

## **Personality Traits and Conflict Handling Styles: Exploring Relationships with Special Reference to Tea Plantation Sector in Nuwaraeliya District**

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### **Introduction**

Conflict is a perceived incompatibility of interests, which is often caused by a misalignment of goals, motivations or actions between two or more parties who are interdependent, that can be real or only perceived to exist (Kenneth, 1992).

The early approach to conflict assumed that all conflict was bad. Conflict was viewed negatively, and it was used synonymously with terms such as violence, destruction, and irrationality to reinforce its negative connotation. However, in accordance with the modern approach, conflict is viewed as potentially useful to energize a company. Due to the effects of the globalization and speedy transformation of the society, the potential for conflict in daily interaction is increasing. Conflict handling styles are typically seen as responses to particular conflict situations.

Opposite to the "conflict avoidance" perspective of traditionalists, the "conflict management" perspective of modern approach recognizes that while conflict does have associated costs, it can also bring great benefits to the organizations. The success of the management depends heavily on an ability to handle conflict effectively (Antonioni, 1990). In accordance with Henry Mintzberg (1975), every manager must spend a good part of his time responding to high-pressure disturbances with the managerial role of disturbance handler.

As mentioned by Friedman (2000) the way an individual think or believe about someone or something (perception) is based on his/ her personality. According to Allport (1943), personality is the dynamic organization within the individual of those psychophysical systems that determine his unique adjustments to the environment and understanding the personality can help managers predict how a person might act in a particular situation. This attests that there must be a relationship between personality traits and conflict handling styles.

As Explained in the past research findings it was clear that, there are contradictory ideas in relation to the relationship between personality traits and conflict handling styles and this matter has poorly been researched in the Sri Lankan context. Conflict can be manifested in a variety of ways. Some signs are outwardly visible, others are more repressed. Strikes are considered as one of the indicators of conflict. In accordance with the classification of strikes by the Labour department of Sri Lanka, the "Tea plantation" sector accounts for the highest strike rate, as a single sector.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between personality traits and conflict handling styles with special reference to Tea Plantation sector in Sri Lanka.

### **Methodology**

Data collection instrument was a Questionnaire based on conflict dimensions defined by Thomas (1992), in "Conflict and Conflict Management," and NEO-PIR model. Sample comprised 26 tea estates situated in Nuwara ELLiya District and 110 executives

responded to the structured questionnaire. Data was mainly analyzed by using the non parametric test, Chi-Square test of association and Spearman's correlation coefficients while few other descriptive techniques were also used.

### Results and discussion

Results indicated that, the compromising style is the most frequently used conflict handling style. The results of the Chi-square test of association ( $P < 0.01$ ) indicated that there is a relationship between personality traits and conflict handling styles. In addition, it was identified that highly corporative conflict handling styles do not relate with a dominant personality trait.

Table 1. Correlation among personality traits and conflict handling style

	Ne	Op	Con	Ex	Ag
Co	-0.057	-0.046	0.000	.201*	-0.052
Acc	-0.092	0.090	0.122	0.07	0.094
Avoiding	-0.046	-0.045	-0.009	-0.07	0.015
Com	-.196*	.307**	.197*	0.055	0.179
Int	-.226*	.305**	.297**	.190*	.228*

Note. \*  $p < 0.05$  \*\*  $p < 0.01$

Source: Summarized SPSS output based on the data of the field survey, 2010

According to the Spearman's correlation coefficient, it was identified that the integrating style was the one and only conflict handling style which is correlated with all the personality traits and has a weak positive relationship with the openness, conscientiousness, agreeableness, extraversion and a weak negative relationship with the neuroticism. In addition, it was found that there is a weak negative correlation between compromising style and neuroticism while conscientiousness and openness had a weak positive correlation with the compromising style.

### Conclusions

Generally, majority of research findings indicate that, there is a relationship between personality traits and conflict handling styles. However the findings of this study suggest that the highly corporative conflict handling styles (accommodating, integrating, and collaborating) do not relate with a dominant personality trait. It implies that there can be other factors that cause to predict the potential conflict handling styles rather than personality variables.

### References

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