

Key findings

Men are more likely to deal with conflict **assertively**.

Women are more likely to deal with conflict **cooperatively**.

People in senior positions are more likely to deal with conflict **assertively**.

This could help us to understand why women are under represented in senior positions and explain the gender pay gap.

Conflict styles, gender, and leadership

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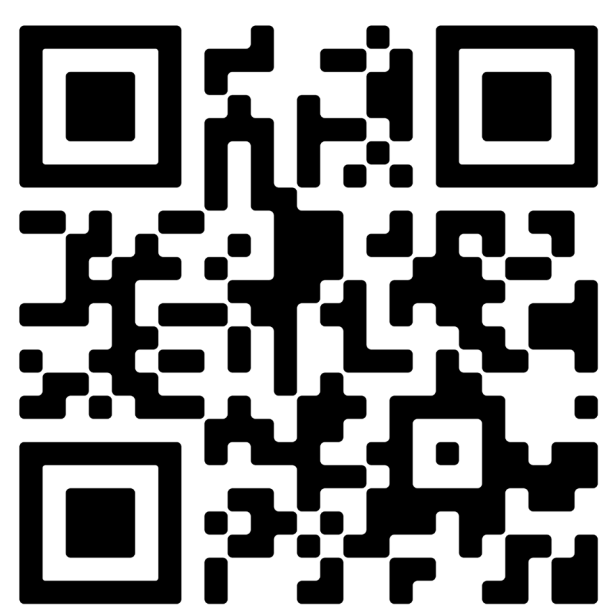
The number of women leaders is increasing but women are still under represented at higher levels and a gender pay gap exists. Differences in conflict style may help to explain this. This study examined differences in conflict style between men and women at different organizational levels.

This study adopts the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI®), which defines conflict as a situation in which people's opinions appear incompatible. There are five conflict styles according to the extent of assertiveness (the extent to which someone's own needs are met) and cooperativeness (the extent to which other people's needs are met):



Methodology

Data was analyzed from an archive of 462,883 people who completed the TKI questionnaire online between 2004 and 2019. ANOVA analyses were conducted to look for differences in scores for the five conflict modes by organizational level and gender.



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Results

There were significant main effects and interaction effects for all five conflict modes. Men scored significantly higher than women on Competing and Collaborating, while women scored higher than men on Compromising, Avoiding, and Accommodating.

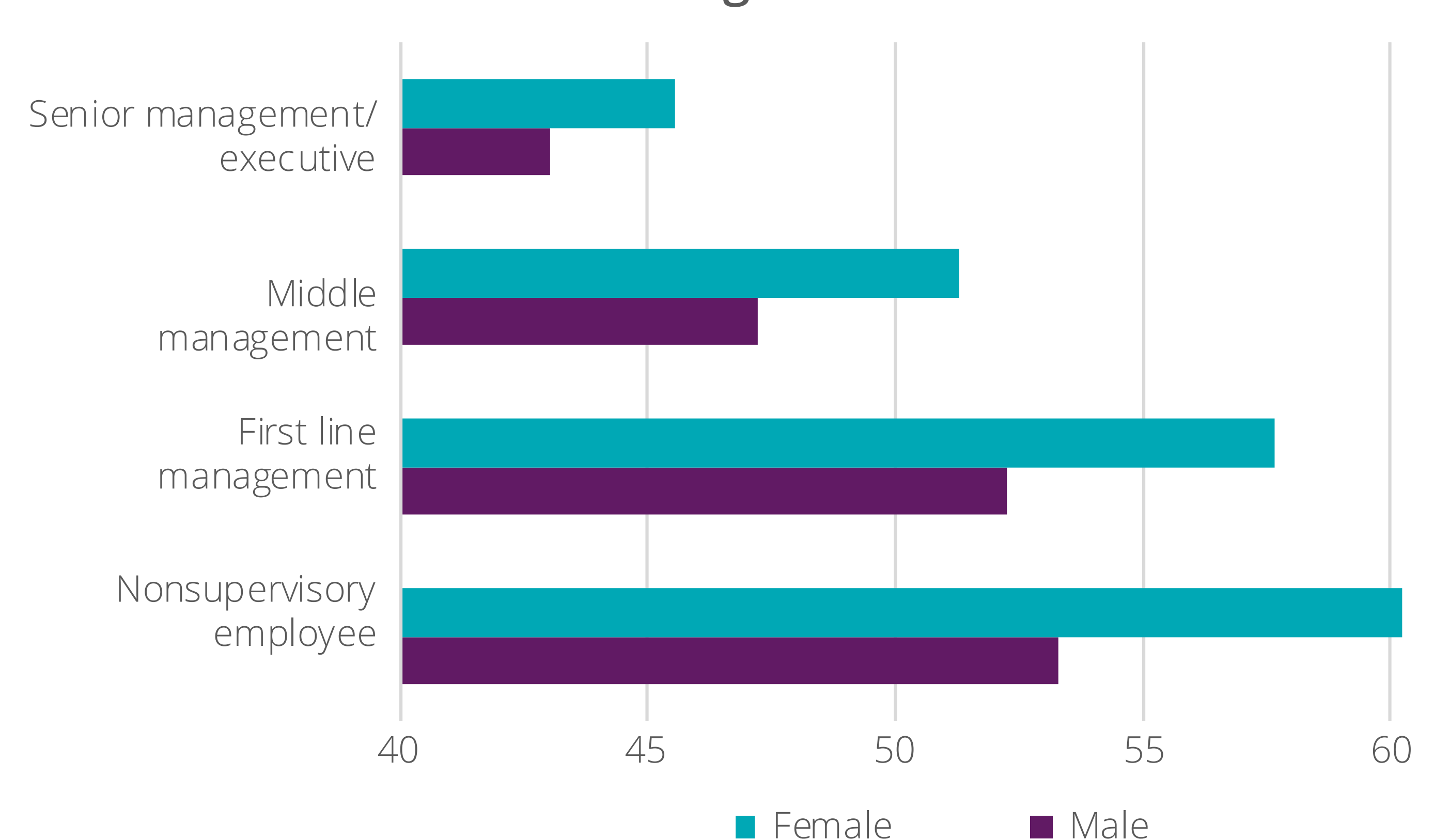
People at more senior levels in an organization scored significantly higher than those at more junior levels on Competing, Collaborating, and Compromising and scored lower on Avoiding and Accommodating.

The largest percentile difference for gender was for Competing. The largest organizational level difference was for Avoiding.

Competing scores for men and women at different organizational levels



Avoiding scores for men and women at different organizational levels



Discussion

The results may help us to understand differences in leadership style, perceptions of men and women, and their negotiating style when discussing salary. Women may be less likely to use assertive styles of negotiating and could be perceived as unusual when they do so. Awareness of different conflict styles may help individuals to adapt their style when discussing salary. Educating those making decisions about salary may help them to reduce unintentional bias toward those with a more assertive style.