Effectiveness of Grievance Handling Mechanisms in Bangladesh: An Empirical Study on Uttara EPZ, Bangladesh

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Abstract: Grievance represents the formal complaint of employees on one or more organizational issues and their management due to employee welfare. In line with this, when a company fails to meet these expectations, employees may file a grievance. This study analyzed different styles of grievance handling management with their effectiveness at the factory level, including an empirical evaluation. A total of 265 samples were investigated in this research, and the data were analyzed using structural equation modelling in Smart-PLS second-generation software to reveal the results. Based on the results of the study, all determinants proved effective, but the collaboration style is the most effective for grievance management. The research is expected to help EPZ stakeholders in Bangladesh manage workers' grievances effectively and maintain harmonious relationships between employers and employees. Moreover, the research will assist further studies in industrial relations.

Key Words: Grievance handling management (GHM), Export Processing Zone (EPZ), Collaborating Style, Bangladesh.

1. Introduction

Grievance handling management (GHM) is a complex procedure that has a direct effect on organizational behavior and industrial relations. In this same line, prior researches also advocated that grievance is nothing but the dissatisfaction regarding work and workplace filed by employees formally to their immediate supervisor (Rose, 2004). In this regard, grievance procedures need to be implemented to serve both employers' and employee's needs (Nurse & Devonish, 2007). Additionally, the arguments of the previous literature explain that GHM is inevitable in the workplace so the relation between workers and employers is also vulnerable. On the other hand, the GHM procedures help to avoid those conflicts. Accordingly, another author in a similar area quoted that employees are given an opportunity to use the 'voice' mechanism to create upward communication channels to management and the conditions under which workers and their unions can assert and protect job rights under the contract (Freeman & Medoff, 1984). Even for an effective management system, grievance settlement helps the organization to ensure the quality of Labor Management (LM) relations climate within the workplace (Ichniowski & Lewin , 1987).

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.59185/jujmr.v3i1.476

Export Processing Zone (EPZ) acts as a hub for the processing of export, FDI, joint venture, foreign alliance, and also comprises factories owned by national and foreign investors. EPZ is a special industrial park where investors are allowed to manufacture goods to export under special facility and security (ILO, 1998). Uttara Export Processing Zone (UEPZ) is situated in Nilphamari, which was established in 2001 and currently having 18 organizations invested by the citizens of Bangladesh, China and United Kingdom. It started its journey having 644 employments in 2001 and currently (2017-2018) having 32,147 employees in the EPZ. In 2001, the cumulative investment in the EPZ was only 0.16 million USD but it was increased to 159 million USD in 2017-18. The total export from UEPZ in the fiscal year 2017-18 was about 807.55 million USD. It has 180 plots covered by 213.66 acres with an average plot size of 2000 square meter (Annual Report, 2019). It is the only EPZ situated in North Bengal and has a significant contribution to the economic development of the local area. It is also expected that the EPZ is going to have a boost as the domestic airport in Saidpur, Nilphamari is going to be the fourth international airport in Bangladesh (Sarker, 2018). Therefore, this study focused on revealing the existing grievance handling mechanism and its impact on conflict management as a facilitator to establish a healthy working environment in Uttara EPZ.

2. Theoretical Framework

Many researchers studied the impact of different grievance handling styles of grievance management. In this pertinent, a group of the researchers reviewed and studied the Thomas-Kilmann grievance management model (for example, Thomas & Kilmann, 1978; Gayle, 2009; Islam & Rimi, 2017; and Singhal, Ojha, & Madha, 2017). On the contrary, another group of studies found that all the styles in the Thomas and-Kilmann model (1978) are not suitable enough in all cases, circumstances, or contexts (such as Njiraini & Gachunga, 2015 and Elbaz, Haddoud, Onjewu, & Abdelhamied, 2019). However, this study concentrated on four types of grievance handling styles adopted from Thomas and-Kilmann model (1978) in the context of Bangladesh. In explaining, that the dependent variable was the grievance handling mechanism and the independent variables were four different styles of GHM i.e. collaborating style, accommodating style, compromising style, and avoiding style.

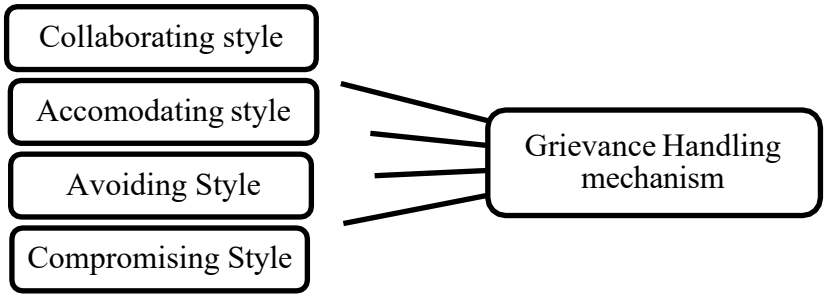


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework of the study

3. Review of the Literature and Hypotheses development

Generally, an effective GHM indirectly improves the relationship between the employer and employee in their collective agreement. Those procedures perform as 'diagnostic devices' whereby all related parties became aware of the upcoming problem and try to improve it (Thomson, 2004). Furthermore, grievance does not arise from anywhere. There are many reasons why employee grievances may arise. In that case, among them, common reasons for employee grievance are workplace bullying & provocation, discrimination, workplace environment, and safety measurements, relationships with coworkers and supervisors, and terms & conditions of employment. If any grievance arises, an employer should act promptly in an appropriate and fair means (Employsure, 2019). According to the previous scholars, the reasons for grievance varies from organization to organization, for instance, in England, employees of different organizations were asked to evaluate job-related reasons for grievance (Judge & Church, 2000). Additionally, the major dimensions for grievance were salaries, the attitude of supervisors, promotion, and behavior of the coworkers, and last but not least the work itself. There are four styles for handling a grievance, namely, collaborating, accommodating, avoidance, and compromising style are discussed in this research. In explanation, the collaborating style refers to a mutual problem-solving method where both parties will come along to resolve the problem. This process helps to build a self-managed team and increase internal relationships by taking away the problems (Hodgetts, 2003). Including that, Hodgetts (2003) also mentioned the very important notable point that is all the parties want to wipe out the problem, which is impossible without the co-operations of others.

3.1 Collaborating style and GHM

A conflict only can be minimized when all related parties are willing to do so and it helps to realize that without collaboration they all will fail. Likewise, another avoidance style for handling conflict is the process where it is believed that there is conflict exists. Consequently, the upper-level manager does not take any initiatives to solve the problem and managers believe this conflict will resolve by itself. The negotiator applies this style to collect enough information about the context of the conflict. After gathering, enough related information and data negotiator takes necessary steps to mitigate the conflict (Deutsch, 2005). The collaborative style was also found the most frequent style to resolve conflict in nursing management (Labrague, Hamdan, & McEnroe, 2018). The current research proposed the first hypothesis as follows:

H1: Collaborating style has a positive relationship with GHM.

3.2 Accommodating style and GHM

The accommodating style for handling conflict is very effective and popular as well and this style means that one party fulfills the interests of the other party at their own expense (Squelch & Lemmer, 2004). In line with the prior researches, according to this style, the negotiators do not put their own opinion; perhaps, the negotiator tends to accept the point of the other of view rather than their own (Mostert, 2008). The present study tried to

investigate the effectiveness of the accommodating style on GHM. That is why; we assumed the hypothesis is like:

H3: Accommodating style has a positive relationship with GHM.

3.3 Avoidance style and GHM

Some prior studies suggested that the avoidance style is one of the most unaccepted ways to deal with conflict (Labrague, Hamdan, & McEnroe, 2018). In comparison to others, the avoidance style is very effective for those types of employees who usually do nothing to solve their problems by themselves and expecting the management will take initiative on behalf of them. In that case, it would be very difficult for the workforce managers to interfere with those problems which can be solved by the employee. The common phenomenon in this situation is that the supervisors are always busy solving the subordinate's problem and for these reasons, employees do not feel any urge to make a peace within themselves (Whitemyer, 2005). Besides, avoidance style was found to be a good solution with the moderating effect of cultural intelligence to the conflicts related to cultural orientations (Caputo, Ayoko, & Amoo, 2018). This study assumed the significant existence of connectivity between the avoidance style and GHM. Hence, it can be proposed that:

H3: Avoidance style has a positive relationship with GHM

3.4 Compromising style and GHM

The accommodation is a common soft response when one party tries to cope up with others position without seeking to serve their interests in the formal relationship (Bodine & Crawford, 2009). On the other hand, the compromise style of conflict management, where the management takes the problem by them and gives benefits to other parties (Whitemyer, 2005). In some cases, compromising style negatively affected the quality of the relationship among parties (Lu & Wang, 2017). Besides, some other evidence showed that compromising style can be used as a strong tool to resolve corporate and industrial conflict (Aqqad , Obeidat , Tarhini , & Masa'deh , 2019; Apipalakul & Kummoon, 2017).

So, the fourth assumption of the study hypothetically is such as:

H4: Compromising style has a positive relationship with GHM

4. Methodology

This research studied the impact of relative grievance management factors, which comprises in-depth analysis from the research data collected on different organizations in Uttara EPZ. Due to the lack of previous studies in Bangladesh especially in Uttara EPZ, it required exploratory research to test the hypotheses. This study carried both qualitative and quantitative approaches for collecting and analysis of data. The study used a Likert scale where respondents were asked to rate the items of the constructs on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 represented 'strongly disagree' and 5 represented strongly agree. Some open-ended questions were also included in the research instrument to assist to reach conclusion and make recommendations.

4.1 Questionnaire development

For the quantitative study, the data were collected from 265 respondents using a structured questionnaire. There were 25 items in the questionnaire to measure four independent and one dependent variable. A total of 20 items were employed to assess the independent variables consisting 'Accommodating Style', 'Avoiding Style', 'Compromising Style', and 'Collaborating Style' from established scales of prior studies that were previously tested the reliability and validity. These four styles of conflict management processes are accessible both globally and locally in preceding studies (Huan & Yazdanifard 2012 and Saeed et al., 2014). Five (05) indicators required to estimate construct namely 'Accommodating Style' and another five (05) for 'Avoiding Style' were adapted from the scales developed by Zhang et al., (2005). To assess the construct namely 'Compromising Style' five (05) items were identified and modified from Lee (2008). Besides, another construct namely 'Compromising Style' was tested by five (05) items adapted from Paul et al., (2004).

To measure grievance handling mechanism (GHM) the dependent variable, five (05) elements were adapted from Godbless et al., (2020). The data were collected in the local language in some cases and then converted into the English language for the convenience of the study.

4.2 Sample Size and Sample Distribution

As the study was conducted on the firms situated in the Uttara EPZ, so the total population for the study was 32,147 (Annual Report, 2019). As factory workers of UEPZ share the same characteristics required for the study, purposive sampling was used to conduct it. The data were collected from eight factories consisting of approximately 10,000 workers. The data were collected without considering the gender or age of the respondents. The collection of data considered the ratio of managers and workers working in the factory to choose the respondents in each of the factories. Most of the respondents are male aged between 26-35 years old (Table 1). The education level of the majority of respondents was secondary school certificate (SSC) or equivalent. 44.52% of respondents had 1-10 years of work experience where 9.05% of respondents had experience of 30-40 years (Table 2). There were 460 questionnaires were distributed. Among them, 195 questionnaires were not used for analysis due to incomplete responses. Finally, 265 responses were selected for analysis which is adequate to run structural equation modeling (Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2013).

4.3 Research instruments

The analysis used Smart PLS Software version 2.0 to study the relationship of the dependent and independent variables using structural equation modeling (SEM). The study used SPSS for data entry. The study used a composite reliability test to assess the reliability of the study. Convergent validity was tested using Average Varience Extracted (AVE), and discriminant validity was examined using Fornell-Larcker Criterion. However, all the independent and dependent constructs had an

alpha value of greater than 0.70 that is acceptable by the recommendation of Nunnally (1978).

5. Findings of the study

The data collection procedure didn't consider any age or gender limitation and focused on equal consideration for all factory workers. In this study 55.84% of respondents are male and 38% of respondents belong to the age group 26 to 35 years which are the highest among the respondents. The following table shows the descriptive statistics of the study

Table 1. Age and gender of the respondents

		Gender		Total
Age	Age group	Male	Female	
	18-25	27	34	61
	26-35	51	52	103
	36-45	40	24	64
	45-60	30	7	37
Total		148	117	265

Based on the research data, 118 respondents passed their secondary level of education which is 44.5% of the total respondents. Apart from this, 80 respondents completed their higher secondary or equivalent certification, 51 respondents accomplished their primary education and 6 respondents were graduates. Most of the respondents here have a total of 1 to 10 years of experience which is 118.

Table 2: Level of education and years of experience of respondents

		Level of education				Total
Years of experience	Years	Primary	Secondary	Higher secondary	Graduate	
	1 to 10	7	59	44	8	118
	11 to 20	11	37	23	3	74
	21 to 30	15	18	12	4	49
	31 to 40	18	4	1	1	24
Total		51	118	80	16	265

Based on the framework, this study used a measurement model. To analyze the reliability and validity of the scales, the study assessed factor analysis using the model. To assess the convergent validity, item loadings along with average variance extracted (AVE) were used by analyzing the construct validity. On the other hand, using the composite reliability (CR) test, the reliability of the study was assessed (Fornell, C. & Larcker, D. F., 1981). A discriminant validity test was also conducted to evaluate whether the

measure of construct related to each other or not (Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2013). According to scholars the minimum requirement to settle the items to analyze in the study should be greater than 0.60 for the item loading, 0.50 for the AVE, and 0.70 for the CR (Chin, 2010). According to the result of the measurement model in Table 1, all the factors had higher scores in the item loading than the standard requirement. Therefore, none of them were removed from the measurement model due to the lack of score in the correlation coefficient for the variable. Furthermore, composite reliability (CR) scores of the factors are more than 0.70 which represents that the items successfully met the minimum criterion for the analysis. The average variance extracted (AVE) of the factors also met the required score and none of them were overlooked for the study.

Table 2: Measurement Model Assessment

Construct	Item Code	Item Loading	AVE	Composite Reliability
Accommodating Style	AcdS1	0.8076	0.5977	0.8807
	AcdS2	0.8074		
	AcdS3	0.8097		
	AcdS4	0.7738		
	AcdS5	0.6559		
Avoiding Style	AvdS1	0.7175	0.5698	0.868
	AvdS2	0.831		
	AvdS3	0.8095		
	AvdS4	0.7492		
	AvdS5	0.6534		
Compromising Style	CmpS1	0.7172	0.5183	0.8427
	CmpS2	0.748		
	CmpS3	0.7451		
	CmpS4	0.7419		
	CmpS5	0.6667		
Collaborating Style	ColS1	0.6491	0.5248	0.8464
	ColS2	0.7749		
	ColS3	0.7207		
	ColS4	0.765		
	ColS5	0.6819		
Grievance Handling Mechanism	GHM1	0.6468	0.5299	0.8489
	GHM2	0.745		
	GHM3	0.7489		
	GHM4	0.7708		
	GHM5	0.7218		

Complying with Fornell-Larcker 's guideline, the study tested discriminant validity to determine whether the measurement is related or not (Benitez, Henseler, Castillo, & Schuberth, 2020). According to Fornell-Larcker's constraints, the value of the square root of average variance extracted should be higher than the value of the latent constructs of the actual non-diagonal variables (Lucas, Diener, & Suh, 1996). The result of the discriminant validity of the research suggests that the study successfully come across to the minimum criteria to be valid.

Table 3: Discriminant Validity (Fornell-Larcker Criterion)

	Accommodating Style	Avoiding Style	Collaborating Style	Compromising Style	Grievance Handling Mechanism
Accommodating Style	**0.773**				
Avoiding Style	0.252	**0.755**			
Collaborating Style	0.085	0.206	**0.724**		
Compromising Style	0.239	0.437	0.105	**0.720**	
Grievance Handling Mechanism	0.569	0.635	0.410	0.603	**0.728**

Act in accordance with the reliability and validity of the test, a structural model was formulated considering the dimensions of the study where different grievance handling styles were the independent variables and grievance handling mechanism was the dependent variable. Considering the four dimensions of grievance handling styles and multi-dimensional grievance handling mechanisms, four latent constructs were concluded. These constructs have a direct effect on the dependent variable grievance handling mechanism. Table 3 shows the results of the structural modeling. The t statistics show that all the constructs of the study have a value of more than 1.96 which is the standard value to be declared a relationship is significant enough (Benitez et al., 2020). According to the model, the values for each of the constructs are accommodating style with grievance handling mechanism ($\beta = 0.3809$, t-statistics = 7.5603), avoiding style with grievance handling mechanism ($\beta = 0.3349$, t-statistics value = 5.6932), collaborative style with grievance handling mechanism ($\beta = 0.2736$, t-statistics value = 4.2748), and compromising style with grievance handling mechanism ($\beta = 0.3372$, t-statistics value = 5.9823). Therefore, all the determinants are supported by structural equation modeling.

Table 4: Structural Model

	Unstandardized Beta	Standardized Beta	Standard Error	t Statistics	Results
AcdS → GHM	0.3809	0.3774	0.0504	7.5603	Supported
AvdS → GHM	0.3349	0.3312	0.0588	5.6932	Supported
ColS → GHM	0.2736	0.2751	0.064	4.2748	Supported
CmpS → GHM	0.3372	0.3363	0.0564	5.9823	Supported

Note: The bold lettered values represented 'the squire root' of the AVE; and the other values signified the correlation between the constructs. Accommodating Style = AcdS; Avoiding Style = AvdS; Collaborating Style = ColS; Compromising Style = CmpS; Grievance Handling Mechanism = GHM

6. Analysis of the study

The major purpose of the research is to find the most effective grievance handling mechanism applied in the factories in Uttara EPZ. For further justification, the study analyzed the effect of different grievance management styles on the grievance handling mechanism. Some researchers studied the same variables in different fields and found similar results (Islam & Rimi, 2017; Longe, 2015; Gayle, 2009), and some of them also found conflicting results as well (Elbaz et al. 2019). The primary outcome of the analysis showed a positive relationship among the grievance handling styles and the dependent variable grievance handling mechanism in the factory level employees in the Uttara EPZ. Similarly, prior researches showed the direct impact of these styles on the commercial banks of Bangladesh (Islam & Rimi, 2017). In Nigeria, a study on secondary schools showed that avoidance style can be an effective means for grievance management among the teachers (Alimi, 2003). In India, researchers suggested forming sexual harassment redressal forums to manage grievances that arise from sexual harassment at educational institutions and then apply grievance handling techniques like accommodation style and collaboration style (Thomas, 2015). Therefore, this study suggests that in the factory level a manager or an arbitrator, or a mediator can use any of the four collaborating style, avoiding style, compromising style, and accommodation style to manage the grievance among the employees. But the calculative study suggests that the most effective grievance management mechanism is accommodating style as the value of t statistics of this style has the highest score (7.5603) and explains that accommodating style and grievance management are strongly correlated with each other. The relationship between collaboration style and grievance management shows that it has the lowest t statistics value of 4.2748. Whereas, the other two relationships of compromising style and avoiding style with grievance handling mechanism have a close relationship with a t-statistics score of 5.9823 & 5.6932.

7. Implications and conclusions

The main motive of the study was to examine the effectiveness of the practical use of different grievance handling mechanisms in the light of Thomas and Killman's model of conflict management. Through an in-depth analysis of the prior studies, four hypotheses were developed. Based on the statistical analysis from the data collected from Uttara

EPZ, it can be concluded that all of them have a positive relationship with the effective grievance handling mechanism. Among the four grievance handling styles in Thomas and Killman's model, the accommodation style was proven to be the most effective grievance handling style where collaborating style was the least effective method for grievance handling. The outcome of the study will allow the firms in different EPZs in Bangladesh to resolve grievances in an efficient manner which will contribute to industrial harmony. It will also help HR managers, factory supervisors, trade unions, industrial arbitrators, mediators, government agencies to apply the most suitable grievance handling style to resolve industrial grievances not only in the Uttara EPZ but also in factories located around the country. The study can also be used as a guideline to explore more options for grievance management and can be used to test the effect of several mediating factors like cultural intelligence (Caputo et al., 2018), trust (Chan, Huang, & Ng, 2008), and employee engagement (Jung & Yoon, 2018) that were used in several studies.

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