DO INFORMAL GROUPS THREATEN ORGANIZATIONS? COMPARING GROUP CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STYLES WITH SUPERVISORS.

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to identify the role played by informal groups in organizational conflict. The existing literature mainly focuses on the effects of informal groups on the behaviors of employees, such as resisting management and disobeying instructions. However, studies that specifically measure how informal groups affect the behaviors of their members in handling conflicts with supervisors are lacking. This research uses quantitative methodology. Data were collected using the Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory II survey. The participants were 316 workers in various American organizations. The results were analyzed using multivariate analysis of variance, one-way analysis of variance, Pearson's correlation coefficient, and the two-samples z-test. The results show that employees who belong to informal groups use the dominating style more frequently than do employees who do not belong to informal groups. However, they do not always use dominating styles; occasionally, they tend to use compromising and integrating styles as well. Age has a significant impact on the relationship between informal groups and integrating and dominating styles. There is also a relationship between gender and avoiding style among employees who belong to informal groups. However, there is no preference for a certain conflict style among the three types of informal groups. The results have implications for management science, including human resources and organizational behavior. However, the research applications may be limited for employees in collectivist societies that are different from American (an individualistic society). The relationship between informal groups and conflict style with supervisors has not been studied before.

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Thus, this research focuses on not only the five conflict styles but also the influence of demographic variables to comprehensively understand this relationship.

Keywords: informal groups in organizations; organizational conflict management; conflict management styles; employee-supervisor relationships

1. INTRODUCTION

Conflict between employees and management occurs frequently in organizations ranging from minor disagreements to sabotage and strikes, as experienced in many places throughout the world. Conflicts are unavoidable in organizations where there is interaction among people. Thus, it is important to identify factors which may affect the way employees handle conflict with their supervisors. This study explores the influence that belonging to informal groups (IGs) has on conflict management styles with supervisors, through comparison with employees who do not belong to informal groups (NIGs).

An organization is a group of people who work together towards certain goals (Hatch, 2011). They are managed through regulations and laws that identify goals, duties, plans, and work strategies. According to Lune (2010), the importance of organizations is to help develop societies, provide people with opportunities for upward mobility, and contribute to the economy. Organizations work as a system comprising many parts, including organizational structure, work environment, and human and financial resources.

IGs in organizations are formed based on social and professional interests. Lee and Lawrence (2013) confirm that members of IGs seek satisfaction in social interests and needs, including belonging and workplace support. Individuals, by nature, seek to build relationships and wish for experiences of belonging, along with safety, self-esteem, and love, as emphasized in Maslow's (1943) needs theory.

Professional interests relate to the benefits of work itself. According to Robbins and Judge (2017), IGs are formed to develop and achieve work-related goals. This type of group may even include members from other organizations in the same profession (e.g., engineers, teachers). Such professionals often form associations to discuss the latest developments in the field and possible ways to improve their work. There are different types of IGs, including interest groups (based on common interests among members), friendship groups (based on the relationships among members), and reference groups (based on using the group as a reference) (Khanka, 2006).

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This study was conducted using an online questionnaire randomly distributed across the United States (US) to 316 employees in various organizations. Demographic variables including gender, age, type of IG, and strength of relationships among group members were tested to determine whether they influence conflict styles of IGs members. The purpose of the study was to increase understanding; the more comprehensively organizations understand the behaviors of their employees, the more effectively they can manage and guide them.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

IGs differ from formal groups in respects such as the priorities of the group's members and the relationship among members. Zayed and Kamel (2005) note that formal groups are formed officially in organizations according to tasks and specialties (e.g., committees, team tasks, departments), whereas IGs result from employee initiatives. Mukherjee and Basu (2005) explain that IGs are formed voluntarily by members, in contrast to formal groups, which are required by an organization.

This voluntary aspect may result in stronger ties between members. Rao and Krishna (2002) both claim that IGs focus on building relationships between members and aim to increase member satisfaction, while formal groups focus on job performance and aim to accomplish certain tasks and duties. These differences clarify that group members are the priority of IGs, and accomplishments are the priorities of formal ones.

Mukherjee and Basu (2005) explain that IGs are "open-ended," meaning they will exist as long as members achieve their interests and desires. By contrast, the permanency and cohesiveness of formal groups is contingent upon the stability of the organizational structure itself. For example, when an organization decides to restructure, it is obliged to merge, split, or even omit some units and departments. This inevitably leads to hiring, firing, or transferring employees, which makes changes in formal groups (e.g., team tasks or team units). Additionally, changes in members of formal groups could occur due retirement, resignation, or transfer of employees to another organizations.

Although formal groups and IGs have obvious differences, they also have similarities. Robbins and Judge (2017) note that both groups have goals that need to be achieved and assign specific goals to members. Mosely, Megginson, and Pietri (2015) explain that formal groups can lead to the creation of IGs with members of formal groups forming IGs. In such cases, unity and harmony among those members is enhanced during formal group interactions, resulting in greater performance.

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IGs have additional advantages. Agarwal (1982) notes increased productivity, positive work environment, and improved work process. These are critical for organizations to ensure survival and enforce competitive advantages. However, some scholars and researchers argue that IGs are not always beneficial to the organizations in which they exist, as will be discussed in the next paragraphs.

Deb (2001) explains that conflicts between management and IGs occur frequently, involving all or some members and their managers and attributes these conflicts to differences in parties' interests. He recommends that management communicate effectively with IGs to understand their interests and concerns to avoid causing such disputes with IGs. When interactions and communication between parties increase, levels of convergence and understanding also increase.

Conflicting parties should share and exchange viewpoints to ensure that both positions are clear. Several researchers, (Fallon, Begun & Riley, 2013; Folger, Poole & Stutman, 2005; Wilmot & Hocker, 2007) agree that conflicts between parties occur due to differences in goals. When IGs perceive an organization's goals as incompatible with their own, they tend to confront management, leading to conflict.

Lashley and Lee-Ross (2003) explain that IGs may have their own values and norms that could potentially cause conflicts between members and management. By and large, differences of values among individuals, whether within or out of work, lead to the adoption of different, even conflicting, positions and attitudes.

For example, some employees believe in personal accomplishments while others believe in teamwork. This may lead to a dispute between these employees regarding ways of performing and managing tasks and duties. Differences of values and beliefs among people are attributed to the existence of a wide variety of beliefs and values, as Maiese (2003) confirms.

Moreover, an IG, as a whole, has an impact on its members because of their desire to enjoy support from, and affiliation with, their groups. Gamage (2006) stresses that IGs influence members' interactions with other employees, groups, and management. If an IG's approach is competition within the organization, then this will be reflected in the behaviors of members.

For example, members may not put enough efforts into work, which affects the performance of the organization eventually. What enforces members' behaviors is the support they obtain from each other. Social identity theory stipulates that individuals belonging to the

same group (ingroup) obtain support from their groups against others who belong to other groups (outgroup) (Robbins & Judge, 2017).

Kroon (1995) states that members of IGs compete with supervisors about different work-related issues. He explains that IGs use their own informal communication channels at work, and they may not adhere to the allocated time for completing tasks and duties assigned by supervisors. De Beer et al. (1998) confirm that the behavior of members of IGs can differ from that of members of formal groups.

Members of IGs tend to compete with managers when they realize that their managers' opinions disagree with opinions of their groups. Furthermore, IG members may not comply with organizational structure regarding the order of authority, which creates rivalry between such members and management (French et al., 2011). For example, IG members sometimes give priority to directions from their group's leader even if that conflicts with the supervisors' directions. Singh (2008) confirms that such distributive conflicts are caused by differences in the distribution of authority and allocation of resources.

The conflicts between IGs and management could occur when organizations decide to make adjustments brought about by changes in the external and internal environments. Organizational changes could include restructuring, merging with another organization, and so on. Rao (2010) explains that IGs often resist the implementation of changes made by their organizations, especially if organizational changes conflict with the IG's interests. As mentioned earlier, IGs tend to prioritize their goals and interests rather than that of the organization (Hiriyappa, 2008).

Furthermore, IGs can compete with management regarding decision making. Agarwal (1982) explains that IG members may resist management's decisions and even reject new members. Hussein (1990) argues that IGs provide an umbrella under which members can rebel against management's decisions and implementations. When parties cling to their positions, competition tends to increase (Wilmot & Hocker, 2007).

Hussein (1989) observes that IGs may work against management in various ways, including by reducing productivity. Appannaiah, Reddy, and Kavitha, (2009) explain that the existence of IGs can influence organizations' performance—another form of competition with management.

One of the primary reasons why IG members adopt competitive behaviors is to project their perceived power. According to Aswathappa (2009), when IGs adopt competitive

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behaviors in organizations, they rely on the power they have due to support from group members and leaders. This is a common human behavior in organizations: when individuals are given power, they tend to confront others. Borkowski (2016) states that IGs grant power to members, and managers need to realize that. French et al. (2011) explain that such groups fulfill the security needs of their members.

Weller and Weller (2002) argue that members are supported by their groups and leaders even in conflicts with management. Plunkett, Allen, and Attner (2013) stress that the power vested in members of IGs is not individual but stems from group membership. Additionally, Mullins (2007) explains that leaders of IGs can enjoy power paralleling that of managers and supervisors; this can positively or negatively influence the behaviors of members.

Scholars who have studied conflict resolution explain that parties who perceive they have power tend to compete and engage in conflicts. For example, Wilmot and Hocker (2007) and Folger, Poole, and Stutman (2005) explain that power influences the course of conflicts in terms of the strategies and tactics used to handle them. Jeong (2010), another scholar, argues that parties rely on their power while negotiating solutions. A powerful party locates solutions that meet its interests rather than all parties' interests.

The studies above provide a general perspective of IG behaviors. They show that IGs compete with management in the workplace, relying on their power for leverage. These studies do not explain the direct relationship between IGs and styles of conflict, especially IG members, collectively or individually, and their supervisors. It is essential to address this issue because of the importance of supervisor-employee relationships, which directly impact productivity, organizational loyalty, and organizational commitment. In addition, supervisors who directly supervise work are considered the first line of management. Based on the literature, the following hypotheses regarding IGs and their conflict styles were formulated and tested in this study:

- **H1:** IG members use a dominating style to manage conflicts with supervisors more frequently than NIG employees.

- **H2:** NIG employees use an integrating style to manage conflicts with supervisors more frequently than IG employees.

- **H3:** NIG Employees use a compromising style to manage conflicts with supervisors more frequently than IG employees.

- **H4:** NIG Employees use an obliging style to manage conflicts with supervisors more frequently than IG employees.

- **H5:** IG Employees use an avoiding style to manage conflicts with supervisors more frequently than NIG employees.

In order to obtain a deeper understanding of the topic from various perspectives that could lead to new discoveries and open doors for new research, this study attempted to determine whether variables including age, gender, types of IGs, and strength of group members' relationship influence the relationship between IGs and conflict styles. IGs comprise males and females of different ages and differ by type and in terms of the strength of ties among members. Males and females tend to use different conflict management styles.

Holt and DeVore (2005) found that the compromising style is used more by women than men in both collectivistic and individualistic cultures. Shockley-Zalabak and Morley (1984) conducted a study on gender preferences of conflict styles and found that female students were less competitive than male students. Jain (2010) found that males were more competitive than females with regard to conflicts among managers in India.

Further, Al-Hamdan, Norrie, and Anthony (2014) discovered that female nurses used a collaborating style more often than male nurses and avoided conflict less than their male counterparts. This study examines the relationship between the age of IG members and conflict styles, which is important to explore because behaviors of individuals can change from one life stage to another (Anderton, Barrett & Bogue, 2010).

Moreover, this study looks at how the various types of IGs (interest, friendship, and reference groups) influence conflict management styles of members. Finally, this study determines whether the degree of relationship strength between IG members affects member conflict styles.

2.1. Conflict Styles

The five conflict styles measured in this study are integrating, dominating, obliging, compromising, and avoiding. integrating, obliging, and compromising styles are cooperation strategies that consider the other party's interests. Integrating style is used when a party is highly concerned about both its own and the other party's interests (Rahim & Bonoma, 1979).

It is likely to leads to mutually satisfactory solutions while maintaining the relationship between the parties. Compromising style is used when parties are just concerned enough about

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each other's interests to consider concessions (Rahim & Bonoma, 1979). This style usually helps resolve conflicts, especially complicated ones that require flexibility and understanding between parties. Obliging style is used when a party is more concerned about the other party's interests than its own (Rahim & Bonoma, 1979). This type of style may quickly lead to resolutions, as one party is willing to accept a solution that meets the other party's desires.

Dominating style is used when a party is only concerned about its interests and ignores those of the other party (Rahim & Bonoma, 1979). This style causes competitiveness among the parties. According to game theory, when one party tries to pursue its interests at the expense of the other party's interests, the conflict becomes zero sum (Fisher & Ury, 1981). Accordingly, a conflict may extend for a long time, affecting the relationship between parties.

Avoiding style is used when a party has a low level of concern about both its own and the other party's interests (Rahim & Bonoma, 1979). This type of style might not lead to conflict resolution. Although avoiding conflict is considered a withdrawal, it is still more competition than cooperation.

2.2.   Study Significance

This study is indispensable due to the importance of identifying conflict in organizations; as noted, IGs can provide a source of such conflicts (Rahim, 2001). Nair (2009) explains that conflicts have negative effects on organizations in terms of performance. In addition, they affect an organization's ability to maintain one of its most important resources—human resources.

Organizations suffering from active conflicts might not be attractive to prospective employees seeking peaceful work environments. Furthermore, the willingness of employees to remain in such organizations may decrease. Rahim (2011) explains that conflicts impact organizations in many respects, including performance, the acceptance of change, and human relationships.

According to Mukhtar (2013), it is impossible to find organizations without conflict, which can occur frequently, in different forms, and between individuals, groups, departments, and management teams. Organizations must learn to deal effectively with conflicts. Rahim (2002) argues that inter-organizations conflicts can be managed effectively by adopting strategies to transform them from destructive to constructive. This study compares the conflict styles of IG employees with NIG employees, providing a better understanding of the effects of

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IGs on conflict styles, and thereby making it easier to deal with these groups and manage conflicts with them effectively.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Survey Instrument

The survey used in this study is the Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory II (form A) [**used with permission from the Center for Advanced Studies in Management**. Further use or reproduction of the instrument without written permission is prohibited]. The survey measures how employees address conflicts with their supervisors through 28 questions. It covers the previously discussed five strategies or styles of conflict management: integrating, dominating, obliging, compromising, and avoiding.

The test-retest and Cronbach's alpha values for these strategies demonstrate the reliability of the survey: integrating (test-retest: 0.83; Cronbach's alpha: 0.83), dominating (test-retest: 0.76; Cronbach's alpha: 0.72), obliging (test-retest: 0.81; Cronbach's alpha: 0.74), compromising (test-retest: 0.6; Cronbach's alpha: 0.65), and avoiding (test-retest: 0.79; Cronbach's alpha: 0.77).

Participants were asked to answer some demographic questions regarding gender, age, and region of residence. Further, they were asked other questions to identify IG membership, the type of IGs to which they belonged, and the strength of relationships within groups

3.2. Sample

The survey was distributed randomly to 469 participants in a SurveyMonkey panel (https://www.surveymonkey.com/mp/audience/our-survey-respondents) (database). In total, 316 surveys were completed. The Survey Monkey database has been used in numerous academic studies, including doctoral dissertations and published papers (Bode, 2014; Ukpe, 2018; Harper, 2016; Dainton, 2015). Participants were employees of various organizations in the US across regions, as follows: west (19%), midwest (25%), northeast (19%), southeast (23%), and southwest (14%). The percentages of male and female participants were 49% and 51%, respectively. The number of IG participants was 123, while that of NIG participants was 193. Participants claimed membership in three IG categories: interest groups (41%), friendship groups (51%), and reference groups (7%).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

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Multivariate analysis of variance was used to determine differences in the use of the five conflict styles between IG and NIG participants. Belonging or not belonging to IGs was considered an independent variable, and the five conflict styles were dependent variables. The results (Table 1) reveal significant evidence indicating that IGs use a dominating style more frequently than NIGs (IG mean = 3.21 NIG mean = 3.04); thus, the first hypothesis is accepted.

The analysis shows that IG employees integrating style significantly more frequently than NIG employees (IG mean = 4.00, NIG mean = 3.79). Thus, the second hypothesis is rejected.

Regarding compromising style, the analysis shows that IG employees use compromising style significantly more frequently than NIG employees (IG mean = 3.79, NIG mean = 3.55). Accordingly, the third hypothesis is rejected.

The results reveal no significant difference in the means for the obliging style between IG employees and NIG employees (IG mean = 3.65 NIG mean = 3.50). Accordingly, the fourth hypothesis is rejected.

Finally, there is no significant difference in the means for the avoiding style between the two groups (IG mean = 3. 20, NIG mean = 3.26). Thus, the fifth hypothesis is also rejected.

Table 1: MANOVA Analysis with Informal and No Informal Group Membership as Independent Variables; Conflict-Handling Styles as Dependent Variables (Hypothesis Tests)

Conflict Style	Group	Mean	SD	N	F
IN	1	4.0058	.61985	123	7.33**
	2	3.7927	.71916	193	
	Total	3.8757	.68911	316	
OB	1	3.6572	.66197	123	3.71
	2	3.5052	.69803	193	
	Total	3.5643	.68718	316	
DO	1	3.2114	.69909	123	4.32*
	2	3.0477	.67191	193	
	Total	3.1114	.68619	316	
AV	1	3.2033	.77428	123	.49
	2	3.2642	.73861	193	
	Total	3.2405	.75207	316	
CO	1	3.7967	.56208	123	10.98***
	2	3.5518	.68601	193	
	Total	3.6472	.65078	316	

Note: Wilks' Lambda = .95, F = 3.18, p < .01. * p < .05. ** p < .01. *** p < .001

MANOVA = Multivariate analysis of variance, IN = Integrating, OB = Obliging, DO = Dominating, AV = Avoiding, CO = Compromising; 1 = Informal group membership, 2 = No Informal group membership, SD = Standard deviation, N = Sample size, Gen = Gender

Scholars in the literature above have argued that IGs tend to confront management more often regarding decisions, rules, and the like. They attribute the competitiveness of IG members to their perceived power. The results of this study show that IG employees use a dominating style in conflicts with supervisors more than NIG employees. In the dominating style of conflict, parties try to protect their interests and obtain their objectives by ignoring those of other parties. However, IG employees do not always use a dominating style. They use integrating and compromising styles occasionally (in fact more often than NIGs) indicating high or moderate concern for the other party's interests.

4.1.   Age and Conflict Styles

The relationships between age and conflict styles for IG employees were measured using Pearson's correlation coefficient (Table 2). The results show significant relationships between age and integrating style (r = 0.234, correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)) and age and dominating style (r = 0.204, correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)). Older employees tend to use both styles, and the preference between them is subject to individual differences. For obliging and avoiding styles, the correlation coefficients are low (r = 0.053 and r = 0.068, respectively). For compromising style, the correlation coefficient is higher (r = 0.137) than for obliging and avoiding styles, although it is also not significant.

Table 2: Pearson's Correlations Between Age and Conflict-Handling Styles for Informal Group Members

		Age	IN	OB	DO	AV	CO
Age	Pearson Correlation	1	.234**	.053	.204*	.068	.137
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.009	.562	.024	.458	.132
	N		123	123	123	123	123
IN	Pearson Correlation		1	.340**	.370**	-.020	.672**
	Sig. (2-tailed)			.000	.000	.823	.000
	N			123	123	123	123
OB	Pearson Correlation			1	.115	.521**	.254**
	Sig. (2-tailed)				.206	.000	.005
	N				123	123	123
DO	Pearson Correlation				1	-.169	.266**
	Sig. (2-tailed)					.062	.003
	N					123	123
AV	Pearson Correlation					1	.054
	Sig. (2-tailed)						.552
	N						123
CO	Pearson Correlation						1
	Sig. (2-tailed)						
	N						123

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Conflict styles: IN = Integrating, OB = Obliging, DO = Dominating, AV = Avoiding, CO = Compromising

For NIG employees, Pearson's correlation coefficients demonstrate that age is not correlated with conflict styles (Table 3); NIG individuals have no preference for one style over another, regardless of age. The correlation coefficients for the integrating, obliging, avoiding, dominating, and compromising styles are r = 0.084, -0.127, 0.012, 0.117, and 0.131, respectively.

Table 3: Pearson's Correlations Between Age and Conflict-Handling Styles for Individuals who are not Members of an Informal Group

		Age	IN	OB	DO	AV	CO
Age	Pearson Correlation	1	.084	-.127	.117	.012	.131
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.244	.079	.106	.866	.069
	N		193	193	193	193	193
IN	Pearson Correlation		1	.656**	.270**	.338**	.716**
	Sig. (2-tailed)			.000	.000	.000	.000
	N			193	193	193	193
OB	Pearson Correlation			1	.178*	.601**	.514**
	Sig. (2-tailed)				.014	.000	.000
	N				193	193	193
DO	Pearson Correlation				1	.070	.277**
	Sig. (2-tailed)					.336	.000
	N					193	193
AV	Pearson Correlation					1	.257**
	Sig. (2-tailed)						.000
	N						193
CO	Pearson Correlation						1
	Sig. (2-tailed)						
	N						193

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Conflict styles: IN = Integrating, OB = Obliging, DO = Dominating, AV = Avoiding, CO = Compromising

4.2. Gender and Conflict Styles

The relationships between gender and conflict styles among IG members were measured using the two-samples z-test (Table 4), revealing that the differences between males and females are not statistically significant with regard to the integrating, compromising, dominating, and obliging styles. However, the values indicate that females in IGs tend to cooperate more than males, and females tend to avoid conflicts with supervisors more than males; the difference is statistically significant (p-value (0.03) < α (0.05)).

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Table 4: Two-Samples z-test Comparison of Gender Means for Conflict Styles for Informal Group Members

Conflict Style	Gender	Mean	Std. Deviation	N	Z-test (p-value)
IN	1	3.9457	0.55433	50	0.36 > 0.05
	2	4.047	0.66157	73	
	Total	4.0058	0.61985	123	
OB	1	3.5467	0.63891	50	0.12 > 0.05
	2	3.7329	0.67113	73	
	Total	3.6572	0.66197	123	
DO	1	3.324	0.59507	50	0.12> 0.05
	2	3.1342	0.75649	73	
	Total	3.2114	0.69909	123	
AV	1	3.0267	0.69282	50	0.03< 0.05*
	2	3.3242	0.80789	73	
	Total	3.2033	0.77428	123	
CO	1	3.735	0.5426	50	0.31> 0.05
	2	3.839	0.57489	73	
	Total	3.7967	0.56208	123	

* Sig. at 0.05 (α) & 95% Confidence Level

Conflict styles: IN = Integrating, OB = Obliging, DO = Dominating, AV = Avoiding, CO = Compromising, Gender: Male = 1, Female = 2

Regarding the relationship between gender and conflict styles among NIG individuals, the results (the two samples z-test) reveal no significant differences between the means of males and females in the five conflict styles (Table 5). However, the mean values indicate that females tend to use compromising, cooperating, avoiding, and obliging styles more than males. As with IG employees, female NIGs avoid conflicts with supervisors more than males, and males use dominating style more than females.

Table 5: Two-Samples z-test Comparison of Gender Means for Conflict Styles for Individuals who are not Informal Group Members

Conflict Style	Gender	Mean	Std. Deviation	N	z-test (p-value)
IN	1	3.7596	0.77285	104	0.48 > 0.05
	2	3.8315	0.65308	89	
	Total	3.7927	0.71916	193	
OB	1	3.4663	0.73529	104	0.40 > 0.05
	2	3.5506	0.65299	89	
	Total	3.5052	0.69803	193	
DO	1	3.1077	0.62188	104	0.180 > 0.05
	2	2.9775	0.72327	89	
	Total	3.0477	0.67191	193	
AV	1	3.2324	0.72905	104	0.52 > 0.05
	2	3.3015	0.75205	89	
	Total	3.2642	0.73861	193	
CO	1	3.5048	0.72321	104	0.3 > 0.05
	2	3.6067	0.63948	89	
	Total	3.5518	0.68601	193	

Conflict styles: IN = Integrating, OB = Obliging, DO = Dominating, AV = Avoiding, CO = Compromising, Gender: Male = 1, Female = 2

4.3. Strength of Relationship Among Informal Groups Members and Conflict Styles

The strength of the relationship among IG members was classified as low, moderate, or high. Pearson's correlation coefficients show that the strength of the relationship is not correlated with conflict styles: integrating (r = 0.14), obliging (r = -0.072), dominating (0.135), avoiding (-0.176), and compromising (0.141) (Table 6). These results demonstrate that belonging to IGs is an influential factor in the relationship with conflict styles, regardless of the nature of the relationships among the members. Employees perceive their membership in IGs as a source of power, security, and protection (Slocum & Hellriegel, 2007).

Table 6: Pearson's Correlation Coefficients Between the Strength of the Relationship and Conflict-Handling Styles for Informal Group Members

		REL	IN	OB	DO	AV	CO
REL	**Pearson Correlation**	**1**	**.140**	**-.072**	**.135**	**-.176**	**.141**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.121	.430	.136	.052	.121
	N		123	123	123	123	123
IN	Pearson Correlation		1	.340**	.370**	-.020	.672**
	Sig. (2-tailed)			.000	.000	.823	.000
	N			123	123	123	123
OB	Pearson Correlation			1	.115	.521**	.254**
	Sig. (2-tailed)				.206	.000	.005
	N				123	123	123
DO	Pearson Correlation				1	-.169	.266**
	Sig. (2-tailed)					.062	.003
	N					123	123
AV	Pearson Correlation					1	.054
	Sig. (2-tailed)						.552
	N						123
CO	Pearson Correlation						1
	Sig. (2-tailed)						
	N						123

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

4.4. Types of Informal Groups and Conflict Styles

One-way analysis of variance is used to identify the differences between types of IGs regarding the use of the five conflict management styles. These IGs differ with regard to purpose of formation. Friendship group members are looking for friendship in contrast to interest group members who prioritize common member interests. Members of reference groups view the group as a standard by which they evaluate their own performances, capabilities, and skills. However, the results reveal no preference for one style over another among these three types of IGs.

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Table 7: ANOVA test for the differences between friendship informal group, interest informal group, and reference informal group in using integrating style

ANOVA					
Integrating style					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	30.947	2	15.474	.819	.443
Within Groups	2265.849	120	18.882		
Total	2296.797	122			

** Sig. is 0.433 > 0.05, there is not significant difference between the groups

Table 8: ANOVA test for the differences between friendship informal group, interest informal group, and reference informal group in using dominating style

ANOVA					
Dominating style					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	33.078	2	16.539	1.362	.260
Within Groups	1457.524	120	12.146		
Total	1490.602	122			

** Sig. is 0.260 > 0.05, there is not significant difference between the groups

Table 9: ANOVA test for the differences between friendship informal group, interest informal group, and reference informal group in using compromising style

ANOVA					
Compromising style					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	3.756	2	1.878	.368	.693
Within Groups	612.943	120	5.108		
Total	616.699	122			

** Sig. is 0.693 > 0.05, there is not significant difference between the groups

Table 10: ANOVA test for the differences between friendship informal group, interest informal group, and reference informal group in using avoiding style

ANOVA					
Avoiding style					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	57.453	2	28.727	1.338	.266
Within Groups	2575.620	120	21.464		
Total	2633.073	122			

** Sig. is 0.266 > 0.05, there is not significant difference between the groups

Table 11: ANOVA test for the differences between friendship informal group, interest informal group, and reference informal group in using obliging style

ANOVA					
Obliging style					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	19.872	2	9.936	.626	.536
Within Groups	1904.729	120	15.873		
Total	1924.602	122			

** Sig. is 0.536 > 0.05, there is not significant difference between the groups

Table 12: Hypotheses Summary

Hypothesis	Support	Finding
H1	Yes	IGs tend to use dominating style more than NIGs.
H2	No	No significant evidence that NIG employees use an integrating style more than IG employees.

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H3	No	No significant evidence that NIG Employees use a compromising style more than IG employees.
H4	No	No significant evidence that NIG Employees use an obliging style more than IG employees.
H5	No	No significant evidence that IG Employees use an avoiding style more than NIG employees.

5. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The results may not be generally applicable to organizations in other cultures. US society is individualistic, with values and norms that differ from those in collectivistic societies. According to Gudykunst (2003), individualistic societies tend to engage in more conflicts than collectivistic societies. Individuals in individualistic societies focus on self-interest rather than group interests in contrast to their counterparts in collectivistic societies (Forsyth, 2010).

Furthermore, this study focuses on current employees in US organizations without distinguishing between public or private organizations, whose features may vary. Rainey and Bozeman (2000) mention that public and private sectors usually differ in terms of organizational change, motivation, styles of management, and organizational culture. Therefore, in future research, it would be beneficial to include samples from different cultures focusing on different types of organizations. This would reveal more about the influence of joining IGs in terms of the group members' conflict styles with supervisors

6. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to identify the role that IGs play in organizational conflict by comparing the behaviors of IG employees and NIG employees regarding how they handle conflicts with their supervisors. Focusing on conflicts with supervisors is essential due to the sensitivity and significance of the employee-supervisor relationship. This study makes a significant contribution to the literature on management science, especially in the human resources and organizational behavior fields.

The results revealed that IG members are not in fact competitive in their conflicts with supervisors and tend to use integrating and compromising conflict styles even more than their NIG counterparts demonstrating care for their own and other parties' well-being. These findings contribute to a more accurate and comprehensive understanding of the behaviors of IG members which can aid management in understanding IG membership and conflict management styles in the workplace.

It may also provide guidance to organizational planners regarding whether or not to encourage IG formation in the workplace. Hopefully, this study paves the way for future research, including perspectives and experience of management.

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SURVEY (DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS + RAHIM INSTRUMENT)

This study aims to understand how informal groups affect the way their members handle conflicts with supervisors. Informal groups refer to groups formed by employees as a result of a common interest or friendships among them. Informal groups are not formed by

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the management of organizations; thus, they differ from formal groups (e.g., task groups).

Please take into consideration accuracy and honesty while answering all the questions. You are not required to include your name or any other identifying information.

Gender:

o   Male

o   Female

Age (in years)

Region

o   Northeast

o   Southeast

o   Midwest

o   Southwest

o   West

Do you belong to informal groups in your organization?

o   Yes

o   No

Specify the type of the informal group to which you belong:

o   Interest Group (formed based on common interests)

o   Friendship Group (formed based on friendships and relationships)

o   Reference Group (formed based on self-assessment for comparison with others)

How do you describe your relationship with your informal group?

o   Low

o   Moderate

o   High

Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory–II, Form A

Please check the appropriate box after each statement to indicate how you handle disagreements or conflicts with your supervisor. Try to recall as many recent conflict

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situations as possible when ranking these statements.

Integrating style:

I try to investigate an issue with my supervisor to find a solution acceptable to both of us.

- A- Strongly Disagree
- B- Disagree
- C- Neutral
- D- Agree
- E- Strongly Agree

Obliging style

I generally try to satisfy the needs of my supervisor.

- A- Strongly Disagree
- B- Disagree
- C- Neutral
- D- Agree
- E- Strongly Agree

Dominating style

I use my influence to get my ideas accepted.

- A- Strongly Disagree
- B- Disagree
- C- Neutral
- D- Agree
- E- Strongly Agree

4- Avoiding style

I usually avoid open discussion of differences with my supervisor.

- A- Strongly Disagree

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B- Disagree

C- Neutral

D- Agree

E- Strongly Agree

5- Compromising style

I try to find a middle course to resolve an impasse.

A- Strongly Disagree

B- Disagree

C- Neutral

D- Agree

E- Strongly Agree

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