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**DETERMINANTS OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT BEHAVIOR: DOES THE CHOICE OF MAJOR AND STUDY PROGRESS PLAY A ROLE?**

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**Abstract**

The main goal of this study was to examine the differences in employing conflict management strategies with regard to the study program and the study progress. In total, 437 students from two faculties from the University of Rijeka, Croatia participated in the research. Dutch Test for Conflict Handling (DUTCH) was used to measure students' conflict management preferences. The results showed that students of both majors used strategies of compromising and problem solving the most. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed the main effect of the study program on the students' preferences for compromising. It was found that the students of psychology reported using compromising more often than the students of economics and business. The interaction of the study program and the study progress on compromising was also significant. It was found that the seniors of psychology preferred compromising significantly more than the seniors of economics and business. Another ANOVA showed that the main effects of the study program and the study progress on forcing were significant with no interaction: preferences for forcing were higher among senior students than among freshmen as well as among the students of economics and business than among the students of psychology. The results provide guidelines for the future design of study programs relative to the needs of the labor market and social needs for integrative solutions and inclusiveness. Despite the validity of our findings, the results cannot serve as an accurate predictor of the student behavior in the workplace. It is possible that college students would use a combination of conflict management strategies once they enter the workforce. In addition, our results are based on self-report data. That is why we suggest that future studies include experimental design as a more accurate way of data collection.

**Key words:** conflict management strategies, Dutch Test for Conflict Handling (DUTCH), study of psychology, study of economics and business

**1. INTRODUCTION**

Human behavior is manifested in a wide variety of behavioral patterns and social scientists are continuously trying to identify its determinants. Special emphasis is given to investigating human behavior in social relations. Behavior in social relations is especially important due to an increase in the importance of teams, which are formed to find solutions for various social problems. Members of teams can encounter conflicting situations regarding goals that should be accomplished, means and methods necessary to accomplish them, distribution of workload and responsibilities as well as benefits and rewards (Wageman, 1995). Teamwork is also a context for emergence of intrapersonal conflicts. Work in virtual teams poses a special challenge. A survey by the Garther Group showed that at the beginning of the century more than 60 percent of professional employees worked in virtual teams (Kanawattanachai & Yoo, 2002). Furumo (2008) found a correlation between deadbeats and those who deserted the virtual team and the intensity of conflict. Those respondents were found to experience more conflict and less trust, group cohesion and satisfaction when working in teams. It can be concluded that a more effective conflict management could prevent members from deserting teams and result in greater teamwork satisfaction and progress.

A widespread concern for economic and social sustainability is accompanied by discussions regarding university efforts in shaping student behavior. It is undisputed that universities play a significant role in shaping student behavior and personal preferences. When studying adolescent peer conflicts, Opatow (1991) found that the surveyed students lacked skills to manage conflicts in constructive ways and were generally limited to two extreme reactions - fight or flee (Opatow 1991). Longaretti & Wilson (2006) found that the surveyed students had an inadequate level of conflict management skills. They also found that teachers did not enact constructive conflict management. Research regarding student conflict management behavior relative to their study program and study progress is lacking. To fill this research gap, we explored what role the choice of the study program or major and study progress play in shaping the behavior of university students. We focused our research efforts on revealing behavioral preferences of students majoring in psychology and economics and business at the beginning and near the completion of their studies. We believe that the efforts of the university staff to model the behavior of students has a substantial influence on their later work and social engagements.

We used the Dutch Test for Conflict Handling (DUTCH) as a proxy to examine behavioral preferences of students of two different majors. In this work, we had several objectives: (1) to identify in which areas of life university students experience conflicts the most; (2) to examine if students differ in experiencing conflicts in certain areas of life with regard to their major; (3) to look for differences in the frequency of experiencing conflicts in students relative to their study program; (4) to identify which conflict management strategies students employ the most relative to the study program and the study progress; (5) to examine if there are differences in employing conflict management strategies with regard to the study program and the study progress.

In light of the current developments in the social and economic sphere, our research falls within the scope of the contingency view, which regards certain conflict management approaches as more effective than others (Rahim, 1997). In that way, our research integrates the micro level (psychological) with the macro level (sociological) along with the economic view and the process of negotiations (Lewicki *et al.* 1992). In addition, approach to social relations and conflict management depends on the value system of a specific society. Understanding conflict management in different contexts and cultures has become increasingly important. In this regard, our study aims to fill the gap regarding student conflict management behavioral preferences in general and in the specific cultural context.

## 2. EXPLAINING HUMAN BEHAVIOR

Students majoring in economics and business are under the strong influence of the standard economic model which states that people are “rational utility maximizing beings” (Paton & Wilson, 2001, p. 289) whose behavior is aimed at maximizing their own self-interests. That is why it is expected that economics and business curricula emphasize the rationality assumption reflected in the maximization of self-interests as the desired economic behavior. Some previous studies seem to confirm this assumption. For example, Frank & Schulze (2000) found that German students of economics were more likely to recommend a plumber that charged higher prices if they had a financial incentive to do so, compared to other students. Brown *et al.* (2010) have also found that business students are more driven by self-interests compared to other graduates. Consistent with previous findings, it is expected that the behavior of economics and business majors is more competitive. Competition can be defined as “mutually exclusive goal attainment”, where the one party’s success implies the other party’s failure (Kohn, 1986). In order to pursue competitive interests, these students are more likely to force their views on others. The study progress in economics and business is likely to exacerbate these behavioral tendencies, which our study tries to explore. Frank (2004) found that students of other majors showed an increase in cooperative behavior as they reached the end of their studies, contrary to the economics majors. In this regard, it is interesting to note that Frank *et al.* (1993) found an increase in self-interested behavior measured by a decline in honesty even after taking an introductory course in economics compared to students taking an introductory course in astronomy. This finding is consistent with the conclusion by Sims (1993) who demonstrated that business students learn selfish behavior through the course of their studies. In this study, we wanted to discover whether students of economics and business differ with regard to their behavior preferences from their colleagues majoring in psychology measured at the beginning of the studies and by approaching their completion.

Little is known about the characteristics of students who choose to enroll in psychology, which was also the motivation for our research. However, some information is available about the characteristics of professional psychologists. Goodyear *et al.* (2016) surveyed counselling psychologists in eight countries and asked them to rate the extent to which each of suggested values guide their work. The results showed that values could be clustered in three groups. The highest rated cluster was related to the focus on clients’ strengths and assets, attention to issues of diversity, focus on person-environment interactions and maintaining a developmental focus. This research showed that counselling psychologists put the greatest emphasis on people’s strengths, which was the top rated value and showed the least variability across countries. Such an orientation requires that counselling psychologists cooperate with their clients by engaging in long-lasting dialogues and testing with the purpose to

find solutions that integrate their characteristics and aspirations. Consistent with these findings, we expect that our respondents majoring in psychology show inclination toward cooperative and integrative behavior.

### 3. APPROACHES TO CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

Conflicts occur when the behavior of one person or persons interferes or obstructs the action(s) of another person or persons (Deutsch, 1973). Conflicts occur for a number of reasons, including ethics (Soutar *et al.*, 1994). Organizational conflict consumes up to 20% of employees' time (Song *et al.*, 2006). In order to solve conflicts and ensure accomplishment of goals and personal satisfaction, individuals should employ conflict management strategies. Conflict management refers to behavioral patterns that participants use to resolve conflicting situations. Generally, in conflicts individuals could exhibit concern for self and/or concern for others. Combinations of these behavioral orientations result in five distinct conflict management styles or strategies: dominating, obliging, integrating, avoiding and compromising (Rahim & Bonoma, 1979). Xie *et al.* (1998) validated these five strategies in the cross-cultural context encompassing four countries.

Dominating (forcing, contending) reflects a high concern for self and a low concern for others. Involved parties perceive their interests to be completely conflicting or negatively related. Each party not only promotes their own goals at the expense of the goals of others (Huang, 2010) but also tries to force their views on others. That is why this approach to resolving conflicting situations is also referred to as the competition style (Paul *et al.*, 2014) or the "win-lose", control and zero-sum approach (Song *et al.* 2006). By using dominating, a party can quickly resolve the issue of dispute. However, the solution is usually short-lived and ensures compliance but not commitment. Morris *et al.* (1998) found that those who value self-enhancement and power prefer forcing, while those who value self-transcendence prefer intervention of a third party. In addition, this approach often has a high probability of being unethical.

Obliging (yielding) reflects a low concern for self and a high concern for other. It is also referred to as the accommodating (Paul *et al.*, 2014), nonconfrontational, obedient and losewin style (Song *et al.*, 2006). The party employing this approach purposefully decides to neglect their interests and focuses on the interests of the other party. The obliging party also puts emphasis on areas of agreement instead of conflicting aspects of the interaction in order to smooth over differences. That is why information mostly flows in one direction. Such behavior can occur in situations characterized by high power imbalance (Rahim, 1983). However, change is likely to occur once the power imbalance is no longer present. This approach is also sometimes referred to as exercise of generosity, selflessness, charity (Song *et al.*, 2006) and self-sacrifice (Rahim *et al.*, 2000).

Avoiding is an approach in which a party shows a low concern for both the self and the others. The party in a conflicting situation tries to withdraw from the situation and refrain from action, which could be achieved by ignoring the problem. It has been associated with passing-the-buck or "see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil" attitude. By choosing avoiding, an individual could signal that a certain problem should not be dealt with or that it is not yet time to deal with the situation. An individual might also pretend the problem does not exist. Avoiding is often associated with situations characterized by power imbalance. In this regard, it was found that managers use avoiding less frequently than others (Rahim, 1983). Huang (2010) found that conflicts could not be resolved by avoiding, despite the intention of participants to maintain harmony.

Integrating reflects both a high concern for self and a high concern for others. Parties behave cooperatively and strive toward a mutually beneficial solution that integrates perspectives and interests of everyone involved. They engage in the exchange of information, issues are discussed freely and openly, expression of thoughts and feelings is welcome and efforts are made to maximize the benefits of all parties (Prein, 1984). The process of integrating views and interests is very demanding. It can only be conducted in true dialogue, supported by a high level of commitment, trust and patience of the involved parties. That is why it is also referred to as cooperation, collaboration, negotiation or problem solving (Edwards & Walton, 2000; Paul *et al.*, 2014). This approach is considered ethical in all circumstances (Rahim *et al.*, 1999).

In compromising, parties exhibit moderate concern for both the self and the others and are interested in reaching the so-called "middle ground" or a common and mutually acceptable outcome. In the process, parties resort to tradeoffs and give up some of their interests (give-and-take) to reach a solution that addresses everyone's interests. Compromising usually does not bring a lasting solution due to partial mutual dissatisfaction with the solution. However, this approach is suggested when resources, including time, are scarce, when the issue under dispute is complex and when perspectives show significant divergence. In these circumstances, parties agree to maintain the mutually acceptable solution for a certain period of time. Further negotiations regarding the matter of dispute often follow on another occasion. It is interesting to note that Gobeli *at al.* (1998) found that compromising was ineffective at the project level but it was effective at the organizational level.

Usage of conflict management strategies could either solve the problem or further exacerbate the situation and cause additional disputes. It is especially problematic when ethics-related issues are handled by forcing or dominating and even avoiding. In accordance with the two dimensions, conflict management strategies can be

divided in two groups – cooperative and competitive (Tjosvold & Chia, 1989). Strategies that presume moderate to high levels of concern for others can be classified as cooperative. Such strategies are obliging (yielding), compromising and integrating. Collaborative approach to conflict management has been found to favorably affect group performance (Farmer & Roth, 1998; Miranda & Bostrom, 1993/94). Similar results were found for the performance of virtual teams (Montoya-Weiss *et al.*, 2001). More precisely, Chen & Tjosvold (2002) found on the sample of MBA student respondents that the cooperative approach to conflicts leads to distributive, procedural and interactive forms of justice, which promotes team effectiveness. On the other hand, avoiding was found to be a determinant of distributive, procedural, and interactive injustice as well as team ineffectiveness. However, a competitive approach was not related to injustice as consistently as avoiding. It is interesting to note that the employment of conflict management strategies is related to the types of conflicts. Conflicts can be constructive or destructive. Song *et al.* (2006) found that the greater the use of integrating and accommodating conflict-handling strategies, the higher the level of constructive conflict would be. On the other hand, the greater the use of forcing and avoiding, the higher would be the level of destructive conflict. In addition, the greater the use of compromising, the lower would be the level of destructive conflict. With regard to the previous argumentation, we posit the following research hypotheses:

*H1: There are statistically significant differences in experiencing conflicts in certain areas of life between students majoring in psychology and economics and business.*

*H2: There are statistically significant differences in the frequency of experiencing conflicts between students majoring in psychology and economics and business.*

*H3: There are statistically significant differences in employing conflict management strategies between students majoring in psychology and economics and business.*

*H4: There are statistically significant differences in employing conflict management strategies between students majoring in psychology and economics and business with regard to the study progress.*

## **4. METHODOLOGY**

### **4.1. Sample and procedure**

The study was conducted at a public university in Croatia. In total, 437 students from two faculties from the University of Rijeka, Croatia participated in the research. The subjects were volunteers enrolled in the study programs of psychology and economics and business. The sample consisted of 87 psychology students and 350 students majoring in economics and business. 61 students of psychology were enrolled in the first and 26 in the last year of study. Our sample consisted of 243 freshmen and 107 senior students of economics and business, respectively. In total, 321 respondents were female (75.7%). The response rate for students of economics and business was 63.7%, while the response rate for students majoring in psychology was 69.6%. First year students were surveyed prior to the introductory lecture in order to make sure they had no significant information regarding the course content. Seniors were surveyed during the last week of their last semester, prior to working on their final thesis (January 2017). Data collection was performed in class on paper by permission of the instructors and included those students who attended the class and were willing to participate. The participants did not receive any extra credit for participating in the research. Participants were asked to state their opinion and were instructed that there were no right or wrong responses. Participants were not aware of the purpose of the study or the research hypotheses.

### **4.2. Measures**

To examine student behavior relative to two dimensions – concern for self and concern for others, we used the Dutch Test for Conflict Handling (DUTCH), which was updated and revised by Carsten *et al.* (2001). This particular measurement instrument was selected due to its excellent psychometric qualities, which was verified in previous research. The questionnaire consists of 20 items grouped in five sections pertaining to five independent conflict management factors, as verified by Carsten *et al.* (2001): problem solving, yielding, forcing, avoiding, and compromising. Questions were presented in random order. Respondents were asked to rate each statement on the five-point Likert scale where one indicated “not at all” and five “absolutely yes”. Scores on each of the factors could range between 5 and 20. The questionnaire started with a series of introductory questions examining respondents’ demographic profile in terms of their study program, career ambition, areas in life in which they experience conflicts and the frequency of experiencing conflicts. The latter ranged from “almost daily”, “several times a week”, “several times a month”, “several times a year” to “almost never”. Career ambition as a control variable was measured on the single-item scale ranging from one to five, with five signifying the highest degree.

Research instrument was pilot-tested with a group of students to ensure that the wording of the items were aligned with the researchers' intent. As a result of their feedback, the wording of some items was revised.

### 4.3. Analyses

Structure of DUTCH questionnaire was evaluated by using exploratory factor analysis (principal component analysis, PCA) with Varimax rotation and eigenvalue>1 extraction criteria along with scree plot to determine the number of factors. Internal consistency of DUTCH factors was determined via Cronbach's alpha coefficients. Hypotheses were tested by using Chi-square tests (Hypothesis 1), t-test (Hypothesis 2) and two-way between-subject analyses of variance accompanied with partial eta squared coefficients (Hypotheses 3 and 4). Newman-Keuls tests were used to explore significant interactions. T-test was also applied to examine if the students of two majors differed relative to the career ambition. Analyses were performed by using software packages STATISTICA 7 and IBM SPSS 21.

## 5. RESULTS

The majority of respondents indicated "family" as the area of life in which they experienced conflicts the most, followed by "friends", "emotional relationships", "faculty", and "work" (Table 1). In order to examine differences in the frequency of experiencing conflicts within specific areas of life of the surveyed students, five Chi-square tests with continuity correction were performed. Chi-square analyses revealed that students of psychology and economics and business significantly differed in experiencing conflicts in only one area of life. It was found that significantly more students of economics and business compared to their counterparts majoring in psychology experienced conflicts at work. In other areas of life, there were no significant differences between the surveyed students of psychology and economics and business (Table 1). Hypothesis 1 was therefore confirmed.

**Table 1.** Differences between students of economics and business (N=350) and psychology (N=87) in experiencing conflicts with respect to conflict areas

Area of conflicts	Study Program	Frequency (%) <sup>1</sup>	$\chi^2_c$	df
Family	Economics	270 (77.14)	.618	1
	Psychology	63 (72.41)		
Friends	Economics	226 (64.57)	2.246	1
	Psychology	48 (55.17)		
Emotional Relationships	Economics	159 (45.43)	.127	1
	Psychology	42 (48.28)		
Faculty	Economics	125 (35.71)	.000	1
	Psychology	31 (35.63)		
Work	Economics	76 (21.71)	7.596*	1
	Psychology	7 (8.05)		

<sup>1</sup> Frequency of participants who experience conflicts in certain areas of life (percentages are shown in parentheses)

\* p< .05

Source: authors' calculations

Independent samples t-test was conducted to examine differences in the career ambition with respect to the study program. No differences in career ambition were found ( $t=-.20$ ;  $df=435$ ;  $p>.05$ ) between the students of economics and business ( $M=3.92$ ;  $SD=.82$ ) and students of psychology ( $M=3.94$ ;  $SD=.89$ ).

Differences in the frequency of experiencing conflicts with respect to the study program were also analyzed by calculating independent samples t-test. The analysis revealed no significant differences ( $t=1.13$ ;  $df=435$ ;  $p>.05$ ) between the students majoring in psychology ( $M=3.30$ ;  $SD=.92$ ) and those majoring in economics and business ( $M=3.15$ ;  $SD=1.12$ ). Hypothesis 2 was therefore not confirmed.

Factor analysis (principal component analysis, PCA) was conducted by using Varimax rotation in order to inspect the structure of DUTCH. According to scree-plot criterion (Cattell, 1966) as well as eigenvalues criterion (Kaiser, 1960), DUTCH questionnaire was found to have the five-factor structure. Scree-plot indicated five dominant factors and in conformity to that finding, there were five eigen-values greater than 1 that explained 55.7 percent of the total variation in the data set. It can be concluded that the five-factor solution constitutes a good

representation of the interrelations among 20 items of the DUTCH model. These results are consistent with the previous research conducted by using the Croatian version of the DUTCH questionnaire (Rupčić & Švegar, 2017) as well as with empirical results of some other studies (e.g. Rahim & Magner, 1994; Carsten *et al.*, 2001).

Internal consistency for the five DUTCH scales was determined by calculating reliability coefficients (Cronbach's alpha). Cronbach's alpha for problem solving, yielding, forcing, avoiding, and compromising was 0.77, 0.69, 0.67, 0.48, and 0.70, respectively. Only the scale referring to obliging had the alpha coefficient below the benchmark established by Nunnally (1978). However, this result is consistent with the research results by Song *et al.* (2006).

Means and standard deviations for each conflict management strategy with respect to the study program and study progress are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Means and standard deviations for each conflict management strategy with respect to the study program and the study progress

Strategy	Study Program	First year students		Last year students	
		Mean (SD)	N	Mean (SD)	N
Yielding	Economics	11.93 (3.01)	243	12.30 (2.63)	107
	Psychology	11.77 (3.47)	61	12.19 (2.71)	26
Compromising	Economics	15.93 (2.55)	243	15.30 (2.65)	107
	Psychology	15.97 (2.50)	61	16.65 (2.08)	26
Forcing	Economics	12.62 (2.81)	243	13.83 (2.89)	107
	Psychology	12.30 (2.89)	61	12.58 (2.97)	26
Problem solving	Economics	15.79 (2.69)	243	15.32 (2.62)	107
	Psychology	15.80 (2.76)	61	16.46 (2.25)	26
Avoiding	Economics	13.35 (2.55)	243	13.43 (2.62)	107
	Psychology	13.07 (2.64)	61	13.19 (3.16)	26

Source: authors' calculations

Effects of the study program and the study progress were tested via five between-subject two-way analyses of variance (ANOVA) one for each of conflict management strategies (Table 3). In all analyses, test scores regarding conflict management strategies were set as the dependent variable. Partial eta squared (part.  $\eta^2$ ) coefficients were calculated to determine the effect size.

As presented in Table 3, neither the study program nor the study progress affected yielding, problem solving and avoiding. The main effect of the study program on the use of the strategy of compromising was significant ( $F_{1,433}=4.42$ ;  $p<.05$ ). It was found that the students majoring in psychology ( $M=16.17$ ;  $SD=2.39$ ) reported using compromising more often than the students majoring in economics and business ( $M=15.73$ ;  $SD=2.59$ ). Hypothesis 3 was therefore confirmed. Furthermore, two-way interaction between the study program and the study progress on compromising (Figure 1) was also significant ( $F_{1,429}=3.91$ ;  $p<.05$ ). Newman-Keuls post-hoc tests revealed that freshmen of economics and business ( $M=15.93$ ;  $SD=2.55$ ) did not significantly differ from their counterparts studying psychology ( $M=15.97$ ;  $SD=2.50$ ) in their preferences for compromising. However, 5<sup>th</sup> year economics and business students ( $M=15.30$ ;  $SD=2.65$ ), preferred compromising significantly less than 5<sup>th</sup> year psychology students ( $M=16.65$ ;  $SD=2.08$ ), according to Newman-Keuls post-hoc analysis (Figure 1). This finding is consistent with Hypothesis 4.

The main effect of the study program (Figure 2) on the use of the strategy of forcing was significant ( $F_{1,429}=4.52$ ;  $p<.05$ ). It was found that the students of economics and business ( $M=12.99$ ;  $SD=2.88$ ) reported employing forcing more often than the students of psychology ( $M=12.38$ ;  $SD=2.90$ ). Furthermore, the main effect of the study progress (Figure 2) on the use of the strategy of forcing was also significant ( $F_{1,429}=4.02$ ;  $p<.05$ ): seniors of both majors ( $M=12.56$ ;  $SD=2.82$ ) reported using forcing significantly more often than their freshmen counterparts ( $M=13.59$ ;  $SD=2.93$ ). These results are also in conformity with Hypothesis 3.

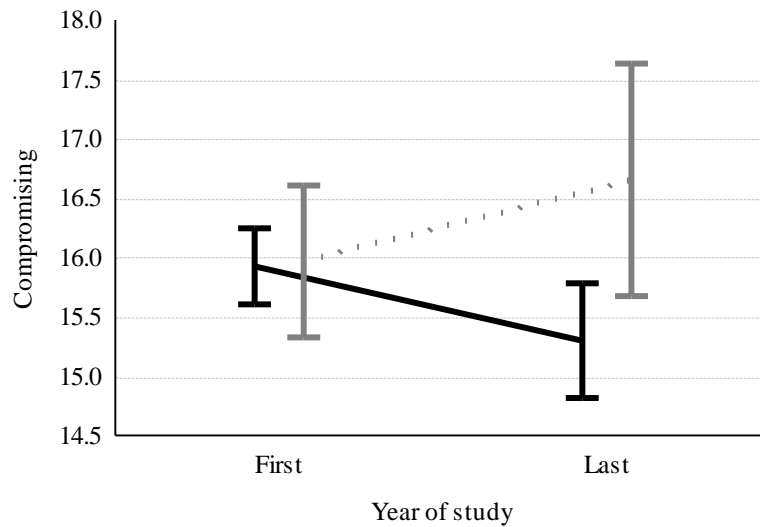
**Table 3.** Effects of study program and study progress on conflict management strategies (N=437)

Effects	Yielding		Compromising		Forcing		Probl. solving		Avoiding	
	$F_{1,433}$	part. $\eta^2$	$F_{1,433}$	part. $\eta^2$	$F_{1,433}$	part. $\eta^2$	$F_{1,433}$	part. $\eta^2$	$F_{1,433}$	part. $\eta^2$
Year of study (YS)	1.035	.002	.008	.000	4.022*	.009	.075	.000	.095	.000
Program (P)	.117	.000	4.417*	.010	4.516*	.010	2.788	.006	.572	.001
YS x P interaction	.005	.000	3.910*	.009	1.557	.004	2.625	.006	.004	.000

\*  $p<.05$

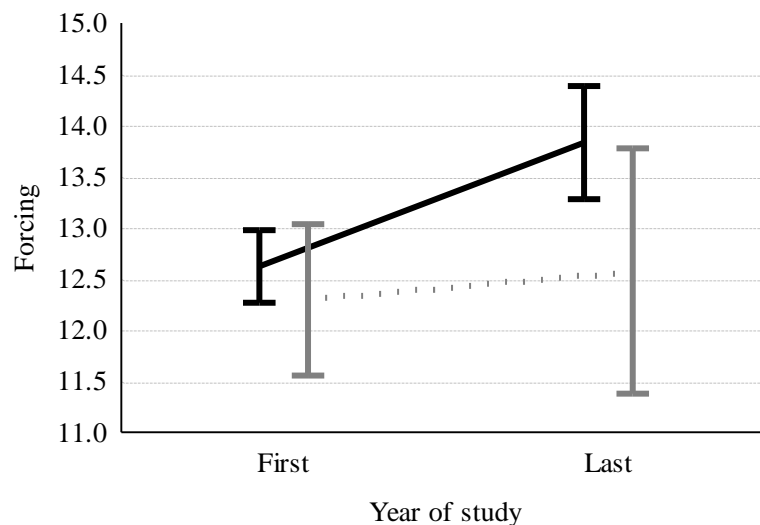
Source: authors' calculations

**Figure 1.** Effects of study program (economics: black solid line; psychology: grey dotted line) and study progress (1<sup>st</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> study year) on compromising (N=437). Vertical bars denote 0.95 confidence intervals.



Source: author's calculations

**Figure 2.** Effects of study program (economics: black solid line; psychology: grey dotted line) and study progress (1<sup>st</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> study year) on forcing (N=437). Vertical bars denote 0.95 confidence intervals.



Source: author's calculations

## 6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The study showed that the most widely used conflict management strategies for students of both majors were problem solving and compromising, followed by avoiding and forcing, while yielding was used the least. Findings for the students majoring in psychology regarding their conflict management preferences are partially consistent with the results by Goodyear *et al.* (2016), who investigated values most favored by counselling psychologists. The highest rated cluster of values was related to the focus on clients' strengths and assets. Psychologists deal with various life situations and try to help their clients find acceptable solutions and develop their character. Both freshmen and seniors majoring in psychology showed a strong inclination towards the strategies of compromising and problem solving. Their preference towards the strategy of compromising was even more pronounced by the end of their studies. The finding that seniors of psychology favored compromising more than seniors majoring in economics and business was expected. However, by reaching the end of their studies, the students of psychology increased their preference for the strategy of forcing, which was unexpected. The reason for such behavioral

preference could be explained by the confidence they gained by mastering the study program. However, further studies are needed in this regard. It is interesting to note that senior adolescents were found to perceive conflicts as beneficial. In her examination of adolescent peer conflicts, Opatow (1991, p. 420) got an interesting statement from a student: "Without conflicts and fights you will never find out who you are and what type of person you like and what you want out of life." In enticing conflicts for that purpose, forcing could be found beneficial.

The fact that the students majoring in economics and business decreased their preference for compromising and increased their preference for forcing by reaching the end of their studies shows that they were under the influence of the postulates of the neoclassical economic theory based on the rational choice theory, which encourages behavior based on self-interests and competition. However, the complexity of business operations often calls for inter-organizational cooperation based on negotiations and dialogue. The business model that can enable survival and competitiveness by integrating partially conflicting interests of competitors is called cooperation, which is based on simultaneous competition and cooperation (Kotzab & Teller 2003). Kohn (1992) showed that cooperative environment produces better results than competition in all aspects of business and social interactions. It is therefore suggested that course holders of economics and business put emphasis on identifying various perspectives and their integration during problem solving exercises. Course holders should stimulate scenario and contingency planning and stakeholder analysis in various business situations and encourage students to identify consequences of specific actions on the stakeholders' interests. This approach could have beneficial effects on the students' future ethical and socially responsible behavior. Davidson & Versluys (1999) found that training in cooperation and problem solving leads to the increased expectations of win-win solutions in students. In this regard, it is beneficial to introduce the term "concern", instead of the term "interests" (Davidson & Wood, 2004), which indicates the intention to approach the negotiations and dialogue more comprehensively. This approach is beneficial for all study programs. In addition, it is interesting to note that Rahim and Psenicka (2002) found that motivation is positively associated with the subordinates' use of problem solving conflict management strategy.

Our results confirmed that five-strategy model is a useful framework for investigating conflict management and that a simpler conceptualization would not be able to reveal the nuances of human behavior relative to perceived incompatibilities. However, the results in our study raise concerns about common-method bias or common-method variance (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003) due to the fact that data were obtained by using self-report measures. We tested for that problem by conducting a post hoc Harman's one-factor analysis in which the unrotated solution to an exploratory factor analysis is examined. The problem of common method bias may be present if a single factor emerges from the analysis or when one factor accounts for the majority of the variance of the dataset. The analysis revealed that one factor accounted for only 25 percent of the total variance. In addition, the five-factor solution obtained with eigenvalue > 1 extraction criterion accounted for 55.70 percent of the total variance. While Harman's single-factor test has its limitations, these results indicate that common method variance should not be considered an issue in this study. In addition, other research indicated that self-reported data do not show significant limitations (e.g. Spector, 1994).

Despite the validity of our findings, our results cannot serve as an accurate predictor of student behavior in the workplace. It is possible that college students would use a combination of conflict management strategies once they enter the workforce. The most important reason is power asymmetry that the students as future workers would encounter. Depending on the role of the opponent/other party (supervisor, a colleague or a subordinate), they may find themselves switching between styles. It has been found that people use different conflict management strategies relative to the level of authority that they encounter in the other party (Rahim, 1992; Holt and DeVore, 2005). In the context of large power distance, employees are more likely to use the strategy of yielding (obliging); the superiors are more likely to force their views on employees, while peers usually resort to compromising. That is why future research could focus on the behavior of interns and new recruits to gain more accurate results regarding the student actual behavior once they enter the labor market. In this regard, it is interesting to note that Drory & Ritov (1997) found that experienced subjects showed considerable sensitivity to the potential power of their opponents, while subjects without work experience did not tend to adjust their tactics to the opponent's power condition. They found that the reaction of inexperienced subjects under both conditions was similar to experienced subjects to low opponent power. They concluded that experienced subjects are more familiar with organizational dynamics and therefore acknowledge the personal risk associated with their dependence on a powerful opponent. Experienced subjects therefore perceive higher risk, which has an intimidating effect and urges them to be less dominating and more obliging. However, any conclusions regarding actual future conflict management behavior of our respondents may be premature.

Along with previously stated limitations, our results are based on self-report data. Our respondents stated their subjective perception of their employment of conflict management approaches, while that may be different from how the other party may have perceived their behavior. That is why we suggest that future studies include experimental designs as a more accurate way of data collection. For instance, individuals could be assigned to dyads to participate in negotiation exercises followed by assessments of each other's behavior. Other variables could be included in such research designs such as time pressure, resource availability, likelihood of future



interactions, short-term vs. long-term orientation, previous personal history etc. We believe that these future studies could elucidate students' behavior even further and provide valuable insight that could be used in the future design of study programs.

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