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The influence of education levels and work experiences on the choice of conflict management styles: the case of employees of public banks in Ethiopia

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Abstract
This study examined the influence of two demographic variables such as, education levels and work experiences on the choice of conflict management styles of employees of Public Banks in Ethiopia. The study identified education levels and work experiences of employees as independent variables and conflict management styles of avoiding, compromising, dominating, integrating and obliging as dependent variables. A non-experimental survey research design was used. A random proportional sample selected from commercial bank of Ethiopia, construction & business bank and development bank of Ethiopia was used for the study. The *Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory- II* (*ROCI-II*) was used for the survey to collect data. Data were collected from employees at their workplace and yields a total of 301 responses giving a 77 % response rate. One-way analysis of variances was used to determine if differences exist in conflict-handling styles within the education and work experience groups. The findings point out that education levels influence the compromising style of conflict management. Besides, education levels, work experiences also influence the choice of employees' conflict-handling styles of avoiding, integrating and obliging. In conclusion, this study provides a more detailed and usable picture of the influence of education levels and work experiences on the choice of conflict management styles.

Keywords: Education Level, Work experience, Conflict Management Styles, Public Banks

Introduction
It is generally understood that whenever people come into contact with others, countless disagreements may arise. In most cases, it is the way in which people decide to respond to those disagreements that would determine whether a conflict situation might result, or not. Since the level of contact in organizations is high, there is a high probability for conflict to occur. The main point is, therefore, the issue is not whether conflict will occur, but how they will effectively respond to it. Considering the fact that there are a number of views of conflict individuals have to contend with, it is not therefore an easy task for them to identify the right strategies or styles to apply in order to successfully manage conflict situations.

Conflict, as defined by Rahim (2001) [24], is an "interactive process manifested in incompatibility, disagreement, or dissonance within or between social entities (i.e., individual, group, organization, etc.)". Schermerhorn, Hunt and Osborn (2003) [25] defined conflicts as "disagreements in a social situation over issues of substance or whenever emotional antagonisms create frictions between individuals or groups". Nahavandi and Malekzadeh (1998) [15] pointed out that for conflict to exist several factors must be present: people have opposing interests, thoughts, perceptions, and feelings; those involved in the conflict recognize the existence of the different points of view; the disagreement is ongoing rather than a singular occurrence, and people with opposing views try to prevent each other from accomplishing their goals.

There are two opposing perspectives on the outcome of conflict. The first assumes that conflict is functional and productive to the organizations. The functional view of conflict suggests that it stimulates innovation, creativity, and growth. Further, conflict may improve organizational decision making. The second view of conflict holds that conflict is dysfunctional and detrimental to organizations. It suggests that conflict may cause job stress, burnout, and dissatisfaction. Further, it assumes that struggle over incompatible goals may reduce organizational commitment and loyalty (Rahim, 2001) [24].

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Conflict results in frustration to those affected and their response may be aggressive or confrontational. It is this nature of conflict and its resulting consequences that make most people look at conflict as unpleasant, counterproductive and time consuming. Conflict is not a one-dimensional concept. It comes in different guises according to the degree of seriousness and has the capacity to either disrupt or, in some cases, improve difficult situations (Barbara, 1997) [4]. It is because of its varied nature that managers usually find it difficult to handle conflict situations effectively.

Conflict management skills are important if individuals are to function effectively at any level of organizations. Mishandled conflict has directly resulted in problems and invokes negative feelings among participants, "organizational inefficiency, reduced productivity, stymied innovation, and compromised profits" (Axelrod & Johnson, 2005) [3]. However, if properly managed, conflict can increase individuals "innovativeness and productivity" (Uline, Tschannen-moran, & Perez, 2003) [27], and leads to "improved efficiency, creativity, and profitability" (Axelrod & Johnson, 2005) [3].

The crux of this research, however, is to explore the influence of education levels and work experiences on the choice of conflict management styles among employees of public banks in Ethiopia. The study of conflict management styles may not be a new in the developed countries, however, in developing countries like Ethiopia this is almost a new field of study. Therefore, the major contribution of this study is to investigate the influence personal characteristics on the choice of conflict management styles in unusual country, and a different culture and workplace outside the developed countries.

Conflict management styles
Various conflict management styles have been suggested. These techniques vary widely in how openly they address the conflict. Blake and Mouton (1964) [6] developed a two-dimensional grid for classifying the various styles of handling interpersonal conflict into five types: forcing, withdrawing, smoothing, compromising and problem-solving. Blake and Mouton's (1964) [6] work propose that conflict is managed in different ways depending on whether the individuals, specifically managers, involved have high or low concern for production and high or low concern for people. Based on theoretical refinements proposed by Blake and Mouton (1964) [6], Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI) was developed by as a research tool by Kenneth W. Thomas and Ralph H. in 1974. The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument model is based on a five-category scheme for classifying interpersonal conflict-handling modes: competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding, and accommodating. These five conflict management styles are described an individual's behaviour along two dimensions: (1) assertiveness, the extent to which the person attempts to satisfy his own concerns, and (2) cooperativeness, the extent to which the person attempts to satisfy the other person's concerns (Thomas and Kilmann, 1974) [26].

While numerous researchers proposed revisions of the preceding frameworks, Rahim and Bonoma's (1979) [21] conceptualization have been one of the most popular and widely used in various studies. Various scholars' empirical evidences suggested it to be the most valid model of conflict management styles (Rahim &Magner, 1995; Van De Vilert&Kabanoff, 1990) [20, 28]. Further, the result of

confirmatory factor analyses is indicated this five factor model has a better fit with data than any other models of two, three, and four style orientations (Rahim and Manger, 1995) [20]. Rahim and Bonoma (1979) [21] delineated the five styles of resolving interpersonal conflict on two basic dimensions: concern for self and concern for other. The first dimension explains the degree (high or low) to which a person attempts to satisfy their own concerns, while the second dimension explains the degree to which an individual tries to satisfy the needs or concern for others. According to Rahim and Bonama (1979) [21], combining the two dimensions results in five specific styles of conflict management styles, as shown and illustrated below:
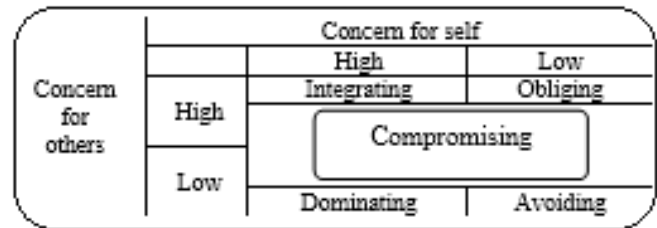

Fig 1: The styles of Handling Interpersonal Conflict (Rahim and Bonoma, 1979) [21]

Avoiding - this style indicates a low concern for self and others. Therefore, an avoiding person fails to satisfy the personal concern as well as the concern of the other party. It has been associated with withdrawal, buck-passing, sidestepping situations. This style may take the form of postponing an issue until a better time or simply withdrawing from a threatening situation (Rahim 2001) [24]. This style has often been found to be used when individuals deal with perceived tactical or minor issues (Afzalur, Garrett, &Buntzman, 1992) [1].

Compromising – this style shows an intermediate concern for self and others. The style perceives both parties involved in give and-take or sharing solutions, whereby both parties accept to give up something to make mutually acceptable decisions. This style may involve splitting the difference, exchanging concession, or seeking a quick, middle-ground position. Similarly, a compromising person or party addresses an issue more openly than an avoiding person or party but does not explore alternative solutions as an integrating person or party (Rahim, 2001) [24]. This style is used when dealing with particular strategic issues (Afzalur, Garrett, &Buntzman, 1992) [1].

Dominating - also known as competing indicates a high concern for self and a low concern for others. A dominating person stands up for his own rights and disregard others' needs and expectation; try to defend personal positions that he believes being as correct and right. This is a win-lose style expression of a forcing behavior in order to win one's position (Rahim, 2001) [24]. This style is often used when the issues involved in a conflict seem relatively unimportant or when a quick decision is required. A dominating style may also be used by upper management for implementing strategies and policies, or when unpopular courses of action must be implemented (Afzalur, Garrett, &Buntzman, 1992) [1].

Integrating- also known as problem-solving. It is characterized by a high concern for self and others. It

involves collaboration between the parties that are willing to reach a mutual and acceptable solution through openness, exchange of information, examination and exploration of differences for arriving at a constructive solution that goes far beyond personal and limited visions of the problem (Rahim, 2001) [24]. This style has been found to be useful in utilizing the skills and information of different individuals to generate solutions, and may be appropriate for dealing with strategic issues relating to objectives, policies and long-range planning (Afzalur, Garrett, &Buntzman, 1992) [1].

Obliging - also known as accommodating. It indicates a low concern for self and high concern for others. An obliging person neglects and sacrifices personal concern so to satisfy the concern of the other party. This style is associated with a non-confrontational element characterized by the attempt of minimizing differences and emphasizing commonalities to satisfy the concern of the other party. It is effective in a situation when an individual is willing to act a concession with the hope of getting something in return (Afzalur, Garrett, &Buntzman, 1992) [1].

Literature Reviews and Hypothesis Formulation
The extent to which a given conflict management style is effective depends on the situation and the skill with which it is used. In this sense, in any given situation a particular conflict management style may be more appropriate than others. Although the choice of a specific conflict-handling style depends largely on the situations, the influence of individual characteristics should be taken into account. For instance, teammates working in the same department may have diverse cultures and values and their perception on how to achieve the goals vary because each one's decision will be influenced by a person's education level, work experience or some other factors. According to Alan, Henkin and Cistone (2000), demographic variables such as education, gender, age, work experiences have high influence on the perceptions of individuals and as such makes people to respond to conflict situations differently.

Education
Many studies have found that conflict management style did differ across education levels. Pinto & Ferrer (2002) [17] found a significant relation between education level and one pair of combined styles. Rahim (1983) [23] who researched 2,377 managers and 557 students also confirms the relationship of styles to education levels. Further, Day and collaborates (1988) who researched 329 buyers with Thomas-Kilmann instrument verified a significant relation of education in one of the five styles of conflict management. However, some studies found that there is no relationship between education level and conflict management styles. In a study that was conducted to explore the relationship between demographic variables and conflict management styles, Poloski and Sontor (2009) [18] found that no significant difference between conflict-handling styles of Croatian employees because of their educational level.
Although most of the existed studies show a significant relationship between education and conflict management styles, exploring the influence of education in a different environment is important. It is, therefore, the first objective of the study, to investigate the influence of education on the choice of conflict management styles of employees of public banks in Ethiopia. Having this as a background, the following hypothesis will be tested:

H_1: There is no a statistically significant influence of employees education levels on his/her choice of conflict management styles.

Work experience
The existing literature about the influence of work experience on the choice of conflict management styles shows mixed results. Konovsky, Jaster and McDonald (1998) [14] found some differences for work experience in conflict resolution styles. Eidson (2003) [11] also found a big correlation between years of experience and preferred conflict management style. In a study about conflict in project management, Posner (1986) [19] found that more experienced project managers tended to use more integrating and obliging styles than those with fewer years of experience. They concerned more for others in dealing with conflicts in projects. Hignite, Margavio and Chin (2002) [12] suggested that individuals with more work experience have significantly higher scores on the compromising style than did those subjects with no work experience. On the other hand, Berry (1994) [5] found no significant differences between conflict management styles and experience. As the experience related strand of literature as a whole proved, the influence of work experience and on the choice conflict management styles is inconclusive. It is, therefore, the second objective of the study to investigate the influence of work experience on the choice of conflict management styles of employees in public banks in Ethiopia. In light of this, the following hypothesis will be tested:

H_2: There is no a significant influence of employee's work experiences on his/her choice of conflict management style.

Research Questions
For the purpose of this study, the following research questions have been asked. These questions are guided the study.
1. Are there meaningful differences among employees' conflict management styles related to their education attainment levels?
2. Are there meaningful differences among employees' conflict management styles related to their work experiences?

Research Methodology
Research Design
Non-experimental, quantitative approach survey research design was followed in this exploratory study. The primary data was generated using a standardized instrument in a field survey design.

Population
The participants for this study consisted of employees of three public banks in Ethiopia. These banks are Commercial Bank of Ethiopia, Development Bank of Ethiopia and Construction & Business Bank.The total employees of Commercial Bank of Ethiopia, Construction & Business Bank, and Development Bank of Ethiopia were 18,000, 1539 and 900 respectively (NBE, 2012).

Sampling design
In order to determine the appropriate sample size, the study was used Yamane's (1967) [29] formula. Based on the

formula, 392 employees were selected. A proportionate simple random sampling technique was used to represent the population equally.

Instruments
The Rahim's Organizational Conflict Inventory (ROCI-II) was used to measure the five conflict-handling modes. This instrument consists of 28 statements and a five-point Likert scale was used to score each statement with a 5 indicating strongly agree and 1 a strongly disagree. In addition to the items from ROCI-II, the instrument incorporates questions related to participant's demographic information. The data were collected from employees who were employed during the 2014-2015 fiscal years. The researcher set the predetermined response rate of distributed surveys at 60%; however, 77% of the survey packets were returned. The reliability of the instrument was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. The result indicates that integrating, obliging, dominating, and compromising have reasonable internal consistency reliability of 0.833, 0.741, 0.793, and 0.703 respectively. However, 0.694 reliability value of the avoiding scale indicated minimally adequate reliability. In addition, several earlier studies confirmed the convergent and discriminatory validity of the instrument. The result of these validities together with the evidence reported in another field

supported the instruments' construct validity (Rahim, 2001) [24].

Variables of the study
The research intends to find out whether education levels and work experiences influence the choice of conflict management styles of employees. The *independent variables* of the study were education levels and work experiences of employees, whereas the *dependent variables* were conflict management styles, namely: avoiding, compromising, dominating, integrating and obliging.

Data analysis
In this study, descriptive statistics and the one-way ANOVA test was used to analyze the data. The data were analyzed by using *Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS)*, version 20.0

Findings of the study
Background information of the respondents
The following table 1 discloses information on gender, age, marital status, educational levels, and experiences of respondents of the study. This background data were reported with frequencies and percentages.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the respondents

Demographic Variables	Number	Percentage
Gender		
Male	163	55.3
Female	132	44.7
Age		
<20	2	.7
21-25	147	49.7
26-30	69	23.3
31-35	52	17.6
36-45	17	5.7
46-50	5	1.7
>50	4	1.4
Marital status		
Single	199	66.1
Married	92	30.6
Divorced	6	2.0
Widowed	4	1.3
Education level		
< 12	20	6.8
Diploma	30	10.1
BA degree	161	54.4
Masters	83	28
PhD	2	.7
Work Experience		
0 -3 years	76	25.6
4-6 years	57	19.2
7-9 years	145	48.8
> 9 years	19	6.4

As the above table 1 shows, there were 163 male and 132 female employees, which account for 55.3% and 44.7 % of the total respondents respectively. In terms of age, the majority of employees lies at the age of between 21 -25 which accounts 49.7%, whereas the least percentage of 0.7% (2) comes from the age of less than 20. The percentage of the marital status of the participants varied greatly from a low 1.3% *(widowed)* to a high of 66.1% *(single)*.
Respondents were also asked questions about their education levels. The result indicated that the proportion of BA degree holders outnumbered other categories which account 54.4% (161) of the respondents. The lowest percentage comes from

the PhD holders at 0.7% (2) of the total respondents. The data revealed that 48.8% of the respondents have a work experience of 7-9 years which were the largest proportion, whereas, the least proportion of 6.4% (19) comes from a work experience of more than nine years.

Education levels and conflict management styles
The first hypothesis sought to determine if differences existed on the preference of conflict management styles with regard to education levels. A descriptive statistics and the one-way ANOVA were calculated for each of the five conflict management styles.

H₁: There is no a statistically significant influence of employees education levels on his/her choice of conflict management styles.

The summary of the descriptive statistics is given in table 2 and the results of one-way ANOVA are given in table 3.

Table 2: Summary of descriptive statistics for education levels and conflict management styles

Styles	Education levels	N	Mean	SD	Sta. Error
Avoiding	<12	20	3.2250	85203	.19052
	Diploma	30	3.3833	.66400	.12123
	Degree	161	3.3685	.77514	.06109
	Masters	83	3.2450	.75184	.08253
	PhD	2	3.5000	.47140	.33333
Compromising	<12	20	4.1750	.88889	.19876
	Diploma	30	3.4333	.52904	.09659
	Degree	161	3.7220	.81538	.06426
	Masters	83	3.4759	.69032	.07577
	PhD	2	3.5000	.70711	.50000
Dominating	<12	20	3.5000	.86694	.19385
	Diploma	30	3.2400	.88886	.16228
	Degree	161	3.0745	.93483	.07368
	Masters	83	2.9759	.95835	.10519
	PhD	2	3.3000	.98995	.70000
Integrating	<12	20	4.2429	.46603	.10421
	Diploma	30	4.0429	.65642	.11985
	Degree	161	4.0115	.74983	.05909
	Masters	83	3.9811	.71907	.07893
	PhD	2	4.2857	.60609	.42857
Obliging	<12	20	3.3667	.77157	.17253
	Diploma	30	3.3489	.68360	.12481
	Degree	161	3.3458	.77068	.06074
	Masters	83	3.3755	.79797	.08759
	PhD	2	3.6667	.23570	.16667

Based on the results shown in Table 2, employees of all education categories shared similar conflict management style preferences. In order of preference, employees preferred the integrating, and compromising style. However, PhD holder employees preferred obliging as the second conflict management styles. As their last option, except employees who has an academic record of less than 12 classes, all shared similar conflict management styles, i.e., dominating, whereas employees who have an academic record of less than 12 classes favored avoiding style.

Table 3: summary of the one-way ANOVA of conflict management styles with regard to education levels

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Avoiding	Between Groups	1.199	4	.300	.515	.725
	Within Groups	169.287	291	.582		
	Total	170.486	295			
Compromising	Between Groups	10.315	4	2.579	4.438	.002*
	Within Groups	169.080	291	.581		
	Total	179.395	295			
Dominating	Between Groups	5.240	4	1.310	1.505	.201
	Within Groups	253.309	291	.870		
	Total	258.549	295			
Integrating	Between Groups	1.284	4	.321	.625	.645
	Within Groups	149.347	291	.513		
	Total	150.630	295			
Obliging	Between Groups	.696	4	.174	.294	.882
	Within Groups	172.163	291	.592		
	Total	172.859	295			

Note: *Significant @ $p \leq 0.05$. The effect size of the significant variable compromising was (.057). Threshold for interpreting the effect size can be found in Cohen's test (Cohen, 1988). Cohen classified effect size that small (0.20), medium (0.50), and large (0.80).

Before conducting the one-way ANOVA, the assumption of homogeneity of variance should be met. Leven's test was conducted to determine it. The result indicated the assumption of homogeneity of variances met for all conflict management styles at a significant level of ($p \leq 0.05$).

As seen in table 3, the one-way ANOVA was conducted to explore the influence of education levels on the choice of conflict-handling styles. The result shows that a statistically significant result has been found in compromising style $F = (4, 291) = 4.438$, $p = .02$. Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis that there is no difference in conflict management styles of compromising with regard to the education levels of employees of public banks in Ethiopia. Further, Cohen's effect size value of compromising ($d = .057$) suggested a very small significant difference.

On the other hand, the remaining conflict management styles, i.e., avoiding $F = (4, 291)=0.515$, $p=0.725$, dominating $F=(4, 291)=1.505$, $p=0.201$, integrating $F=(4, 291)=0.625$, $p=0.645$ and obliging $F=(4, 291)=0.294$, $p=0.882$ demonstrated a non- significant difference with academic ranks. Therefore, we fail to reject the null hypothesis that there is no difference in conflict management styles of avoiding, dominating, integrating and obliging with regard to the academic ranks of employees of public banks in Ethiopia.

Work experiences and conflict management styles
The second hypothesis sought to examine if significant

differences existed between work experiences of employees and their preference for conflict management styles. Descriptive statistics and the one-way ANOVA has been determined for each of the five conflict management styles.

H_2: *There is no a statistically significant influence of employees work experiences on his/her choice of conflict management styles.*

The summary of the descriptive statistics is depicted in table 4 and the results of one-way ANOVA are given in table 5.

Table 4: Summary of descriptive statistics for work experiences and conflict management styles

Styles	Education level	N	Mean	SD	Sta.Error
Avoiding	0-3 Years	76	3.2654	.79357	.09103
	4-6 Years	57	3.0789	.74941	.09926
	7-9 Years	145	3.4425	.73240	.06082
	>9 Years	19	3.6228	.74295	.17045
Compromising	0-3 Years	76	3.5592	.83354	.09561
	4-6 Years	57	3.5921	.78722	.10427
	7-9 Years	145	3.7569	.75803	.06295
	>9 Years	19	3.5921	.78267	.17956
Dominating	0-3 Years	76	3.0500	.96395	.11057
	4-6 Years	57	3.1053	.98133	.12998
	7-9 Years	145	3.1255	.90736	.07535
	>9 Years	19	3.1158	1.01174	.23211
Integrating	0-3 Years	76	3.9906	.75425	.08652
	4-6 Years	57	3.9524	.76614	.10148
	7-9 Years	145	4.1281	.65611	.05449
	>9 Years	19	3.6316	.71001	.16289
Obliging	0-3 Years	76	3.4868	.76728	.08801
	4-6 Years	57	3.1287	.82377	.10911
	7-9 Years	145	3.3931	.72347	.06008
	>9 Years	19	3.5439	.76748	.17607

Based on the results found in table 4, with regard to work experiences, employees shared similar conflict management style preferences. In order of preference, they chose integrating and compromising style. However, employees who have a work experiences of greater than nine years chose avoiding as their second conflict management style. As their third and fourth options, employees' preference of

conflict management styles varied with respect to work experiences. As their last option, employees with an experiences of "4-6 years" was avoiding ($M = 3.0789$, $SE = 0.09926$), whereas the remaining categories of experiences shared a similar preference of conflict management style, i.e. dominating.

Table 3: summary of one-way ANOVA of conflict management styles with regard to work experience

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Avoiding	Between Groups	7.352	3	2.451	4.329	.005*
	Within Groups	165.861	293	.566		
	Total	173.213	296			
Compromising	Between Groups	2.479	3	.826	1.341	.261
	Within Groups	180.582	293	.616		
	Total	183.061	296			
Dominating	Between Groups	.290	3	.097	.109	.955
	Within Groups	260.599	293	.889		
	Total	260.889	296			
Integrating	Between Groups	4.870	3	1.623	3.245	.022*
	Within Groups	146.600	293	.500		
	Total	151.471	296			
Obliging	Between Groups	4.999	3	1.666	2.904	.035*
	Within Groups	168.128	293	.574		
	Total	173.126	296			

Note: *Significant @ $p \leq 0.05$. The effect size for significant variables were avoiding (.042), integrating (.032) and obliging (.028). Threshold for interpreting the effect size can be found in Cohen's test (Cohen, 1988). Cohen classified effect size that small (0.20), medium (0.50), and large (0.80).*

In order to check the assumption of homogeneity of variance, Leven's test was conducted. The result of the test indicated that the assumption of homogeneity of variances is met for all conflict management styles at a significant level of ($p \leq 0.05$).

As it is depicted in table 5, one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine the influence of work experiences on the choice of conflict management styles. The result indicated that among the five conflict management styles, avoiding $F = (3, 297) = 4.329, p = 0.005$, integrating $F = (3, 297) = 3.245, p = 0.022$ and obliging $F = (3, 297) = 2.904, p = 0.035$ styles demonstrated a statistically significant difference with work experiences. Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis that there is no difference in conflict management styles of avoiding, integrating and obliging with regard to work experience of employees of public banks in Ethiopia. Further, Cohen's effect size value of avoiding ($d = .042$), integrating ($d = .032$) and obliging ($d = .028$) suggested very small significant difference.

On the other hand, the remaining conflict management styles, i.e., compromising $F = (3, 297) = 1.341, p = 0.261$ and dominating $F = (3, 297) = 0.109, p = 0.955$ demonstrated insignificant difference with work experience. Therefore, we fail to reject the null hypothesis that there is no difference in conflict management styles of compromising and dominating with regard to work experience of employees of public banks in Ethiopia.

Discussion of results
The main objective of this study was to investigate the influence of academic levels and work experiences on the choice of conflict management styles of employees of public banks in Ethiopia.

Education levels and conflict management styles
The result indicated that four out of the five conflict management styles had no a statistically significant difference exists with regard to education level. First, the result indicated that education levels had a significant impact on the choice of compromising conflict-handling style. This finding is similar to, Pinto & Ferrer (2002) [17] who revealed a significant relation between education levels and one pair of combined styles. Similarly, Rahim's (1983) [23] indicated the relation of style to education. Likewise, Day and collaborators (1988) verified a significant relation of education with one of the five styles of the Thomas-Kilmann instrument. Second, the result indicated that education levels had no a significant impact upon avoiding, dominating, integrating and obliging conflict handling styles. This finding is similar to those of Poloski and Sontor (2009) [18] who found no significant difference between conflict-handling styles of Croatian employees because of their educational levels. Third, the mean score shows that all employees shared similar integrating conflict management style preferences. This may be consistent with Rahim (1992), who reports that if an individual resides in a collectivist culture, he/she may use an integrative dimension of conflict management styles. The preference of integrating conflict style may also indicate that decisions within a banking sector cannot be taken by a single individual thus the value of the differences (skills, information, experience) of both parties involved to define the problem, and identify effective alternative solutions is important.

To sum up, the findings revealed that employees with any academic ranks preferred integrating style, while compromising style shows a significant difference among employees.

Experience and Conflict management style
With regard to work experiences of employees, the result indicates a significant difference for avoiding, integrating and obliging styles of conflict management. This finding is consistent with several researchers. Konovsky et al. (1998) [14] found some differences for year of work experiences in conflict resolution styles. Eidson (2003) [11] also found a big correlation between years of experiences and preferred conflict management styles. Similarly, Posner (1986) [19] and Hignite et al. (2002) [12] found a significant difference between experiences and conflict management styles. Further, the mean score of the data indicates that integrating is the most preferred conflict management style. The implication of this finding in this particular setting could be that employees understand or accept that integrating is best for open discussion of the problem on a friendly term. Employees attempted to work with the opponent in an effort to find an integrative solution that would satisfy both sides. However, the current study found no significant difference between years of experiences and the dominating and compromising conflict-handling styles. This finding is consistent with Berry (1994) [5] and Indelicato (2005) [13] who found no significant differences between conflict management styles and experience.

The result of the study indicates that among conflict-handling styles, integrating and compromising are the most likely used in Ethiopian Public banks. This can be clarified by the Ethiopian culture. According to Brew and Cairns (2004) [7], culture is vital in molding individual's perceptions, attitudes, and appraisal and its conflict-handling. As Cheri and Michael (2016) [8] stated many African cultures, including that of Ethiopia, are highly collectivist. Collectivist cultures focus on relationships, group obligation, and interpersonal harmony. Further, Rahim (1992), reports that if the individual resides in a collectivist culture, she/he may use an integral dimension of conflict handling style.

Compromising reflects the point of intersection of both dimensions where individuals receive an intermediate level of satisfaction of their concerns from the resolution of their conflicts. In general, the findings of this study are consistent with the findings of previous studies of conflict management among employees in organizations in some other countries.

Conclusions
This article examines the influence of education levels and work experiences of employees on the choice of conflict management styles in the public sector banks in Ethiopia. It was hypothesized that education levels and work experiences had no impact on the choice of conflict management styles of employees. The results of this study show that education levels affect only compromising variable, whereas years of experience affects the uses of avoiding, integrating and obliging conflict management styles of employees. Further, the result concludes that employees at any academic and work experience levels preferred integrating style as the most conflict-handling styles.

Although the specific analysis here focuses on employees in public banks, the study has implications for our understanding of employee's conflict management styles across the private and non-profit sectors. Any employees, who work within organizations, present them with varied numbers of challenges at different levels of difficulty and

complexity that forces them to face with conflicts. Awareness of how the demographic characteristics influence the employees' choice of conflict-handling styles allows for managers to take steps to buffer against potential deleterious influences, perhaps by investing in team building or training in conflict management skills. Similarly, knowing the factors that affect the employee's style of handling conflicts may help managers to predict the behavior of their employees in such conflict situations. Therefore, the results of the study might be somehow used to reduce the consequences of job conflict and enhance the work environment of the subject in particular and of employees in general.

In conclusion, it can be stated that no studies have been done to examine the influence of academic levels and work experiences on conflict management styles of employees in public sector banks in Ethiopia. It is believed that this study has given a more practical picture of interpersonal conflict with regard to academic levels and work experiences.

Limitations and Future Research
As with most research, there were quite a few limitations to this study and should be addressed in future research. First, while the sample size utilized was large, it is not a perfect representative of the Ethiopian public bank employees overall. The overwhelming majority of the participants in this study come from urban areas. As such, generalizations to a large population should be done with some caution as the Ethiopian public bank employees also include large rural employees. Studying a more varied and truly representative sample would indicate if there are other vital features to be found across Ethiopian public sector bank employees. Second, this study has not been included all demographic variables and contextual variables that may relate to conflict-handling styles. Therefore, future studies should examine other demographic characteristics and work measures and situational determinants of conflict management styles.

Finally, this study focuses on the influence of education levels and work experiences on the choice of conflict management styles of employees of public sector banks in Ethiopia. As conflict is inevitable in all types of the organizations, future research should include private banks which would help for comparisons.

This study represents one of the first and only attempts to understand the influences of academic levels and work experiences on the choice of conflict management styles in Ethiopian public banks. These variables provide a good opportunity for further research regarding Ethiopian public banks, conflict-handling styles, and education levels and work experiences. Although they may not be entirely unexpected, the findings of this initial exploration exhibit that there are significant similarities and differences in the choice of conflict-handling styles among employees. These results have now been explored and should continue to be investigated in the future.

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