where additional research could prove insightful. First, future research should continue to examine extent to which personality influences not only the strategic dispositions for responding to conflict, but also whether personality influences or moderates the choice of conflict response when distinct contextual factors are apparent in the conflict episode. For example, one possible stream of research could test whether individuals who are relatively higher in self-monitoring, given their supposed ability to read social cues and adjust their behaviors, are better able to choose an appropriate response to a conflict episode regardless of their primary conflict handling strategy. In addition, future research could assess the degree to which proactivity influences an individual's ability or willingness to adjust the conflict handling approach given discernible contextual factors within a specific conflict episode.

Future research should determine how results might vary if participants were members of non-American cultures. As an example, using Hofstede's dimensions of culture (Individualism/Collectivism, Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, Achievement/Nurturing, Future Orientation), subject populations from a variety of cultures could be compared and contrasted in their responses.

Finally, future research should assess whether the present findings would be different with an older, more experienced sample. The participants in this study were relatively young and with limited work experience, which might have an influence on the overall results. In addition, since the subjects in the present study were strictly business majors, it would be worthwhile for future research to assess whether the results of the present research can be generalized to individuals other than business majors.

There are a number of limitations with the present study. As stated above, the sample for this research was relatively young, had limited work experience, and was centered geographically in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. As such, caution should be used in generalizing these findings to other populations or types of workers. Second, given that the research design was cross-sectional with the use a questionnaire as the basis for data collection, there is the threat of common method variance. In response, future research should attempt to validate these findings by using other design and data collection techniques such as direct observation of individual behaviors either in simulations or in real-life work situations.

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