



Conflict Management Message Styles and Decision Making Patterns in Mexican Adolescent High-School Students

KEYWORDS

Interpersonal conflict, Conflict styles, Conflict resolution.

Alejandro César A. Luna Bernal

PhD in Psychology. Professor and researcher at University of Guadalajara, Mexico.

ABSTRACT *In order to contribute to the discussion on decision making and conflict management in adolescence, this paper analyses the relationships between three conflict management message styles (self-oriented, other-oriented, and issue-oriented) and three decision-making patterns (vigilance, hypervigilance / procrastination, and buck-passing), in a sample (N = 401) of Mexican high-school students, aged 15 to 19 years old. The participants answered the Conflict Management Message Style Instrument and the Melbourne Decision Making Questionnaire. In the results, issue-oriented and other-oriented styles correlated positively with vigilance. In turn, self-oriented style correlated positively with procrastination / hypervigilance and buck-passing, and negatively with vigilance. These findings will be discussed considering previous studies on these issues.*

The development of the ability to deal with conflicts in a constructive way is one of the most important aspects of psychosocial growth in adolescents. Conflicts are interaction situations and, therefore, the ability of manage them in a constructive way depends largely on the individual's ability to communicate effectively. In turn, choosing the right strategy to manage conflict and the proper way to communicate among the conflict depends on the individuals' ability to make decisions efficiently. Therefore, the analysis of the relationship between conflict communication and decision-making is an important object of study to understand how adolescents develop their capacity for constructive conflict management.

In this context, and in order to contribute to the discussion on this issue, the present study was proposed to analyze the relationships between the decision-making patterns proposed by Janis and Mann (1979), and the conflict management message styles proposed by Ross and DeWine (1988), in a sample of Mexican high school students.

According to Janis and Mann (1979), the need to make a decision involves an intrapsychic conflict, which engenders a certain degree of stress. In order to solve this decisional conflict, the individual takes any of the following decision-making patterns: a) vigilance, when the individuals think they have enough time to research systematically and evaluate relevant information reasonably; b) hypervigilance, when the individuals believe that the time available is insufficient, thus they search for information in a disorderly way being prey of high stress levels; c) defensive avoidance, when the individuals try to escape of the decisional conflict avoiding making a decision, through the procrastination, the buck-passing, or the rationalization of the most accessible alternative.

Most studies that have been developed in Spain and Latin America with the model of decisional conflict have been realized on samples of college students (e. g., Alzate, Laca & Valencia, 2004; Laca & Alzate, 2004; Laca, Mejía & Mayoral, 2011). Thus, in order to contribute to conceptualize decision making of Mexican adolescents into this theoretical framework, Luna and Laca (2014b) conducted a study of a sample of 992 Mexican high-school students, aged 15-19. In their results, three factors were identified as patterns of decision-making in adolescents: a) vigilance, b) hypervigilance / procrastination, and c) buck-passing.

The conflict management style refers to the way which the individuals approach to the counterpart for to handle a conflict. Ross and DeWine (1988) propose to evaluate the conflict management styles through verbal messages used by individuals into conflict situations. In this way, Ross and DeWine (1988) identified three conflict management message styles: a) the self-oriented style reflects an emphasis on the speaker's personal interest; b) the issue-oriented style maintains that the problem can be solved without jeopardizing the relationship and emphasizes that both parties must deal with the problem; c) the other-oriented style emphasizes overlooking the problem and keeping the other party happy.

The studies with the Ross-DeWine model in Spain and Latin America has been realized on samples of adults and college students (e. g., Mejía y Laca, 2006; Laca, 2005; Laca et al., 2011). Because of this, Luna and Laca (2014a) conducted a study of a sample (N = 1074) consisted of middle and high school and undergraduate students with age range of 11-25 years. Their factor analysis of *Ross-DeWine Conflict Management Message Style Instrument* resulted in a three-factor solution appropriate to the theoretical model with acceptable indicators of validity and reliability.

Previous studies have found statistically significant correlations between decision-making patterns and conflict management styles (e. g., Alzate et al., 2004; Laca and Alzate, 2004). However the main antecedent of the present research is the study of Laca et al. (2011). These authors studied the relationship between the decision-making patterns proposed by Janis and Mann (1979), and the conflict management message styles proposed by Ross and DeWine (1988) in a sample of Mexican and Spanish college students with average age of 21 years. In this study, the self-oriented style correlated positively with hypervigilance, buck-passing and procrastination, and negatively with vigilance. The issue-oriented style positively correlates with vigilance, and negatively with procrastination. The other-oriented style positive and significantly correlates with hypervigilance, buck-passing and procrastination.

Because of the antecedent studies that have been conducted on samples of adults and college students, the present study was proposed to analyze the correlations between these variables in Mexican adolescents in order to

contribute to the discussion on decision making and conflict management in adolescence.

METHOD

Participants

The sample ($N = 401$) was composed of high school students from the city of Guadalajara, México, with age-range 15 to 19 ($M = 16.67$, $DS = 1.15$). 170 (42.4%) of the participants were males and 231 (57.6%) females.

Instruments

Conflict Management Message Style instrument. This questionnaire consists of 18 items distributed in three subscales according to the model of Ross and DeWine (1988): a) self-oriented, b) issue-oriented, and c) other-oriented. The instrument was originally created for Ross and DeWine (1988). Mejía and Laca (2006) and Laca et al. (2011) made the translation into Spanish on samples of Mexican and Spanish university students. Later, Luna and Laca (2014a) realized a validation study of a sample ($N = 1074$) of Mexican students, age-range 11 to 25. The coefficient of reliability Cronbach's alpha reported for Luna y Laca (2014a) were of .68, .72 y .83 for the self-oriented, other-oriented, and issue-oriented styles, respectively.

Melbourne Decision-Making Questionnaire. The original instrument by Mann et al. (1997) is composed of 22 items distributed in four subscales according to the Janis and Mann (1979) model: vigilance, hypervigilance, buck-passing, and procrastination. Alzate et al. (2004) and Laca (2005) translated it into Spanish and validated this instrument with a sample of 609 Spanish university students. Later, Luna and Laca (2014b) used this version for a new study of validation on a sample of 992 Mexican adolescents, aged 15 to 19 years. The authors realized a exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses of the *Melbourne Decision-Making Questionnaire*. In their results, three factors were identified as patterns of decision-making in adolescents: a) vigilance (alpha .65), b) hypervigilance / procrastination (alpha .68), and c) buck-passing (alpha .72).

Procedure

Collaboration of school authorities was obtained. Students were invited to participate in the classroom in a completely voluntary and anonymous way. They were guaranteed confidential handling of information and its exclusive use for scientific purposes. Participants answered a battery consisting of various psychometric scales in one session lasting approximately an hour; as a part of a larger study on *Correlates and predictors of conflict management styles in teenagers*. In this paper the correspondent results to the relationships between decision-making and conflict management are reported.

RESULTS

According the object of this study, a Pearson's correlational analysis was realized. As it can be seen in Table 1, the following correlations were statistically significant. On the one hand, the issue-oriented and the other-oriented styles correlated positively with vigilance. On the other hand, self-oriented style correlated positively with procrastination / hypervigilance and buck-passing, and negatively with vigilance.

	Procrastination / Hypervigilance	Buck-passing	Vigilance
Issue-oriented	-.030	-.041	.213**

Self-oriented	.276**	.225**	-.133**
Other-oriented	.057	.061	.103*
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$			

DISCUSSION

In general, the findings of this study are consistent with the thesis of Laca (2005), who wrote that conflict management can be understood as a cognitive process of decision making, and that there are common psychological processes between decision-making and conflict management.

The positive correlations between other-oriented and issue-oriented styles and vigilance could mean that the willingness of adolescents to cooperation probably tends to increase in conflict situations where they perceive the enough time for to research systematically the relevant information and to evaluate it. In contrast, the negative correlation between self-oriented style and vigilance could mean that the willingness of adolescents to compete probably tend to increase in contrary conflict situations (i.e., when the adolescent thinks that the time available is insufficient, and he/she searches for information in a disorderly manner being prey to high levels of stress).

In the factor analysis of *Melbourne Decision-Making Questionnaire* realized by Luna and Laca (2014b), the items of hypervigilance and procrastination subscales corresponded to a single factor. The authors argued as a possible interpretation of this result the possibility that teenagers tend to recognize only pattern of making decisions in these items, which may consist in the following: in the first instance the teenager would tend to avoid making a decision (procrastination), but as the time available decreases, the teenager tends to adopt a hypervigilant pattern of decision making, due to the increase of intensity associated with decisional stress (hypervigilance).

Into this framework, the positive correlation between self-oriented style and procrastination / hypervigilance pattern, could mean that Mexican adolescents tend, in general and first instance, to avoid conflict; but as increases the intensity of decisional stress, the adolescent tends to adopt a hypervigilant pattern of decision making and, thus, a competitive style of handling conflict (self-oriented).

Acknowledgments

This study was developed with support from the Program for Professional Development of Professors (PRODEP) of the superior type, under the project entitled "Correlates and predictors of conflict management styles in adolescents" (DSN/103.5/15/6927). The researcher acknowledges this support from PRODEP and from the University of Guadalajara.

References

- Alzate, R., Laca, F. & Valencia, J. (2004). Decision-making patterns, conflict styles, and self-esteem. *Psicothema*, 16(1), 110-116.
- Janis, I. L. & Mann, L. (1979). *Decision making. A psychological analysis of conflict, choice, and commitment*. New York: Free Press.
- Laca, F. A. (2005). *Elección de estrategias de afrontamiento del conflicto bajo presión de tiempo*. Bilbao, España: Universidad del País Vasco.
- Laca, F. & Alzate, R. (2004). Estrategias de conflicto y patrones de decisión bajo presión de tiempo. *Revista Internacional de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades*, 14(1), 11-32.
- Laca, F. A., Mejía, J. C. & Mayoral, E. G. (2011). Conflict communication, decision-making, and individualism in Mexican and Spanish university students. *Psychology Journal*, 8(1), 121-135.
- Luna, A. C. A. & Laca, F. A. V. (2014a). Estilos de mensajes en el manejo de conflictos en adolescentes y jóvenes mexicanos. *Boletín de Psicología*, 110, 37-51.

7. Luna, A. C. A. & Laca, F. A. V. (2014b). Patrones de toma de decisiones y autoconfianza en adolescentes bachilleres. *Revista de Psicología*, 32(1), 39-65.
8. Mann, L., Burnett, P. Radford, M. & Ford, S (1997). The Melbourne Decision Making Questionnaire: An Instrument for Measuring Patterns for Coping with Decisional Conflict. *Journal of Behavioral Decision Making*, 10(1), 1-19. doi: 10.1002/(SICI)1099-0771(199703)10:1<1::AID-BD-M242>3.0.CO;2-X
9. Mejía, J. C. & Laca, F. A. (2006). Estilos de comunicación en el conflicto y confianza en las propias decisiones. *Enseñanza e Investigación en Psicología*, 11(2), 347-358.
10. Ross, R. & DeWine, S. (1988). Assessing the Ross-DeWine Conflict Management Message Style (CMMS). *Management Communication Quarterly*, 1, 389-413. doi: 10.1177/0893318988001003007