Gender Differences in Conflict Management Strategies of Leaders: The Mediating Effect of

Power Construal

Kira K. T. Krebs

S4357086

Department of Psychology: University of Groningen, Netherlands

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Abstract

The relationships between leaders and employees are relevant for the functionality of an organization. However, conflicts are frequently present between employees and their superiors in company environments. Managing conflict is a relevant task of the leader to ensure the functioning of the company. However, there are multiple strategies to handle conflict. Namely, avoiding, forcing, compromising, accommodating, and problem-solving. The present study will exclusively focus on problem-solving and forcing as conflict management strategies. Indeed, it will be assessed whether gender differences of the leaders influence their use of either forcing or problem-solving. Additionally, power construal was chosen as a relevant process explaining the influence of gender on conflict management. Hence, power construal is included as the mediator of the study. We designed a study (N=412), of which all were in managerial positions to test if there are negotiable differences in their conflict management. The results of the study have shown no significant results except a significant effect of power construal, in particular perceiving power as an opportunity, having a positive effect on forcing. Limitations and Implications will be addressed in the discussion section.

Keywords: leader, gender differences, power construal, conflict management

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Power Construal

Gender is a construct that is deeply involved in various aspects of society, especially when focusing on power dynamics (Ridgeway, 2011). Providing gender equality in workplaces still needs further development (Stainback et al., 2011), as inequality is grounded in many different aspects. Examples of these aspects are the typical hegemonic stereotypic beliefs about men's and women's skills concerning competence in work and leadership abilities (Gorman and Kmec, 2009; Ridgeway and Correll, 2004). However, in recent years, having a specific percentage of women employed in managerial positions has become mandatory. By 2026 members of supervisory boards or 33 percent of supervisory and management boards of listed companies in the EU must be female (BMFSFJ, 2022). Next to the mandatory percentage of women needing to work in higher manager positions, it has been found that companies benefit from women being in these positions. Gender diversity in leading positions can increase company performance, especially when focusing on innovation (Dezsö & Ross, 2012; Perryman et al., 2016). Furthermore, gender diversity in management has been associated with high job satisfaction among employees (Collins et al., 2014). However, the inclusion of women into business did not only uncover the benefits of women being employed in leadership positions. Additionally, research has found that men and women differ in their approaches to leading (Burke & Collins, 2001). These differences may include many essential responsibilities, inter alia, fulfilling the organization's strategy and mission, efficiently building teams, and managing conflict (Bolton et al., 2012; Tjosvold, 1998).

One of the leaders' many tasks is resolving interpersonal conflicts with the employees (Tjosvold, 1998). Conflict management is quite a general issue in any corporate workplace.

Runde and Flanagan (2012) found that 25-40% of the leader's time is invested in solving

conflict. As conflict can have destructive consequences for the cooperation, the leader, and the

employees, it is of great interest to investigate which conflict management strategies leaders use

to manage conflict (Katz & Flynn, 2013; Tjosvold, 1998). When differentiating between men

and women, women showed a tendency to use more collaborative strategies, while men used

dominant strategies (Gardiner & Tiggemann, 1999; Rosener, 2011; Rosenthal, 1998).

   Many factors can influence how leaders treat and solve interpersonal conflicts with their

employees. One possible explanation is called power construal. Power construal explains how

organizational leaders perceive and use their power (De Wit et al., 2017). This construct

influences a leader's power use (De Wit et al., 2017). How a leader construes their power affects

the relationship the leader has with their employees (Parmer & Dillard, 2019). This interesting

finding elicits the question of how these tendencies influence the conflict management styles of

leaders. However, to which extent a leader actively construes their power is again dependent on

the individual factors influencing their behavior. This could be, for example, their gender.

Literature research has not found specific data of power construal directly tested in connection to

gender. Nevertheless, De Wit et al. (2017) controlled for gender in their study, which examined

power construal connected to taking advice as a leader. Moreover, they did not find any very

essential outcomes, but slight differences in men construing their power more as an opportunity

while women slightly construing their power more as responsibility. The researcher states that

they do not expect gender differences to be a significant indicator for power construal.

Nonetheless, they admit that their study was not specifically designed to examine gender

differences. Additionally, many studies used gender only as a control variable (De Wit et al.,

2017; Fousiani & Wisse, 2022) which induces the opportunity to test the specific construct of gender having an effect on a leader construing their power.

As conflict is quite a reasonable construct to study in organizational structures, it is of interest to examine how the leaders, as being responsible for the conflict, use conflict management strategies. Analyzing factors that might influence this decision process can give valuable insight into workplace interactions between leaders and subordinates. As there are quite a few plausible factors, the present study narrows it down by including gender and power construal. Hence, this study will examine leaders' gender differences in choosing conflict management strategies towards their subordinate employees, being mediated by leader power construal. Specifically, whether men perceive their power as an opportunity and therefore use forcing conflict management strategies will be tested. Furthermore, it will be examined whether women perceive their power as responsibility which results in using collaborative conflict management strategies.

Gender and Leadership

Gender differences are a relevant topic in many aspects of society. Especially in the workplace, discrimination against women is still present. Women are seen as less suited to leadership positions (Stainback & Kwon, 2011). Even though this conflict is already for a pretty long time in discussion and evidence has been found that women are as suited for leadership positions as men, women are still underrepresented in leadership positions in Western societies (Wilson et al., 2014). Furthermore, in the big 500 S&P (market capitalization index of the U.S.) companies in the United States, the 5% quota of women needed to be employed in leadership positions did not increase in recent years (Catalyst, 2021). Even though gender discrimination in the workplace cannot be denied, women do not stop fighting for their equality and continue

pushing forward to gain more power in the business world. Sylvia Anne Hewlett (director of the Gender and Policy Program at Columbia University) stated that women do indeed have the ambition to dominate leadership positions against men (Perlroth & Miller, 2012).

Dominance is often attributed to men, while gender stereotypes associate women with being warm and gentle, not dominant or masculine. However, stereotypic traits associated with leadership are typically masculine (Eagly & Karau, 2002). When women are considered for leadership positions, it has been found that women can be better suited as leaders compared to men, because of their relationship-oriented leading styles (Burke & Collins, 2001). Therefore, gender diversity in management can benefit companies and employees (Collins et al., 2014; Dezsö & Ross, 2012).

When men and women are put into an accurate comparison of leadership, it is of great interest how they differ in their leadership behavior as it is often found to be very different (De Wit et al., 2017; Gardiner & Tiggemann, 1999; Rosener, 2011; Rosenthal, 1998). Women tend to engage in more prosocial relationship-oriented leading behaviors, while men tend to use more dominating and forcing leadership behaviors (Gardiner & Tiggemann, 1999; Rosener, 2011; Rosenthal, 1998). A characteristic of leadership that greatly influences a leader's behavior is how leaders construe their power (De Wit et al., 2017). Power construal impacts a leader's decision-making process as their power use characterizes it. This does not only impact the leaders themselves but also the people influenced by their decisions, often their employees. How a leader construes their power correlates with the relationship they have with their employees and therefore influences cooperation in the workplace (Sims & Szilagyi, 1975). The construct of power construals is intriguing to include in the present study and will thus be introduced in the following paragraph.

Power Construal

Power construal describes the perceptions leaders have of their power. This can be differentiated by seeing their power as either an *opportunity* or a *responsibility* (De Wit et al., 2017). Opportunity, in this case, means that a leader uses their power for benefits directed towards themselves. This means they want to benefit from it and to achieve this, and they dominate others. They do not consider others' needs and sacrifices into consideration as they only want to achieve their own goals (Fousiani & Wisse, 2022; De Wit et al., 2017; Maner & Mead, 2010). Responsibility, in contrast, means that these leaders focus on the great responsibilities they get through a high-power position. They are conscious of the people they are affecting with their decisions. Therefore, they consider not only their own needs and sacrifices but also those of the people included in their decision-making (De Wit et al., 2017; Fousiani & Wisse, 2022; Reiley & Jacobs, 2022). How leaders implement their power impacts the organization's social relationships, especially with the employees (Galinsky et al., 2015). Whether leaders use their power as responsibility or opportunity, influences their followers' perception and impacts their relationship (Liden & Erdogan, 2000). A leader using and perceiving their power as responsibility is positively associated with a good relationship quality with their employees, while power used as an opportunity is associated with a more negative relationship quality between leader and employee (Fousiani & Wisse, 2022).

Leaders that use their power as responsibility are more prosocial (Foulk et al., 2020). They want to find the most balanced solution from which everybody benefits (De Wit et al., 2017). They constantly exchange with their employees, listen to their goals and needs, and try to collaborate their own needs with the needs of their followers (De Wit et al., 2017; Sassenberg et al., 2014). As this orientation is directed towards prosocial working together, employees

experience their leader more positively and seek a relationship with them (Fousiani & Wisse, 2022; Van Lange et al., 2012). A responsibility power construal is associated with ethical leading, meaning those who use it aim to care for the people following them while contributing to their success (Treviño & Bown, 2014; Sassenberg et al., 2012).

However, when leaders use their power as an opportunity, their strategies are self-oriented, dominant, and authoritarian (Chen et al., 2014; Rus et al., 2010; Scholl et al., 2017). These leaders do not take their employee's well-being and opinions into consideration. Their power and position are tools to achieve their goals and interest (De Wit et al., 2017). In contrast, the prosocial responsibility construal is an opportunity construal associated with being antisocial, resulting in a negative relationship with the followers (Foulk et al., 2020; Siddique et al., 2020). These leaders only focus on their self-centered goals and therefore are challenged by a minimal gain of trust of their employees and problems finding committed followers (Graen et al., 1982).

In this study, we argue that whether a leader uses their power as a responsibility or opportunity is determined by the leader's gender. In particular, women tend to use their power as responsibility, while men, use it as an opportunity (Bormann et al., 1978; Chen et al., 2011; Rosener, 2011; Gardiner & Tiggemann, 1999; Rosenthal, 1998).

A decision made by a leader is a challenge as it includes both themselves and their followers (De Wit et al., 2017). An important aspect of decision-making is how the leader handles employee-leader conflict (Thomas, 1992). Due to the provided information, it is interesting to investigate whether conflict management strategies and power construal are associated. Therefore, power construal might mediate the conflict management strategies a leader uses. These strategies will be discussed next to understand conflict management further.

Conflict Management Strategies

Conflict management is a part of negotiating between two or more parties to achieve their goals. There are five types of conflict management often used in the workplace: Contending (forcing), Yielding (accommodating), Collaborating (problem-solving), Inaction (avoiding), and Compromising (De Dreu et al., 2001). Leaders can use conflict management strategies to achieve their goals and interests. Factors like gender or power construal might influence their selection of a conflict management strategy (Korabik et al., 1993; Fousiani et al., 2020). In the context of the present study, the paper will only focus on forcing and problem-solving as conflict management strategies of leaders with their employees. As these two strategies occur in negotiations with unequal power dynamics, and show a more active implementation than the other techniques (De Dreu et al., 2001), it is important to investigate them. Active implementation is especially important for leaders as they are responsible for solving work-related conflicts with their followers. By choosing active strategies, they try to be in control of the development and result of the conflict (De Dreu et al., 2001). Additionally, the two strategies are quite opposing and it is of interest to investigate whether power construals might lead a leader to use one of both contradicting conflict management strategies.

Forcing is a conflict management strategy that is characterized by being dominant and forcing others to achieve goals in a conflict situation (Blake & Mouton, 1964). Forcing is one of the active conflict management strategies and focuses strongly on its own outcomes, not the ones of the negotiation partners. To differentiate, active conflict management strategies focus on actively achieving the best outcomes for the negotiator, while passive conflict management strategies focus on meeting the needs of the negotiation partner (Dijkstra et al., 2011). People who use forcing use their persuasion by being dominant, threatening, and demanding (Blake

&Mouton, 1964). Forcers do not consider the wishes and needs of the other parties and do not value interpersonal relationships with their opponents. (Dijkstra et al., 2011).

Collaboration or problem-solving is the second active conflict management strategy (Blake & Mouton, 1964). Problem-solving is again highly concerned about its own outcomes but also considers the other parties' needs and wishes into consideration. Problem-solving is seen as constructive as it focuses on interpersonal relationships with the other parties and their benefits. Collaborators stay focused but are very friendly, assertive, and social and show great concern for other parties' outcomes (Blake & Mouton, 1970; Van de Vliert & Euwema, 1994). This conflict management strategy can solve conflict properly and supports the well-being of the relationships involved (Dijkstra et al., 2011).

Conflict management strategies need to be utilized by leaders in the workplace (Thomas, 1992). Which strategy leaders activate can be influenced by different factors. The present study will focus on the role of leader gender in conflict management strategies towards followers through the leader's construal of power as a responsibility or as an opportunity.

The Present Study

The present study investigates how leaders' gender influences their conflict management strategy when in conflict with subordinate employees. The literature has shown that women tend to use more collaborative conflict management strategies to resolve conflict with their employees, while men tend to decide on a forcing conflict management strategy to resolve conflict (Rubin, 1975; Holt & De Vore, 2005). Consequently, research has found gender differences in conflict management strategies exist. Besides, it is also important to distinguish which variables explain this association. The potential mediating variable the study will use is the leader's power construal. For instance, having a power construal of opportunity could be

positively associated with forcing, as the mutual approach is to act for only one's own benefit. A possible explanation would be that both constructs show similarities in being self-directed, dominant and having decreased quality of relationships between leaders and followers (Blake & Mouton, 1964; De Wit et al., 2017; Dijkstra et al., 2011; Fousinai & Wisse, 2022). In contrast, perceiving power is expected to be positively correlated with problem-solving as both initially approach prosocial working and conflict resolution behavior (Blake & Mouton, 1970; De Wit et al., 2017; Fousiani&Wisse, 2022; Van de Vliert & Euwema, 1994). Following this line of argumentation, it is reasonable that construing power as an opportunity is negatively correlated with problem-solving, and construing power as responsibility is negatively correlated with forcing.

The present study will investigate the potential mediating effect power construal might have on the two conflict management strategies. This is done to extend the explanations of gender differences among managers in conflict management. Therefore, the study will also test if men's power construal influences them to use one of the two management strategies. The mediation model can be found in Figure 1.

Accordingly, the hypotheses of the present paper are:

Hypothesis 1. The gender of the leaders influences the type of conflict management strategies they use, with men being more likely to use a forcing strategy and women being more likely to use a collaborative strategy when in conflict with their employees.

Hypothesis 2. The relationship between leader gender and conflict management strategies is mediated by leader power construal, such that men's tendency to use forcing strategies is explained by their view of power as an opportunity, whereas women's tendency to use collaborative strategies is explained by their view of power as a responsibility.

Figure 1.

Hypothesized Research Model
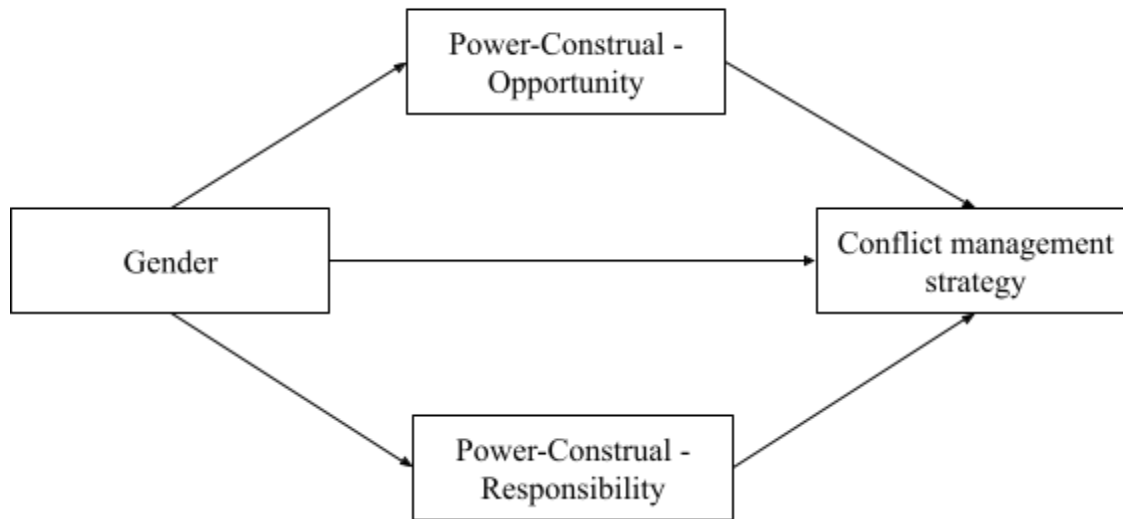
Methods

Participants

A total of 431 individuals participated in the study. However, 19 participants were excluded from the data analysis as they did not have managerial tasks. The remaining sample consisted of 412 participants who held managerial positions with an average age of 40.31 (SD=0.16). Of the participants, 209 were female, 201 were male, and two identified as "other". Regarding job positions, 4.4% were in top management, 50,4% were in middle management, 37% worked in lower management, and 8.2% held specialized and qualified positions. Furthermore, 44.8% of the participants had bachelor's degrees, and 18.9% had completed high school. Most participants were British (299 individuals), 106 were from America, four were from Ireland, and three were from other countries.

Procedure

The study recruited participants online through Prolific. To be eligible for the study, individuals had to work as a manager or supervisors in a company and be proficient in English. Participants were compensated for their time with 1 Euro per study wave. The study was conducted using Qualtrics. It was conducted in two waves with four weeks of time lag in between. At the beginning of each wave, participants were provided with a brief introduction to the topic and asked for their informed consent before proceeding with the survey. In the first wave, the participants were asked to complete questionnaires about themselves and their interactions with others in the workplace or broader social environment and provide demographic information, including gender. This part of the survey took approximately 15 minutes. Next to the demographical data, power construal was also measured in the first wave. Here the participants needed to indicate how they perceive their power in their organizational positions. This was done by proposing statements the participant needed to rate to the extent they agreed with the statement. In the last wave, participating supervisors were asked to recall a conflict with a subordinate employee they supervised within the last six months. They needed to describe their behavior during this conflict. Participants were debriefed at the end of the study, and an open-ended question was included to mitigate any discomfort caused by the survey. Participants were asked to write two or three sentences about the most enjoyable aspect of interacting with their employees.

Design

The study measured leader gender, power construal, and conflict management strategies.

Control Variables

In the statistical analysis, the control variable age is included. The involvement of a control variable is done to increase the internal validity of the model. The control variable limits

the influence of confounding and external variables. Age was included in the analysis as a

continuous variable and can influence a leader's conflict management. Most people in leadership

positions are older and have more work experience than younger employees. This can have an

influence on conflict management (Beitler & Zapf, 2018). Furthermore, dealing with conflict is

an ability that can change with aging (Beitler & Zapf, 2018). Additionally, when comparing

young leaders, they often show more competitive goal-focused orientations, while older behave

more calmly and use their experience and knowledge to resolve problems and conflicts (Pfeffer,

1983; Kabacoff & Stoffey, 2001). Consequential age might have an influence on leadership and

conflict management and is therefore added as a control variable.

Measures

***Gende*r**

Gender was measured right at the beginning of the survey in the first wave. Gender is

part of the demographic measurement and was measured as male, female, and other.

Power construal

In order to manipulate power construal, the questions designed refer to the study of De

Wit et al. (2017), which examined how leaders' power construal leads them to take or reject

advice. The scale includes six items, of which six cover statements about power perception, and

the seventh one is a control statement. An example statement is, "The opportunities that it gives

me to tell my subordinates what to do without asking them what they want to do." or " The

responsibilities to ensure that important goals of my subordinates are met.". The scale was split

into the items of opportunity and responsibility, therefore, Cronbach's alpha for the opportunity

items was .79 and for responsibility, Cronbach's alpha was .79. The statements must be rated on

a seven-point Likert scale (*1 = not at all true,7 = absolutely true*). The questions can be found in Appendix A.

Conflict management strategies

The conflict-management strategies of forcing and problem-solving were examined in this paper[1] Two scales of four items were used to assess the participant's conflict management strategies. Items such as "I pushed my own point of view" or "I examined ideas from both sides to find a mutually optimal solution" were based on conflict management strategies developed by De Dreu et al. (2001). These were used to determine which conflict management strategies managers or supervisors tend to use in conflicts with subordinate employees. Cronbach's alpha of the forcing scale was .8 and .69 for the problem-solving scale. Participants were asked to rate the questions on a seven-point Likert scale (*1 = not at all,7= to a great extent*). The questionnaire can be found in Appendix A.

Results

The correlations of the study variables included in the model can be found in Table 1.

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[1] Originally, the conflict management strategies questionnaires measured all five strategies, but the present will only include the measurement of forcing and problem-solving

Table 1.

Pearson correlation coefficients between study variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Age	1	.054	-.112*	.134*	.024	-.029
2. Gender	0.54	1	-.098	-.077	-.062	.105
3. PC_O	-.112*	-.098*	1	-.057	.176**	-.062
4. PC_R	.134*	.077	-.057	1	.080	.111
5. Forcing	.024	-.062	.176**	.080	1	.038
6. Problem-solving	-.029	.105	.-.062	.111	.038	1

*Note. *p < .05, **p < .01*

Mediation Analysis

The present study examines a mediation effect using the Process Hayes Model 4 in SPSS (Hayes, 2013; model 4). The study analyzes the potential effect of the gender of a leader on their conflict management strategies. Focusing on forcing and problem-solving. The mediation analysis adds the variable power construal to examine whether the power construal of each leader has an influence on the relationship between a leader's gender and their tendency to choose either forcing or problem-solving. In the mediation analysis, the control variable is added to the model as a covariate variable. The statistics of the mediation model can be found in Table 2 and Table 3.

Forcing

The first analysis included the dependent variable of forcing. First of all, H1, including the main effect of gender on forcing, was not found to be significant. The simple effects of gender on the mediators' opportunity and responsibility were also not found to be significant. H2 was not found to be significant. The only significant effect that was found was the positive main effect of the mediator opportunity on forcing as a conflict management strategy. The main effect of responsibility on forcing was not significant. The potential influence of leader gender on forcing can not be transmitted by power construal. The mediation model's Direct, Indirect, and Total effects, including the control variable, were all found to be non-significant.

Problem-solving

The second analysis included problem-solving as the dependent variable. H1 was not found to be significant. Gender does not have an effect on problem-solving. The simple effects of Gender on the mediators of opportunity and responsibility were insignificant. The main effects of the mediator's opportunity and responsibility on problem-solving were not found to be significant. Examining the mediation model. H2 was not found to be significant. The potential influence of leader gender on problem-solving can not be explained by power construal. Neither the Direct-, Indirect- or Total effects were significant.

Discussion

The study was conducted to test if the gender of the leaders has an influence on their conflict management strategies. In particular, women tend to use problem-solving to solve conflicts with their employees, and men use forcing to resolve conflicts with their employees (Davis et al., 2010; Holt & DeVore, 2005). It was hypothesized that women tend to be more collaborative leaders while men are more often dominating leaders (Gardiner & Tiggemann, 1999; Rosener, 2011; Rosenthal, 1998). However, this relationship has not been studied before in

a mediation model, including power construal as the mediator. To explain the potential

relationship, a mediation hypothesis was included. Hypothesis 2 proposed that the power

construal of the leader could explain why women use problem-solving strategies to resolve

conflict and men use forcing strategies. Power construal in this context is the perception of the

leader of their power (De Wit et al., 2017). None of the proposed hypotheses of the study were

found to be significant. This indicates that the gender of the leader, male or female, might not

influence the type of conflict management strategy they use. The second hypothesis is stating

that the power construal of the leader mediates the effect of leader gender on forcing or

problem-solving was also not confirmed. It can be concluded that how a leader perceives their

power does not necessarily explain why leader gender influences leader conflict management

strategies. The significant effect of power construal on forcing indicated that people construe

their power as an opportunity leading to show tendencies of using forcing conflict management

strategies.

Limitations and Future Directions

Multiple limitations can be found in the present study. First of all, the conflict

management scale, in general, is very established, accurate, and detailed. Nevertheless, forcing

and problem-solving are only measured with four items each which might reduce the possibility

of measuring the two constructs very precisely. However, problem-solving is a difficult construct

to measure, as problem-solving is very context-specific, in particular, for example, context

complexity, which needs further context-specific measurement possibilities (Batool & Hayat,

2019). Hence, the scale used has been revised and improved multiple times to increase its

accuracy. The missing strength of the mediation analysis of the present study could be explained

by the narrow and specific construct it measured. Overall, conflict management is very much

dependent on many different factors. Therefore, adding a moderator could be useful. Resolving

conflict depends on different factors, for example, the emotional state of the person managing the

conflict. A variable that can be useful to be included in the analysis would be the measurement of

the emotional regulation of the leader. Emotional regulation is connected to conflict management

and might be an additional fitting moderator to the analysis (Shih & Susanto, 2009). The current

study focused on forcing and problem-solving as conflict management styles. However, there are

three more, namely compromising, avoiding, and accommodating, which can be an addition or

alternative to study in the given research construct (De Dreu et al., 2001; Korabik et al., 1993).

As mentioned before, conflict management decisions are very dependent on different factors.

Therefore, adding the other three strategies could enlarge the pool of possible strategies for the

leaders. Consequently, the measurement might become more reflective of their accurate

behaviors (De Dreu et al., 2001).

Moreover, Research has investigated a lot of constructs analyzing gender differences,

also in regard to gender discrimination and maltreatment of females in environments like the

workplace. However, it can be argued that only focusing on gender differences as a significant

indicator of behavior is too limiting and often not necessarily a predictor of specific behavior

(Sent & Van Staveren, 2018). People are not only determined by their gender (Cho et al., 2013).

The intersectionality theory also states this. Therefore, the non-existing gender effect might be

explained by the fact that many more factors determine human behavior. Intersectionality theory

states that human identities are built by many more factors than the gender they are assigned to.

Additional formative factors include race, social class, sexuality, religion, etc. (Cho et al., 2013).

These factors necessary for identity formation could be included in future research to predict

behavior, specifically conflict management.

A different angle for future research would be to compare this construct in a cross-cultural setting. Cross-cultural studies concerning conflict management in the workplace have been done in the past, including gender differences (Holt & Vore, 2005; Tinsley & Brett, 2001). As the participants of this study have only been members of individualistic cultures, a cross-cultural extension may give more insight. It would be interesting to see if the tested constructs would indeed gather more significant results in collectivistic cultures. Another reason for the insignificant results is that online studies are sometimes less accurate measurements because people feel they need more time to answer the questions precisely and correctly. Furthermore, in online studies, participants sometimes do not read the questions carefully or even skip them. If they are forced to answer, they may click any kind of answer just to be able to proceed. That is the reason why reversed items are often included in Internet studies. However, it might happen that some questionnaires of the participants might be inaccurate. Lastly, power construal in relationships to power and conflict was tested before with the addition of the employee's response to the power holders. Employee perception of leaders' power use has already been successfully studied by Fousiani & Wisse (2022) before. Adding employee perception and relationship quality could be a suitable extension to the present project. This extension would include more people involved in organizational structures and could therefore give more insights into company relationships (Fousiani & Wisse, 2022). In addition, the variable "age" was incorporated as a control variable in the analysis. The correlations, as displayed in Table 1, indicate a significant positive relationship between age and power construal as a responsibility and problem-solving. In contrast, a negative correlation was observed between age and power construal as an opportunity. It is worth noting that the construct of age has previously been examined in relation to conflict management (Beitler & Zapf, 2018). These

current findings offer valuable insights for future research to explore the role of age within this

particular construct in greater detail.

Theoretical & Practical Implications

One theoretical practicality of the study is that using leaders as the sample is quite

unique. Leaders, in general, are a special group to study as they can significantly influence

organizational structure (Yukl, 2008). The sample of leaders is so special for conflict

management research as they are responsible for the conflicts and their management in the end

(Katz & Flynn, 2013; Tjosvold, 1998). Another specialty of this sample is the aspect of gender

diversity. As already mentioned, gender differences, especially in the workplace, are studied a

lot, and gender differences in leading positions are quite a societal topic (Ridgeway, 2011).

However, adding information towards such a sensitive topic like conflict management and not

only general ones. Additionally, the effect of gender diversity in general on conflict management

in organizations is a connection that has already been considered by other research and can

contribute significantly (Bordean et al., 2020).

Even though the results were insignificant, the results are a start for further research.

Aspects of the study have been found to be significant before but not specifically in this exact

construct. Therefore, conditions around this study might have to change. Conflict resolution is

already very dependent on many different factors, especially in the workplace, next to power

construal and gender (Fousiani et al., 2020; Korabik et al., 1993). Examples are resources, the

intensity of the leader-employee relationship, well-being, goals setting, etc. (Fousiani et al.,

2020; Fousiani & Wisse, 2022; Oxenstierna et al., 2011;) The study illustrates that gender

differences in conflict resolution in work settings are not easy to generalize and therefore need

more exploration. As these findings are in some ways contradicting to what has been found

before, for example, that indeed tendencies exist of women being more collaborative and men more likely to be forcing the study addresses some uncertainty. This context signifies the necessity of further research (Davis et al., 2010; Holt & DeVore, 2005). Furthermore, gender differences are a big topic that society focuses on, and many studies examine gender differences in the workplace. However, the present findings highlight that gender research can be contradicting and not easy to generalize (König et al., 2015).

Considering the practical implications of the research, the findings are important for big organizations that benefit from studies about power relationships in the workplace between leaders and their employees. These studies give organizations insights that they can use to develop strategies for better workplace atmospheres and collaboration between managers and employees. Moreover, conflict management is included in most organizational settings, particularly interpersonally, in teams, and between the executive floor and the subordinates. Therefore, organizations can benefit from these findings to overall improve organization-related conflicts. Every new study examining gender differences gives new insights into society. Furthermore, society can gain from this study as gender differences in the workplace are relevant for any working member of society. Additionally, conflict management can be found anywhere in society, not just in the work setting, which, therefore, should be interesting for ordinary people in general (interpersonal, politics, workplace, etc.)

Conclusion

In conclusion, the construct of the study was of great necessity. As already mentioned, the results were insignificant, but the information gathered is still useful. It is important to keep in mind, that even though in this specific context, no gender differences were found in the conflict management strategies of the leaders when focussing on problem-solving and forcing,

these findings are not ultimate. In particular, it only illustrates that research is not at their end

goals in this research domain. Furthermore, gender differences have already been discussed a lot

but these findings underline that gender differences should be analyzed carefully and not be

over-generalized too quickly. The present study examined a construct that is highly dependent on

the participants and their intrinsic, as well as, extrinsic influential factors, which is hard to study

and therefore needs more in-depth research.

However, the study introduced more directions science could approach to identify the

factors that explain leaders' conflict management strategies toward their employees.

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Table 2.

Mediating Effect of Power Construal on Gender and Forcing

Predictor	*B*	*SE*	*p*	*95% CI*
Mediator: Power construal (Opportunity/ Responsibility)				
Mediator: Leader Opportunity				
Gender	-.20	.16	.21	-0.52; 0.11
Age	- .02	.01	<0.05	-0.03; -0.00
Mediator: Responsibility				
Gender	.13	.11	.20	-0.07; 0.34
Age	.01	.01	.17	-0.00; 0.02
Dependent Variable: Forcing				
Opportunity	-.30	.13	.03	-0.57; -0.03
Responsibility	.06	.13	.64	-0.20; 0 .33

Gender	-.16	.16	.34	-0.48; 0.17

Indirect effect

Mediator	B	BootSE	Boot 95% CI
Opportunity	-.04	.03	-0.11; 0.02
Responsibility	.02	.02	-0.02; 0.07

Direct effects

	B	BootSE	Boot 95% CI
	-.16	.16	-0.48; 0.17

Total effects

	B	BootSE	Boot 95% CI
	-.67	.92	-2.53; 1.19

Table 3.

Mediating Effect of Power Construal on Gender and Problem-Solving

Predictor	B	SE	p	95% CI
Mediator: Power construal (Opportunity/ Responsibility)				

Mediator:

Leader Opportunity

Gender	-.20	.16	.21	-0.52; 0.11
Age	- .02	.01	<0.05	-0.03; -0.00

Mediator:

Responsibility

Gender	.13	.11	.20	-0.07; 0.34
Age	.01	.01	.17	-0.00; 0.02

Dependent Variable: Problem-solving

Opportunity	-.06	.06	.32	-0.17; 0.06
Responsibility	.16	.09	.07	-0.01; 0 .34
Gender	.26	.16	.0.1	-0.06; 0.57

Indirect effect

Mediator	*B*	*BootSE*	*Boot 95% CI*
Opportunity	.01	.02	-0.02; 0.06
Responsibility	.02	.03	-0.01; 0.09

Direct effects

B	*BootSE*	*Boot 95% CI*
.26	.16	-0.06; 0.57

Total effects

B	*BootSE*	*Boot 95% CI*
.29	.16	-0.02; 0.61

Appendix A

Power construal

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

In my work, I tend to see my power in terms of...

1. The opportunities that it gives me to tell my subordinates what to do without having to ask them what they want to do.

2. The responsibilities it gives me towards my subordinates and their needs.

3. The opportunities it gives me to make my own decisions without having to think about my subordinates' desires or needs.

4. The obligations it gives me towards my subordinates (e.g., take care of things that need to be done).

5. The opportunities it gives me to achieve goals that I find important for myself rather than for my subordinates.

6. The responsibilities to ensure that important goals of my subordinates are met.

Conflict management strategies

Whenever I have a disagreement or conflict with one of my subordinate employees, usually…

Forcing

1. I push my own point of view.

2. I try to maximize my own gains.

3. I fight for a good outcome for myself.

4. I do everything to win.

Problem-solving

1. I examine issues until I find a solution that really satisfies me and my employees.

2. I stand for my own and my employees' goals and interests.

3. I examine ideas from both sides to find a mutually optimal solution.

4. I work out a solution that serves my own as well as my employees' interests as good as possible.