Conflict Management Styles: The Iranian General Preference Compared to the Swedish

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Abstract— Conflict occurs when needs and desires of two individuals or parties are contradicting, consciously or unconsciously. In other words, conflict happens when parties are not getting what they want. Consequently, proper resolution is inevitable to avoid tensions and stresses that conflict may cause. Awareness of how people generally prefer to deal with conflict in an organization seems extremely crucial for leaders to play their leading role properly.

Thomas-Killman Conflict Mode Instrument is broadly implemented to evaluate how people deal with conflict. Assertiveness and cooperation are two key parameters that are used by this instrument to assess people's preference for how to deal with conflict, resulting in five distinguishable modes: avoiding, compromising, accommodating, competing and collaborating. 36 engineering students and 21 experienced engineers from Iran along with 25 Swedish students answered questions of this instrument.

Results imply both Iranian naive engineers and experienced engineers mostly prefer to avoid conflict. Similarly, both of them generally showed a lack of interest in competing mode. However, the results indicate that gaining experience intensifies the interest to avoid and disinterest to competing mode. On the other hand, the general preference of Swedish students for dealing conflict purports a profound contradiction with Iranian case showing a great sense of assertiveness rather than cooperativeness. The difference between the Iranian and the Swedish public preference is justified by their cultural dimensions.

Index Terms—**Conflict Management style, Thomas-Kilmann Instrument**

I. INTRODUCTION

There are always few things that can please everybody. Conflict occurs when needs and desires of two individuals or parties are contradicting, consciously or unconsciously. In other words, conflict happens when parties are not getting what they want. Since people normally possess different traits and characteristics, lack of conflict may indicate lack of any meaningful interaction.

Why conflict and conflict management should be a place of concern for organizations? To answer to this question directly, it should be considered that human beings are the most influential part of each organization. So, they bring

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conflict to organization when mingle in an organization. The dysfunctional conflicts among individuals have proved to have a negative impact on organizational efficacy and performance. Also, not exploiting constructive conflict is a place of loss for each organization. Any attempt to manage and lead an organization without taking into consideration probable conflicts, inevitably results in failure. That is the reason of why managers spend up to 30 percent of their valuable time to handle conflict and why conflict management as an undetachable part of leadership is as significant as planning, communication and motivation [1].

There are lots of studies that have probed how people respond to conflict and what the most frequent conflict management styles are. However, there is no study available to determine Iranian public preference of choice of conflict management styles. So, this study designed to determine prevalent conflict management modes among Iranian technical students and engineers and compare them with prevalent conflict management style of Swedish students. Perceiving the way that people handle conflict is the first crucial pace in being able to devise effective strategies to help Iranian young engineers constructively handle inevitable conflicts through their career and speed up the process of their personal and professional development.

II. BACKGROUND

A. Definition of Conflict

Conflict can be defined as an incongruity of desires, goals or values between individuals or groups, including attempts to prove their own position accompanying mutual antagonistic feelings [2]. Similarly, it can be comprehensively described as "... a process that begins when one party perceives that another party has negatively affected, or is about to negatively affect, something that the first party cares about" [3]. In fact, a clash of desires, values, interests, attitudes, manners and methods usually spark a conflict.

B. Root Causes of Conflict

There are lots of causes that can initiate a conflict. Conflict can be started by poor communication, dissatisfaction caused by management style, desire to obtain power, ineffective leadership, lack of openness and so on. Three distinct main drivers of conflict can be recognized as: Power, Value and Economic [4]. Power conflict happens once each party or individual is struggling to obtain more power and influence on each other that demands less power and influence of another one. Value conflict is a result of inconsistency in people's culture and way of life. It got affected by how

people define rightness and it involves ethical issues as well. Economic conflict originates conflict in people's attempts to fight for resources that are always scarce. For example, two project managers in a matrix-structure organization should fight for shared resources [5] that may cause destructive conflict if not be handled properly. Ambiguity (obscure goals and imprecision), the nature of activities and roles and a change in external ambient can be seen as other sources of conflict [6].

C. Conflict and Organization

In traditional view which was dominant about group behavior through 1930s and 1940s, conflict was regarded as a major obstacle for proper function and had to be avoided in all aspects at all costs. The more modern approaches towards conflict were initiated by human relations scientists. They emphasized conflict as an inevitable natural phenomenon in human interactions that should be managed properly [7].

The paradigm in which conflict was seen as a negative natural phenomenon was abolished soon. In fact, conflict can be seen as a creative force and the only thing that should be done is to exploit this driver to innovate more. Therefore, the need for innovation can be intensified when things are not being run smoothly. Hence, managers are advised "keeping team conflict alive" [8]. Generally speaking, conflict is both good and bad thing. However, the manner by which conflict is handled can use conflict constructively or destructively [9]. Nowadays, conflict is assessed in terms of functionality that can either contribute organizational growth or hinder the efficacy and performance [10]. However, the dysfunctional conflict among individuals has proved to have a negative impact on organizational efficacy and performance [11].

It has been shown that effective conflict management has a straightforward and positive impact on team cohesion. It also alleviates the negative impact of relationship conflict and task conflict on team cohesion. In reality, effective conflict management can change downside effect of relationship conflict and task conflict on team cohesion to some positive impacts [12]. Nevertheless, effective conflict management as an important part of leadership is possible only based on knowledge and awareness.

D. Conflict Management Styles

Managerial theories categorize different strategies of dealing with conflict. A common definition is that people choose five different gestures once confronting conflict: Avoiding, Accommodating, Competing, Compromising and Collaborating. While avoiding strategy orients toward neglecting conflict, accommodating strategy lean towards adaption and concession. Alternatively, competing strategy is based on gaining or aggrandizing power and authority, whereas compromising strategy seeks for sharing. Finally, collaborating strategy orients towards integration (Table I).

In fact, these five individual's conflict modes are assessed along with two principle dimensions: Assertiveness and Cooperativeness. Assertiveness attributes the quality in which person attempts to settle his or her own concerns, whereas cooperativeness addresses to some extend person is concerned to satisfy others' wishes [13].

TABLE I . DEFINITION OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STYLES [14]

Style	Definition
Avoiding	Neglect the conflict or deny the availability of conflict. One seeks for neither own concerns nor others'. In this mode, one prefers to evade an issue or put it off until later. (Unassertive and uncooperative)
Accommodating	Overlook own concerns to satisfy those concerns of others. It is a form of selfless generosity that followed by yielding to others' wishes when one would prefer not to do. (Unassertive and cooperative)
Compromising	Seek for a mutually acceptable solution that satisfy both parties partially via addressing some concerns of both parties and neglecting others by exchanging concessions and finding a middle-ground position. (Moderately assertive and moderately cooperative)
Competing	Seek for own concerns at the expense of others' concerns by using all appropriate power to win the position and defend something that is believed to be correct. (Assertive and uncooperative)
Collaborating	Pursuit of all concerns of both parties through a solution that satisfy both parties completely as a result of parties collaboration to address all underlying concerns and attempts to find alternatives to satisfy all of them. (Assertive and cooperative)

Fig 1 illustrates the relation between these five distinct strategies along with assertiveness and cooperativeness. In different textbook this styles may be addressed with different terminology. For example, some researchers use Integrating, Obliging, Dominating to refer to Collaborating, Accommodating, Competing styles, respectively [15].
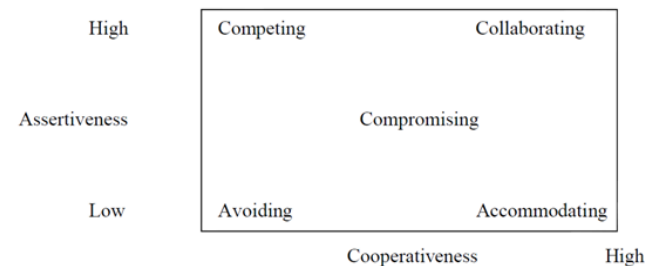

Fig 1. Conflict grid [16]

As it is claimed, awareness of how people prefer to deal with conflict seems extremely crucial for leaders to play their leading role properly. Therefore, through these years researchers have been trying to illuminate how people deal with conflict and what is the impact of their preference on the performance and efficacy of their organization. For example, a study has shown that when superiors implementing competing and avoiding styles of conflict to deal with conflict, their subordinates view them as incompetent superior, consequently resulting in job dissatisfaction. Conversely, subordinates are more satisfied when superiors exercise collaborating, compromising and accommodating conflict modes [15].

E. Conflict Modes and cultural dimensions

Public preference of conflict modes are strongly correlated to cultural patterns. According to Hofstede, there are five cultural dimensions: power distance index (PDI), Individualism (IDV) vs. Collectivism, Masculinity (MAS) vs.

Femininity, Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI), and Long Term Orientation (LTO) vs. Short Term Orientation [17], [18]. A study has shown that manager's general preference of how to deal with conflict are correlated to the Hofstede's cultural dimension that describe the characteristic of national culture. This study shows that cultural dimension of Individualism and Masculinity significantly encourages a tendency of adopting competitive mode of conflict management. Similarly, quality of Uncertainty Avoidance begets a tendency to avoid conflict [19]. There is a reasonable consistency between this study and Valentine's. In contrast, Taiwanese-Chinese engineers with Chinese cultural dimensions (characterized by femininity, high power distance and high uncertainty avoidance) prefer treating disputes through burdensome administration routine and similarly most documented disputes must be ultimately settled be central governmental authority [20].

F. Conflict Modes, Gender and Organizational Level

Reference [21] has used Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Instrument mode to assess public preference of conflict management styles in term of gender. Her findings show that conflict management styles of Avoiding and Compromising is significantly used by all categories of nurses. Since nursing is a woman-dominated profession and the absolute majority of participants in her study were women, this selection of conflict management style can be considered based on gender perspective. It shows that women in different categories including staff nurse, nurse managers and deans have a least tendency to compete. Moreover, nurse managers and deans are not reluctant to collaborating style as much as staff nurse. It implicitly means placing in higher level in an organization may increase inclination to the assertiveness.

Another study has compared prevalent conflict styles between nursing students and students of allied health profession. Thomas-Kilmann Instrument was used to assess these students' conflict management preferences. Reviewing the results showed no considerable difference between graduate students and undergraduate students' general conflict mode for both two groups. Similarly, women and men represented similar preferences. However, students of these two groups had different choice of conflict management styles. While nursing students showed a great tendency towards compromise and then avoidance, students of allied health professions prevalently chose avoidance, followed by compromise and accommodation. Furthermore, competing style was the least common conflict management style among all participants [22].

Similarly, Slabbart has studied twenty five middle managers and twenty five junior managers from banking industry to figure out their conflict management styles via their answers to Thomas-Kilmann questionnaire. He has found that middle managers have a propensity towards assertiveness including competing and collaborating styles, while junior managers generally avoid the conflict. He has found junior managers unassertive and uncooperative [22].

Prevalent conflict management styles based on gender perspective and organizational levels point of view seems a little perplexing. However, a recent study has tried to illuminate the impact of gender and organizational level on

preference of this choice. Thomas et al. have reviewed the answers of 400 fully-employed people in each six different organizational level, half women and half men. They have found that competing and collaborating styles (assertiveness) increases continually at progressively higher levels of organization, while avoiding and accommodating (unassertiveness) decreases. However, compromising correlates with organizational level, curvilinearly; decreasing in highest and lowest organizational levels. Through gender perspective, men showed much more tendency to competing styles at all six organizational levels compared to women. Therefore, they have claimed that conflict management styles of men and women are not converging at higher organizational level, in contrast to a traditional view. Furthermore, competing style is the least prevalent conflict mode [24]. Findings of a Chinese research group are in accordance with this study. Data of 52 top management team members in 16 Chinese entrepreneurial high tech companies has delineated that collaborating (assertiveness) is the most common choice of conflict management approach among them to deal with conflict [25].

Finally, what is the impact of role and situation on preferred choice of conflict management? Since men and women plays different roles at home and at work, according to the role theory they would implement different conflict handling mode in these two different situations. For both genders competing style is used more frequently and accommodating style is used less frequently at work than at home. While men managers are more likely to compromise at work than at home, tendency of low level women managers to collaborate is stronger at home than at work [26]. Thus the situation can affect people's preference of conflict management styles.

III. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The main aim of this study is to map the pattern of Iranian choice of conflict management styles to not only to equip professional engineers and managers with Iranian prevalent conflict management styles, but also develop some ideas for further complementary studies. This study aims to determine (1) common conflict management styles chosen by Iranian engineering students and Iranian engineers and to compare these styles with each other and with prevalent conflict management styles chosen by Swedish technical students and (2) whether the cultural dimensions or gender are correlated to these styles. This study is directed by following research questions:

1. What are the common conflict management styles chosen by Iranian technical students (imminent graduates)?

2. What are the common conflict management styles chosen by Iranian experienced engineers (mostly not playing a managerial role)?

3. How do common conflict management styles of Iranian students contrast to those of Iranian engineers?

4. How much dose obtaining job experiences affect the prevalent choice of conflict management styles?

5. Is there any considerable difference in the choice of common conflict management styles between Iranian men engineers and Iranian women engineers?

6. What are the common conflict management styles chosen by Swedish technical students?

7. How is the common choice of conflict management contradicting between Iranian and Swedish?

8. Are the findings interpretable by cultural dimensions theory?

IV. SCOPE

The main research question of this study is:

How do the Iranian and the Swedish often respond to conflict?

However, there are some general questions that are partially answered through this research:

1- How do prevalent conflict management styles vary by experiencing a career?

2- How do prevalent conflict management styles vary by gender?

3- How do prevalent conflict management styles vary by cultural dimensions?

This study focuses on how Iranian students and engineers (and Swedish students) respond to conflict, preferably. Although root causes of conflict is also discussed, however conflict resolution methods is not addressed by this study. This study is concentrating on public preference of conflict management styles among studied people and seeking for correlation between this preference and other general traits of studied people to find the root causes of such a preference.

Since this study is going to be presented as a master thesis with a limited time, general figures are projected by limited number of participant. Although the number of participants is limited, statistical figures are described thoroughly and findings are assessed by existing dominant theories.

V. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To assess present paradigm within Iranian engineering students and Iranian engineers, an evaluative approach should be designed. Although this paradigm is going to illuminate for professional engineers and managers how Iranian naive and experienced engineers respond to conflict to enable them to play their leading role more effectively, It will be a place of interest for researchers because it may falsify or validate existing theories. Since, Iranian engineering students are not being trained formally how to handle conflict, their mental models are probably based on traditional perspective of conflict (dysfunctional object), however the Swedish students are being taught how to handle conflict. To explore how Iranian engineers respond to conflict this study is designed to be both deductive and inductive. Through this study, a general pattern is developed to describe Iranian frequent responses to conflict. However, the findings are assessed along with existing theories; Consistency between results of this study and existing theories (and other studies) would strengthen findings of this study and validate existing theories. Similarly, when the findings of this study are in contradiction with existing theories, both findings and present theories would be weakened.

Hence, evaluative approach of this study is designed as follow. Data is collected via standardised Thomas-Kilmann conflict mode instrument (TKI) questions, consisting of 30 forced two-choice questions. The reason behind that was this fact that TKI has been implemented in the majority of researches on conflict management. This instrument is seen as a standard tool in different business and governmental organizations. Twelve is the maximum score can be devoted to each special conflict mode. Participants should answer each question by choosing either A or B which attributes their prevalent response to conflict. It was urged that participants should adjust their answers in relation with their colleagues and peers, since conflict management styles generally differ in accordance to the situation. The five possible styles were explained as conflict grid which characterizes assertiveness and cooperativeness of participants.

Participants were randomly selected from students of Iran University of Science and Technology and engineers from three different companies. All in all, thirty six students and Twenty one engineers replied the questionnaires completely. Iranian students were all undergraduate junior and senior or graduate students. Iranian engineers were mostly from non-managers staff to keep a firm definition of the target group. In addition, Swedish students were asked to reply this questionnaire to give data for comparison. Twenty five students from KTH Royal Institute of Technology answered the questions. Table II shows the distribution of participants based on gender.

TABLE II. NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS BY DISCIPLINE AND GENDER

Discipline	Men	Women	Total
Iranian technical students	36	0	36
Iranian engineers	13	8	21
Swedish technical students	16	9	25

VI. RESULTS

Table III. demonstrates the mean value and standard deviation of total scores derived for each group. The maximum standard deviation is 2.42.

Fig. 2 shows the Iranian prevalent conflict management styles. This figure is depicted based on the average scores of mean scores for Iranian engineering students and Iranian engineers. As it is obviously can be seen, avoiding and compromising are the most common conflict handling mode among the Iranian, whereas competing is the least popular conflict management mode.

TABLE III. MEAN SCORE AND STANDARD DEVIATION FOR THREE DISCIPLINES

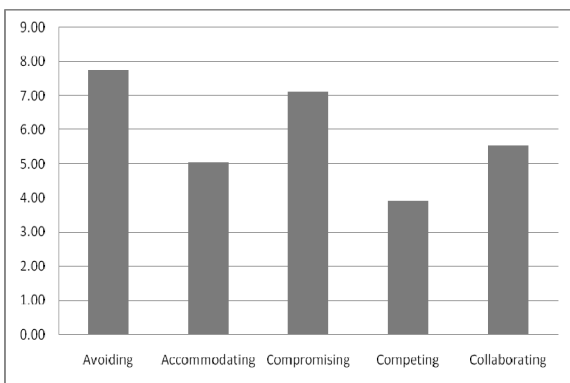| Discipline		Avoiding	Accommodating	Compromising	Competing	Collaborating
Iranian technical students	MEAN	7.47	5.00	7.19	4.72	5.61
	STDEV	1.70	2.43	1.83	2.37	1.79
Iranian engineers	MEAN	7.90	5.62	7.43	3.33	5.71
	STDEV	1.95	2.31	2.04	2.33	1.52
Swedish students	MEAN	6.08	5.58	5.75	6.00	6.58
	STDEV	2.35	2.02	1.82	1.86	2.15

Fig 2. Prevalent conflict management styles among the Iranian

Fig 3. Demonstrate Iranian engineering students' choice of conflict handling versus Iranian engineers' choice. According to this graph, Iranian students and Iranian engineers have a similar tendency towards conflict handling. Avoiding is the most common choice, followed by compromising, collaborating, accommodating and finally competing, in both two groups. The most considerable difference between these two groups is their propensity towards competing mode. It seems reasonable to conjecture that experiencing a career reduces the selection of competing as a way of dealing with conflict. Iranian engineers can be characterized by extremely low level of tendency to competing style relative to other styles.
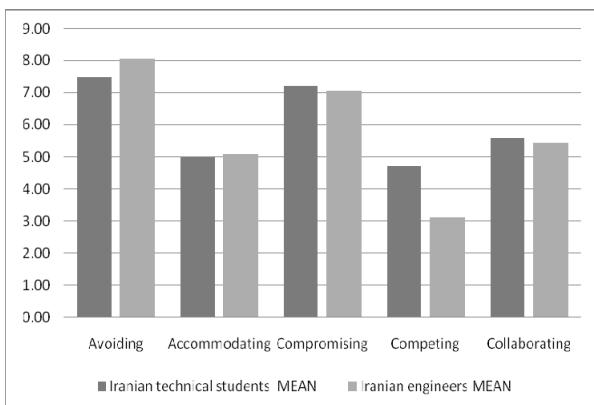

Fig 3. Prevalent conflict management styles
(Iranian students vs. Iranian engineers)

Fig 4. compares prevalence of conflict management styles

between Iranian students and Swedish students. As can be seen, while collaborating style is ranked third among Iranian preference to handle conflict, it is the most dominant choice among Swedish students. Similarly, unlike the Iranian preference, accommodating style is the least common mode among Swedish students. Generally speaking, while Swedish students show a tendency to assertiveness, the Iranian prefer cooperativeness.

The dominant conflict handling mode among Iranian women engineers seems to be compromising. As it is illustrated by fig. 5. compromising and competing styles are slightly more popular among women than men. Conversely, Iranian women engineers are employing less avoiding, accommodating and collaborating styles than men.
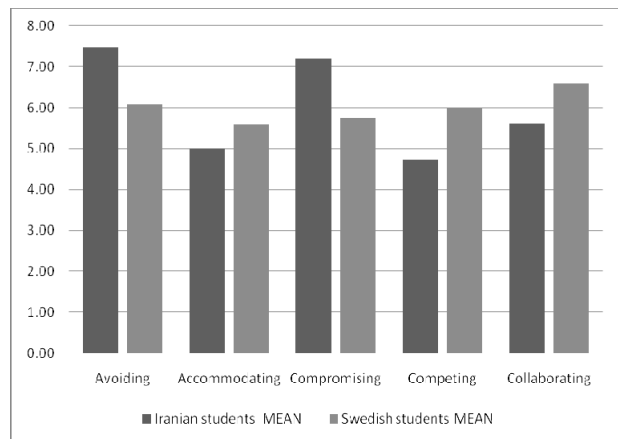

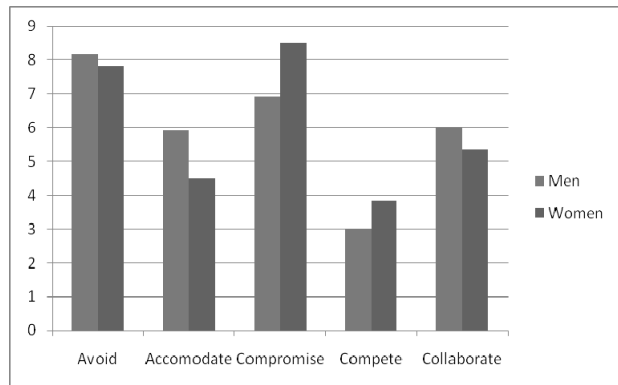Fig 4. Iranian students vs. Swedish students

Fig 5. Conflict management styles among Iranian engineers (men vs. Women)

Effective conflict management demands the use of various conflict handling modes. Hence, participants who scored at or above 75th percentile in more than one conflict mode may have the potential of effective conflict management. Table IV summarise how many people of all participants scored at that level. Only 33 percent of participants use two or three conflict modes more often than the most of the normed group. Data used here comes from an updated normative sample by [27].

Table V. demonstrated the frequency with which different conflict management styles were chosen above 75th percentile level. According to this comparison the most recognizable distinction is that 53 percent of participants chose avoiding style above 75th percentile level of the

normed group. This table also shows the frequencies with which conflict management styles were used under 25th percentile.

TABLE IV. NUMBER OF STYLES ABOVE 75TH PERCENTILE OF NORM AMONG ALL PARTICIPANTS

Number of styles greater than 75th	Frequency of participants	Percent of participants	Cumulative percent
0	8	14	14
1	30	53	67
2	17	30	97
3	2	3	100
Total	57	100	

TABLE V. PERCENTAGES OF PARTICIPANTS ABOVE 75TH AND BELOW 25TH PERCENTILE NORMED GROUP

	Percent >75th percentile	Percent <25th percentile
Avoiding	53	5
Accommodating	30	28
Compromising	14	14
Competing	23	28
Collaborating	3	21

VII. DISCUSSION

Based on the results, the most prevalent choice of conflict management styles among Iranian engineering students and Iranian engineers is avoiding, followed by compromising, collaborating and accommodating, respectively. Conversely, competing is the least common choice among these people. According to the Hofstede's cultural dimensions, Iran is characterized by "collectivism" and "masculine" with moderate uncertainty avoidance and slightly large power distance [17]. Reference [19] has shown that high uncertainty avoidance encourage avoiding style, while individualism and masculinity begets propensity of competing mode. Hence, studied Iranian's tendency to use avoiding mode can be explained by its moderate uncertainty avoidance characteristic. Similarly, their reluctance to competing mode is correlated to their low degree of individualism.

Although based on [19] the degree of masculinity should encourage competing style, studies Iranian show little interest towards competing. This contrast can be explained by this fact that probably the impeding effect of high degree of collectivism (instead of individualism) may undermine the encouraging effect of masculinity towards competing style. Furthermore, studied Iranian were not managers, while [19] has studied project managers and [24] has shown that organizational level may result in increasing propensity towards competing.

Strong interest of studied Iranian towards avoiding and then compromising styles is in complete accordance with nurses' interest towards this two conflict management styles. However, it may weaken valentine's conclusion which try to attribute this interest to this fact that nursing is a women-dominant profession and consequently may enfeeble her argument that selection of conflict management style can be considered based on gender perspective.

Based on our findings, students' tendency towards avoiding style is slightly less than tendency of engineers with some years experience towards this mode. However, engineers use competing style drastically less than engineering students. For engineers the mean score of avoiding mode is just over 8, while competing mean score is just over 3. This finding is weakened by the results of another study carried out by Thomas et al. There are extremely limited studies to show how people's attitude towards competing conflict mode varies while they are getting experienced. Thomas et al. Have shown how organizational level affects the choice of conflict handling mode. They have used six different organizational levels started with entry level, followed by non-supervisory, supervisory, management, executive and top executive. That seems reasonable to adapt studied engineering students and studied engineers by entry level and non-supervisory level, respectively. While competing mode is less common among engineers than students, non-supervisory employees show slightly more tendency to use competing style than entry level.
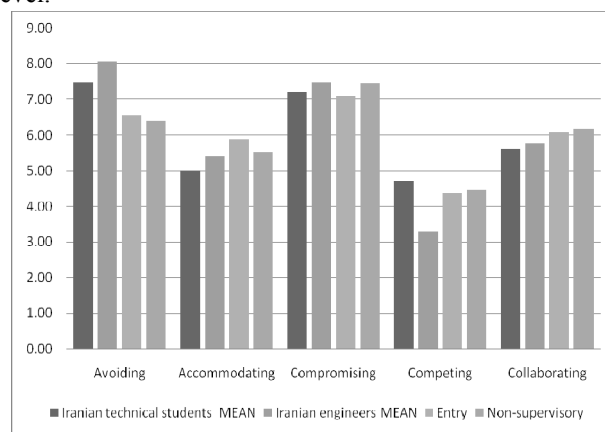

Fig 6. Comparison between two studies

Fig. 6. demonstrates a thorough comparison among results of Iranian engineering students, Iranian engineers, entry level employees and non-supervisory level employees. The result of these two latter groups comes from Thomas et al. who have studied 400 employees in different organizational level from different ethnicity mostly Caucasian, African American and Hispanic. The general pattern selecting conflict management styles seems almost similar to Iranian preference. Avoiding and compromising are still the most favourite conflict mode, followed by collaborating, accommodating and competing.

Strong inclination for assertiveness rather than cooperativeness among Swedish people may seem doubtful at first glance. To discuss how Swedish students handle conflict, cultural dimensions of Sweden must be studied. According to Hofstede's cultural dimensions, Sweden is characterized by individualism, femininity, small power distance and weak uncertainty avoidance. Accepting the findings of Mohammed et al., which correlates individualism to competing and uncertainty avoidance to avoiding styles, the Swedish students response is completely in conformity with their cultural dimensions.

Many studies have tried to probe the impact of gender difference of preferred conflict management styles [28],

resulting in contradictory conclusions. However, there is a fairly general agreement among all empirical literatures that competing conflict management style is more common among men than women [24]. Also, women prefer cooperativeness more than assertiveness. However, our findings about impact of gender difference on conflict styles don't seem to be in accordance with others.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The initial result of this study is that Iranian engineering students and Iranian engineers have similar prevalent conflict management styles. For them, the most frequent conflict handling style is avoiding, followed by compromising, collaborating, accommodating and finally competing. That means studied Iranian' handling conflict can be characterized by more cooperativeness and less assertiveness. This study also shows that the degree of cooperativeness among Iranian engineers is in higher level than engineering students that purports experiencing a career can reduce assertiveness of engineering students. This behaviour is rooted in engineers' extreme reluctance to use competing mode to handle conflict.

Conversely, Swedish students seem to be more assertive and less cooperative. Their prevalent conflict management style is collaborating, followed by competing, avoiding, compromising and accommodating.

As it was obviously shown, the public behaviour of the studied Iranian and studied Swedish to handle conflict are different. It may be first conjectured that obvious differences between two countries such as geography, weather, type of government, religion and traditions are the reasons of this difference. However, based on the above thorough discussion cultural dimensions can affect people's mode of managing conflict. Iranian cooperativeness is rooted in their collectivism and moderate uncertainty avoidance. Similarly, Swedish assertiveness must be reasoned to their individualism and weak uncertainty avoidance.

Furthermore, this study doesn't show that gender difference may have an impact on people's preference of conflict management styles. Both studied Iranian women and men showed more interests towards cooperativeness than assertiveness. For both men and women, compromising and avoiding are the most prevalent and competing is the least prevalent mode of conflict management.

IX. CRITICAL REVIEW

While evaluating the strength of the results of this study, here are some substantial limitations that must be put into consideration. First, The Thomas-Kilmann conflict mode instrument (TKI) relies on subjects' self-report instead of measuring how subjects would really handle a conflict situation [29]. However, there is no guarantee that people do whatever they say. They must answer global questions while imagining them self in a hypothetic conflict situation. However, being in a real conflict situation generally has an impact on people's feelings and emotions that may affect their real behaviour. It seems reasonable to conjecture that people are more self-sacrificed (cooperative) in their fantasy

than in real world. In addition, TKI measures how subjects express that they would handle a conflict. Since they are ipsative data, one can argue that is not logical to use them for inter-individual comparisons [30]. Furthermore, ipsativity of data and forced-choice format have resulted in psychometric and statistical bewilderment through the years. Most significantly, scores in these five different modes are not independent and must sum up to 30, a constant.

The attitude towards five distinct conflict modes seems to be disparate among different people. In other words, people have a different perception of these five conflict modes. For example, [31] has claimed that compromising style is considered so favourable. According to the conflict grid, compromising is seen as an intermediate mode of handling conflict along with terms of cooperativeness and assertiveness. However, it seems that compromising is conceived as moderately assertive and highly cooperative so that competitive people consider it as a foible that damages the strength of this mode. Therefore, the perception of compromising is strongly correlates to the preference of cooperation instead of competition. In other words, conflict grid should not be seen as an absolute reality, especially once talking about the location of compromising in this grid.

Moreover, competing and collaborating are viewed as assertiveness characteristic and people with avoiding and accommodating styles known as unassertive. However, this statement should be questioned. Unassertiveness is defined as person's tendency to satisfy others' concerns. That means when people choose avoiding and accommodating style they care about others' wishes. In fact, this statement would be weakened by this fact that people sometimes seems unassertive because they don't care at all. For example, when a person doesn't care about the organization where he or she is working in, he or she would probably choose to avoid conflict not bothering themselves. So, these different five conflict management styles may give a slightly false impression of their real meaning.

Also, a fact that can weaken findings of this study is the limited number of participants in this study was. Moreover, all participant students were from one Iranian and one Swedish campus. Participant engineers were all from just 3 different companies including this fact that participant women were from only one company.

Finally, students and engineers have different mental models. When students are asked to answer TKI 30 questions, they may imagine (or remember) a conflict situation that they may have with their classmates to be able to answer the questions. When engineers are asked to answer these questions, they might imagine (or remember) a conflict situation they may have with their colleagues. Hence, appearance of the questions are equal, however the conception of each question and statement may be different. In fact they answer slightly different questions.

X. RECOMMENDATIONS

This research should be redone with larger number of participants and more expansive sample groups considering different companies. Also, the TKI instrument used in this

study should be evaluated to determine if there is more reliable instrument to be used. Further study is needed to monitor the practical conflict management in actual conflict situation and determine how frequent different conflict handling styles are used in engineering environment. A new study can be conducted to measure conflict management styles of people, by others judgment about them instead of their self-report.

Considering the amount of past researches in conflict management styles based on gender perspective, profession perspective, organizational level, cultural dimensions, and job experience perspective, there is an essential need to call for further researches on various dynamics dealt with the relationship of conflict management styles and organizational performance. It is emphasized the need for researchers to pay more attention to the impact of different conflict management preference on the organizational efficacy.

It is also suggested to explore the root causes of people's different behaviour in handling conflict. This call is especially essential for competing mode, which this study showed is the less common conflict management styles among lots of people. It must be questioned if people's slight tendency towards competing conflict mode means that they are not interested in competing with each other and what the root causes are. For example, people may don't want to compete with each other because of lack of motivation. Researchers can develop training guidelines to support people to compete more effectively. If lack of interest towards competing style means a lower efficacy, it will be possible to use TKI to appraise how much the performance of an organization is. That means with such assumptions it seems possible to use TKI as a performance appraisal tool.

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