

# Personality traits, management styles & conflict management in a military unit

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## Abstract

**Aims:** Personality of managers affects their managerial style and their conflict management method. This study was performed with the aim of investigating the relation between personality traits, leadership styles and conflict management methods in a military unit.

**Methods:** This cross-sectional correlation study was performed on 200 senior managers of a military unit in Qom who were selected by available sampling method. The leadership style was investigated by leadership styles questionnaire and managers' personality traits were investigated by NEO questionnaire and their conflict management method was studied by Robbins questionnaire. Data was analyzed by SPSS 16 using descriptive and inferential statistical methods.

**Results:** The benevolence-consolatory imperative leadership style was the most frequent style (65.5%) and compatible personality was the most observed characteristic (19.5%). The extrovert personality had positive relation with participatory management style. There was a significant positive relationship between the extrovert personality and management style score. In addition, there was a significant positive relationship between neuroticism and incompatible style.

**Conclusion:** The benevolence-consolatory imperative leadership style is the most frequent style and compatible personality is the most observed characteristic among the studied unit's senior managers. There is a significant positive relationship between solution-seeking and controller methods of managing conflict and management style score and there is a significant negative relationship between neuroticism and management style score.

**Keywords:** Personal Traits, Management Styles, Conflict Management, NEO Questionnaire

## Introduction

In the current era, understanding the personality of individuals is necessary in many situations of life. Managers' personality is effective in the process and choice of conflict resolution method and management style. Research shows that there is a significant correlation between personality traits and style of conflict management. An indifferent or impassive manager passes the issue and ignores it, while another manager shows serious reactions [1]. Therefore, for achieving organizational goals, paying attention to these factors is necessary, because each manager with any type of personality follows particular style of management [2]. Study of Mehdipour showed that extrovert personality correlates with cooperative conflict management style and introvert and neurotic personality have relationship with conflict management style specifically compulsory and power method [3]. Also, the results of Antonioni's study show that some of five group factors of personality including extroversion, conscientiousness, neuroticism, compatibility and openness have significant relationship with management styles [4]. Studies show that one of the reasons and agents that

bring about conflict in organizations is the presence of individual and personality differences. Different managers' personality can be a source for development and creation or it can be a root for many organizational problems and affects the operation, decisions and organizational behaviors [5]. In other words, the conflict occurs because people always do not have agreement upon goals, issues, ideas and similar cases and since people employed in organizations involved in activities with different personal characteristics such as locus of control (introvert, extrovert), power seeking, self-esteem, copying with situation, being risky, the basis of conflict is provided. Past studies have shown that there is significant relationship between personality characteristics and organizational conflict [6]. The results of Nassiri's study showed that there is significant positive relationship between personality traits and control center and power seeking in staffs and organizational conflict (interpersonal). Also, there is negative significant relation between self-esteem personality characteristics and compatibility with staff's situations and organizational conflict (between individuals) [7]. Nabavi's study in 2006 on the relationship between personality types (extrovert-

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introvert) and leadership style (imperative-participatory) in Tehran University managers, indicates a significant relationship between having extrovert personality and participative management and significant relationship between introvert personality and imperative management style [8]. Also, the research of Foong showed that the personality characteristic is potential factor in job success and extraversion personality characteristic and being conscientious with participative management style are the factors of managers' success [9]. Kozan in his study of management in Turkey, Jordan and the United States achieved the following according to five management styles: A) in Turkey, most of the managers preferred cooperative approach rather compulsory and compromise methods. B) In Jordan cooperative, compromising, adaptive, avoidant and mandatory methods were used respectively. C) In United States, cooperative method was at the highest level and then compromising, adaptive and mandatory methods respectively [10]. In a study conducted in 1998 in the United States through questionnaire, extraversion had positive relationship with imperative management style while compatibility and neuroticism had negative relationship with imperative management style. Also, avoidance had positive relationship with extraversion and neuroticism [11]. However, in another study in the United States, 97 employed female nurses in south Mississippi were investigated and there was no significant statistical relationship between personal characteristics and method for dealing with conflict [11]. Martis has conducted a study with the title of investigation of the relationship between the "Big five personality characteristics" and managerial practices in trust relationships between managers and staff dimension. The results indicated that there is a significant and positive relationship between managerial practices and trust between managers and staff [12]. In the research that investigated the relationship between personality dimensions of managers, the significant relationship between personal dimensions and conflict management style such as tolerance style and avoidance style has been expressed [13]. Studies show that the leadership style of most managers is consulting in their own views. This view has been indicated by several studies, such as Tajvar and Ebrahimi [14], while the findings of Mosadegh Rad (Arab and Akhtari et al.) do not confirm these findings [15]. Kalantari performed a research in 2007 to determine the relationship between conflict management styles and personality characteristic of Yazd university managers' personality. The findings of

this study showed that extrovert personality has relationship with cooperative, collaborative and consensus conflict management styles and no significant correlation was seen between other variables and conflict management styles [13]. The result of Zarnosheh's study in 2000 in one of military hospitals in Tehran showed that 50% of managers were using solution seeker style, 45.8% were using controller style and 4.2% were using avoidance style [16]. Findings of another study by Amin Torabi in 2004 showed that 54.2% of managers had a task-oriented leadership style, 35.6% had oriented-relationship style, and 10.2% had a social independent leadership style. Regarding conflict management strategies, 49.7% had avoidance, 44.6% had controller and 5.7% had solution seeker strategies respectively [17].

Undoubtedly, the leadership style of managers is effective in the proper guidance of staff towards the organizational objectives. Using the best management or leadership style and factors affecting it will lead to increase of the effectiveness and efficiency of the staff and systems. Although sufficient research has not been done in this area especially in army systems, studies have been done in different domains that were mentioned. The results of this research, however, can provide scientific attitudes and perspectives for researchers especially for military commanders, and helps the proper application of managers (regarding their personality and behavior characteristics) in sensitive and key posts in order to ultimate improvement of organization. The purpose of this study was investigation the relationship between personality, leadership style and conflict management and their relationship in a military unit.

## Methods

This cross-sectional correlation research was performed in 2008 and is considered as applied type based on its specific objectives. Studied population were all senior managers in a military unit. Sample size was determined based on Morgan table equal to 200 individuals who were selected by available sampling method.

Data gathering tools were NEO personality questionnaire, management style (leadership) questionnaire and conflict management style questionnaire. Revised NEO Personality type questionnaire is a type of self-evaluative personality questionnaire which is based on a popular personality model called the "five-factor model" [18]. This questionnaire contains 60 questions that in this method

the minimum score is zero and the maximum score is 48. Regarding the validity of short form NEO, the results of several studies indicate that the subscales of short form NEO have good internal consistency. For example, McCrae and Costa, have reported alpha Chronbach's coefficient between 0.68 and for being successful up to 0.68 for neuroticism [19]. Holden also reports Alpha coefficient for these factors in the range of 0.76 for openness to 0.897 for neuroticism [20]. The results of a study by Mooradian and Nezek indicate that the

Chronbach's Alpha for neuroticism, extroversion, openness, being agree and consciousness has been reported 0.75, 0.74, 0.75 and 0.83 respectively [21]. This questionnaire has been normalized in Iran by Grossi [22]. Validity of this questionnaire came out to be 0.83, 0.75, 0.80, 0.79 and 0.79 for factors C, A, O, E and N, respectively using test-retest method in 208 students with three months interval. Also, in Mollazadeh's study, the validity of test-retest with 37 days interval in 76 martyrs' children has been reported 0.83, 0.78, 0.73, 0.79 and 0.85 respectively for neuroticism, extroversion, openness, agreement and conscientiousness [23]. Chronbach's alpha coefficient has been reported for neuroticism 0.88, Extraversion 0.83, openness 0.74, agreement 0.76, conscientiousness 0.87 and general alpha coefficient 0.83 respectively. Regarding concurrent validity of the questionnaire and Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) assessment questionnaire, Minnesota multi-dimensional personality questionnaire, California revised questionnaire, taste investigation of Gliford and Zuckerman questionnaire, trait inventory and interpersonal trait scale, significant relationship has been reported. Reports regarding validity of short NEO form have been presented. Mc Crae and Costa express that NEO short form has exact compatibility with its complete form in the way that the short form scales has correlation above 0.68 with scales in complete forms. Mc Crea and Costa in another study report that the validity of NEO five factors based on correlation with mate and peers evaluation is placed in the range from 0.44 for conscientiousness to 0.65 for openness. Additionally, in this study it has been reported that this questionnaire explained the 85% of variances in the convergent validity which has obtained through similar traits evaluation using trait confirmation and mate and peer evaluations [19].

Management style questionnaire (leadership) had 35 questions and included three styles of imperative-compulsory management style, imperative benevolence-consultative style and participatory style that its reliability and validity are credited. Validity of

this questionnaire is 0.82 and in Alpha level of 1% is significant [15]. Scoring is done based on Likert style in this questionnaire. A score of 1 to 5 has been considered for too low, low, medium, high and too high levels respectively that for some questions scoring is done reversely. Judging criteria to determine the leadership style of studied managers were in this way: managers who score 35 to a 107 have imperative-compulsory style, who achieve 108 to 131 have imperative benevolence-consolatory style and who get over 132 have participatory style. Conflict management style questionnaire also have 30 questions in which the investigation of managers dealing with conflict situation during the work performance has been investigated and each question has been graded from 1 to 7. The highest score in this scale is 210. In this scale investigation of 3 styles and method of solving the conflict has been considered. Solution-seeking style, incompatible style and controller style are evaluated based on Roobin's view. Validity and reliability of this questionnaire in 25 of people in community has been reported 78% by Mehdipour using Chronbach's alpha [3]. Also, the reliability coefficient of measuring tools for conflict management styles has been obtained 86% by Kalantari M [13]. Scoring in this questionnaire was done based on Likert scale.

For testing Normal distribution, Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used that in all cases distribution was normal. Then, descriptive statistical method (frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation) and inferential statistics (means comparison, one-way variance analysis and correlation and Scheffe follow-up test) was used.

## Results

Table 1 shows the demographic findings including frequency and percentage of age, management experience, educational level, marital status, the percentage of veterans and income variables.

The mean Scores of subjects in the management style were equal to  $120.23 \pm 12.07$  with the range 86 to 165. The mean of Scores in solution-seeking style was equal to  $54.51 \pm 7.96$  and in controller style was equal to  $33.13 \pm 5.83$ . Incompatible style also had the mean range  $52.43 \pm 10.92$  and the range 22 to 125. Imperative benevolence-consolatory style with 65.5% was the most leadership style, and participatory style with 13.5% was minimum leadership style used by participants. Compatible personality traits (19.5%), was the most personality traits among senior managers in this military unit. Then openness personality traits,

(18.5%), neuroticism (17.5%), conscientiousness (15%) and extroversion (11.5%) were located respectively.

There was a positive and significant relationship between solution seeker style and controller style with extrovert personality trait. Also, positive and significant relationship was observed between incompatible style and neuroticism trait (Table 2).

**Table 1-** The frequency and percentage of age, position, management experience, educational level, marital status, the percentage of veterans and income (n =200).

Variable	Frequency	Percentage	
Age (years)	25-30	13	6.5
	31-40	43	21.5
	More than 40	141	70.5
	No response	3	1.5
Management experience (months)	1-24	30	15
	25-60	24	12
	61-120	42	21
	More than 121	101	50.5
Level of education	No response	3	1.5
	Diploma	29	14.5
	associate and bachelors degree	157	78.5
	Master and higher	11	5.5
Marital status	No response	3	1.5
	Single	3	1.5
	Married	195	97.5
Veterans' percentage	No response	2	1
	To 25	43	21.5
	25-50	28	14
	50-70	8	4
Amount of income (Tomans)	No response	121	60.5
	To 500 thousand	56	28
	500 to 700 thousand	101	50.5
	To one million	37	18.5
	Over one million	3	1.5
No response	3	1.5	

**Table 2-** Correlation between personality traits and conflict management styles (n =200)

Personal trait → Management styles ↓	Neuroticism	Extroversion	Openness	Agreement	Conscientiousness
Solution seeker style	-0.13	0.38**	-0.05	0.12	0.12
Incompatible style	0.17*	0.02	-0.02	0.04	-0.08
controller style	-0.11	0.18*	-0.09	-0.02	0.04

p<0.001\*\*, p<0.05\*

There was a significant relation between solution seeker conflict management style and with three

leadership group. (p=0.001; df= 186 and 2, F=7.56) in the way that managers who were using solution seeker style, preferred using imperative-compulsory style compared with participatory style.

Significant relationship was observed between controller styles and leadership styles (F=14.95; df=189 and 2; p=0.001). There was a significant difference between participatory style with imperative benevolence-consolatory style. In other words, managers who were using controller style preferred using imperative benevolence-consolatory style and imperative-compulsory style compared with participatory style. Also, significant difference was seen between imperative benevolence-consolatory with imperative compulsory style i.e. managers who were using controller style, had more tendency toward using imperative benevolence-consolatory style in comparison with imperative-compulsory style.

**Table 3-** Correlation between personality traits and conflict management styles with leadership style score (n =200).

Variable	Correlation with management style score
Extroversion	0.18*
Openness	0.08
Compatibility	-0.02
Conscientiousness	0.04
Neuroticism	-0.18*
Solution seeker	0.33**
Controller	0.45**
Incompatible	0.01

p<0.001\*\*, p<0.05\*

There was a significant difference between management style of subjects and neuroticism groups (F=3.85; df=186 and 2; p=0.026). Managers who had neurotic personality trait had tendency toward using imperative-compulsory management and the less neuroticism personality trait in management, the more the managers' tendency in using participatory style.

There was a significant difference between incompatible styles of subjects with compatibility groups. (F=4.34; df=192 and 2; p=0.037). On the other hand, senior managers who were using incompatible style in times of crisis or difficulties did not have compatibility personality trait.

### Discussion

Based on the results of this study, imperative benevolence-consolatory style was the most and participatory style was the lowest styles which were used. Since, the studied community has been a military society and the dominant culture in this environment is Islamic and value culture, it seems that

combination of these two features lead to more using imperative benevolence-consolatory styles among managers. According to the findings of study, solution seeker style had the highest mean in conflict management and controller has allocated the lowest mean of style. Therefore, it can be stated in this way that considering military unit managers had more tendency toward more using of solution seeker style in conflicts. These results have been confirmed in other studies such as Zarnoosheh's study [16]. Also the results from other research indicated that most of the managers with increasing their age and experience tend to utilize seeking solution strategies in conflict management [3]. Considering that managers spend training courses regarding crisis management and problem solving in routine and crisis situations periodically, and considering the experience of eight years sacred defense which is based on presenting logical solution for solving conflict, tendency toward using this style is natural. Although most studies in the non-military environment indicate that people were using avoidance, controller and seeking solution strategies respectively.

Based on the results of current study, compatible personality trait has been the most personality trait among the senior managers and after that openness, conscientiousness, neuroticism and extroversion were placed respectively that this result is consistent with the result of research by Kozan in the United States, Turkey and Jordan [10]. Compatibility is a dimension of personality which explains the degree of good tempering, cooperation and trust to a person. This point should be noted that most of today managers have been participated in eight years sacred defense. These people that most of them have had compatible personality trait, have deployed voluntarily to war battle and this personality trait has been maintained in them until today. Also considering that one of properties of military people is keeping military secrets, most of these people are chosen in the selection process or they find the promotion in the way that they have fewer tendencies toward interpersonal and social relationship.

The result of this investigation showed that there is significant and negative relationship between neuroticism personality trait and management score. This result is consistent with Khosravi's study that he has obtained the mean of neuroticism dimension less than average [24]. It can be expressed that people with neuroticism personality trait use imperative benevolence-consolatory style and participatory style less. In other words, managers with neuroticism personality trait use the ideas of their colleagues less

in decision making and doing affairs.

There is a positive and significant relationship between extroversion personality trait and management score. The findings of the study shows that the more people are extrovert, the more they have tendency toward using participatory leadership style and imperative benevolence-consolatory styles and people with more incompatible style tend to use imperative-compensatory style that Nabavi's research confirms this finding [8]. Based on this relationship it can be expressed that extrovert managers are social people and they have strong between individual relations and are active in team and group activities and in making decision and doing affairs utilize the consultations of other colleagues. Therefore, these managers are successful people.

The findings of the study showed that there is positive and significant relation between solution seeker style and controller style with extroversion personality trait and there is positive and significant relation between incompatible style and neuroticism personality trait. People with extrovert personal trait had more tendencies in using solution seeker style and controller style and people with neuroticism personality trait had more tendencies in using incompatible style. However, difference in peoples' personality is one of the reasons for appearing the conflict in organization because besides the growth and development, people gradually find some differences in their physical power and ability, cognitive level, genius, memory and spirits from others. These individualistic and personality differences in humans cause that conflict appears in their joint activity. On the other words, differences cause the appearance of conflict in social and organizational behavior.

There was a positive and significant relationship between solution seeker style and controller style and leadership style score. Therefore, managers who use two solution seeker style and controller style in conflict management style, their management method is more participatory and imperative benevolence-consolatory and these managers consult with their other colleagues and subordinates in their duties and decision making and are not indifferent to others. Investigation of conducted research in this domain that has been reported in its place is confirmatory for this relation.

## Conclusion

Imperative benevolence-consolatory style is the most common leadership style used by senior managers of the studied military unit and most of managers tend to

use solution seeker style in solving conflicts. Also, compatible personality trait is the most personality trait in the senior managers of this unit. Extrovert personality trait has positive relationship with participatory management style and incompatible has negative relationship with participatory management style. Solution seeker style and controller style have positive relation with management style score. There is a negative and significant relationship between neuroticism and management score.

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