HOW EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE RELATES TO CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STYLE IN SELANGOR

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ABSTRACT

As human, conflict is part of life and is essential in determining an individual's maturity, therefore, handling these conflicts effectively is preferred. This research explored how emotional intelligence relate to the conflict management style preferred. Data of 470 counsellors in Selangor were collected, and chi square for independence were administered to understand the association of an individual's emotional intelligence level and their preferred conflict management style. The result showed that emotional intelligence as a whole has an significant association with the preferred conflict management style. As for the sub-categories, intrapersonal, interpersonal and adaptability were found to be associated with the preferred conflict management style. However, stress management were not found to be significantly associated. This findings proved that emotional intelligence does relates to the style of managing conflict.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Conflict Management Style, Stress Management, Adaptability, Intrapersonal, Interpersonal.

INTRODUCTION

Conflict is an inevitable event that every human being will face on a daily basis. These challenges will make an individual grow to its full potential. However, in order to survive these challenges and triumphing through it, individuals will need to have a certain way of managing the conflict. The skill of having to understand which style or method to use in managing conflict can be related to the ability to understand other people's need, the ability to put oneself in other persons' shoes, the ability to actually foresee or perceive other people's preferences.

High emotional intelligence people has been reported to have the ability to solve conflicts more efficient than those with lesser level of emotional intelligence, which means that there is a significant relationship between high emotional intelligence and good conflict management (Lee, 2003; Goleman, 2000). This findings is acceptable since emotional intelligence has elements of empathy and interpersonal awareness that will make a person with high emotional intelligence become sensitive and highly aware of other people's wellbeing.

The ability of combining and categorising concepts, judging reason and using abstract thoughts can be referred to as intelligence, adding emotions to intelligence, it refers to the ability to organise response, crossing boundaries of psychological perceptions and thoughts which includes physiological, cognitive, motivational and experiential system (Salovey and Mayer, 2000).

Another definition of emotional intelligence is the capacity to recognise inner self feelings and those of others' and use it in motivating ourselves and managing emotions in ourselves and with others (Goleman, 2006). In other words, emotional intelligence is our capability to identify and recognise our own feelings and of others' and ability to manage it.

Baron (2004) defined emotional intelligence as a non-cognitive capabilities and skills that influence the ability to succeed in coping with demands and pressure from the environment (Baron 2004). This definition points out that emotional intelligence can help individuals in adapting to the situation by managing the changes and demands happening around a personl.

Goleman (2006) defined EI as the capacity for recognising our own feelings and those of others for motivating ourselves and for managing emotions in ourselves and in our relationships (Goleman, 2006). Bar-On defined EI as an array of non-cognitive capabilities and skills that influence one's ability to succeed in coping with environmental demands and pressures (Bar-On, 2004).

In Goleman's theory of emotional intelligence, he described four different dimensions, which are, self-awareness, social awareness, self management, and relationship management (Goleman, 2006). In the first dimension, self-awareness refers to a person's ability to accurately identify their own emotions. This dimension has 3 other sub dimensions, emotional self-awareness, accurate self-assessment, and self-confidence. In the second dimension, social awareness, it refers to the person's ability to acknowledge their emotions during any conversations or engagements in social situation. This dimension consists of empathy, organisational awareness, and service orientation. In third dimension, self-management, refers to the ability of a person to handle their emotions and actions in order to ensure positive outcome. The sub dimension for self-management are, emotional self-control, transparency, adaptability, achievement orientation, initiative and optimism. The last dimension is relationship skill which refers to the ability to manage conversations and social engagements in order to produce positive outcome. The sub dimension for relationship skill are, developing others, inspiration leaders, influence, change catalyst, conflict management, and teamwork and collaboration.

Baron (2004) on the other hand, explained his approach of emotional intelligence with 5 dimensions, which are, intrapersonal, interpersonal, stress management, adaptability and general mood. Intrapersonal can be referred to as self-awareness and self-expression, it refers to the person's ability to precisely explain, understand and accept themselves emotionally, it also can be identified by the person's ability to express their emotions, their emotional independence, and their effort in achieving personal goals. The sub dimensions for intrapersonal are self-regard, emotional self-awareness, assertiveness, independence and self-actualisation. Interpersonal refers to the person's social awareness and interpersonal relationships. This is further defined by the person's ability to understand other people's feelings, their cooperativeness with others, and success in establishing mutual satisfying relationship with other people. Sub dimensions for interpersonal are empathy, social responsibility, and interpersonal relationship. In stress management, Baron defined it as the emotional management and regulation. It can be identified by a person's ability to effectively and constructively manage and control their emotions. Sub dimensions for stress management are stress tolerance and impulse control. In adaptability, it refers to change management skill of a person, how a person validate their feelings linking it with reality and adapting to it. It also refers to a person's ability to adjust their thinking and emotions in any situation and effectively solve problems both personal and interpersonal. The sub dimension for adaptability are reality-testing, flexibility, and problem-solving. And lastly, general mood, it refers to the person's self-motivation, the ability to look at the brighter side of things, the

positive outlook and feeling of content with themselves. General mood has two sub dimensions, optimism, and happiness.

Baron (2006) explained that emotional intelligence factors are dependant with each other, for example, a person who is dependant and non-assertive will find it hard to express their feelings to others, this interpersonal relationship is dependent upon positive self-regard, which also part of self-acceptance, and social responsibility, and when one person is feeling responsibility, they will feel accepted and will accept others as well as respect others. In other words, all these emotional elements are interconnected and with good connection between them, one can understand, relate, and solve conflict and challenges better.

When a conflict situation becomes in depth, it is not practical to come with a solution without trying to understand the emotions behind it. Therefore, it can be said that having to understand the emotional capacities of people in a conflict situation is essential in determining smooth conflict resolution process (Goleman, 2006).

A higher level of emotional intelligence is positively correlated with collaborating and negatively with accommodating. This relationship was found by Morrison (2008) in his study to determine the relationship between emotional intelligence and preferred conflict handling style among 94 registered nurses in Missipi healthcare facilities. The finding showed that higher level of emotional intelligence were correlated conflict management style, which means that it is important to develop and understand emotional intelligence and competencies to ensure effective conflict management skill (Morrison, 2008).

Boland and Ross (2010) did a factorial design experiment on emotional intelligence level and conflict hostility. From the findings, it can be said that a high emotional intelligence person will have a better chance in a mutually satisfactory agreement in a conflict situation (Boland and Ross, 2010).

Salami (2010) studied a relationship between conflict management strategies and organisational citizenship behaviour and emotional intelligence on three hundred and twenty public servants from the state of South Western Nigeria. With multiple regressions, the result indicated that forcing and withdrawing conflict management strategies were negatively significant in moderating emotional intelligence traits (Salami, 2010).

In studying five hundred and twenty eight employees of ninety seven organisational teams, Ayoko, Callan and Hartel (2008) explored the advance research of conflict and emotions by integrating conflict, reactions to conflict and team emotional intelligence climate. The result revealed that low emotional intelligence in teams resulted in destructive reactions towards conflict, and team with less-well-defined emotional intelligence climates were associated with increased task and relationship conflict and conflict intensity (Ayoko, Callan and Hartel, 2008).

Der Foo, Elfenbein, Tan and Chuan (2004) examined relationship between emotional intelligence and negotiation among 164 undergraduate students in a large Asian city with Chinese ethcnic origin, consisting of 76 males and 88 females. The result showed that high emotional intelligence negotiators reported higher positive outcomes (Der Foo, Elfenbein, Tan and Chuan, 2004). Emotional intelligence can influence a conflict negotiation outcome depending on the conflict resolution technique chosen (Fulmer and Barry, 2004).

A study by Jordan and Troth (2009), on managing emotions during team problem solving, exploring emotional intelligence and conflict management style. Jordan and Troth (2009) studied 350 individuals from 108 work teams. The study showed that emotional intelligence indicators were positively liked with performance but differently linked with conflict resolutions (Jordan and Troth, 2009).

Past researches highlighted the relations of having a certain level of emotional intelligence in solving any crisis and any kind of conflict situation. This research will

go deeper in understanding the association between an individual's emotional intelligence level and how it is relating to their choice of conflict management style.

METHOD

Respondents

470 respondents recruited from counsellors in Selangor were involved in this research. From 1000 survey questionnaires were distributed, 470 were usable. A Non-probability Convenience sampling method was used in this research because of the convenient accessibility of the researcher on the targeted population.

Instruments

The Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i) by Reuven Bar-On (2004)
The Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i) was developed by Reuven Bar-On to assess the Bar-On model of emotional-social intelligence. The EQ-i is a self-report measure designed to measure a number of constructs related to EI. The EQ-i consists of 133 items and takes approximately 30 minutes to complete. It gives an overall EQ score as well as scores for the following five composite scales (intrapersonal, interpersonal, stress management, adaptability and general mood) and 15 subscales (self regard, emotional self awareness, assertiveness, independence, self-actualization, empathy, social responsibility, interpersonal relationship, stress tolerance, impulse control, reality testing, flexibility, problem solving, optimism, happiness) (Bar-On, 2004).

Each of the items has 5 points response set ranging from "very seldom of me" or "not true of me" to "very often true of me" or "true of me". High EQ-i scores indicate emotionally intelligent people whereas lower scores indicate a need for enrichment in specific areas. EQ-i has a Cronbach alpha co-efficient of as low as .69 to .86.

Keirsey's Temperament Sorter II by David Keirsey (1998)

Keirsey's Temperament Sorter II was developed by David Keirsey in 1998 which has close relation to Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. It is a self-assessed personality questionnaire designed to help people better understand themselves and others. Keirsey's Temperament Sorter II consists of 70 items with 4 pairs of alternatives, which are Extraverted vs. Introverted, Sensory vs. Intuitive, Thinking vs. Feeling, Judging vs. Perceiving. The temperaments will be presented by the accumulation of highest score of each item. A high score of each sub-scale will define the outcome of each individual's personality profile.

Varlami & Bayne (2007) found adequate reliabilities of the KTS II for research purposes of 0.78 (Extraversion and Introversion), 0.79 (Sensing and Intuition), 0.70 (Thinking and Feeling) and 0.73 (Judging and Perceiving). Francis, Craig and Robbins (2008) also reported similar alpha coefficient of 0.71 (Extraversion and Introversion), 0.82 (Sensing and Intuition), 0.86 (Thinking and Feeling), and 0.84 (Judging and Perceiving).

RESULTS

In table 1 below are result of overall score of emotional intelligence and its relationship with conflict management style. Majority of the respondents have high emotional intelligence style. Among these high emotional intelligence Selangorian, 26% chose avoiding as their style of managing conflict, 22% compromising, 21% collaborating, 17% accommodating and 14% competing. A chi-square test-for-independence was used to examine whether emotional intelligence was related to their chosen style of conflict management. The chi-square test was statistically significant, X^2 (4, N = 470) = 46.95, p < 0.001, with Cramer's Value of .32 indicating that there was a small association between emotional intelligence and conflict management style.

Table 1: Emotional Intelligence and Conflict Management Style

	Competing	Collaborating	Compromising	Avoid	Accommodating	Total
High	55	93	103	122	81	454
Low	11	5	0	0	0	16
Total	66	98	103	122	0	470

In table 2 below, the result showed the relationship between intrapersonal and conflict management style. 93.1% of participants with high intrapersonal score, avoidance is the highest chosen conflict management style with 28% of them chose avoidance as mode of conflict management, compared to 21% of them chose compromising, followed by 20% chose collaborating, 18% chose accommodating and the lowest chosen style is competing with only 13% of them chose this as their style of managing conflict.

6.9% participants with low interpersonal score, tend to chose only three style of managing conflict of competing, collaborating and compromising with each style scored 9%.

A chi-square test-for-independence was used to examine whether stress management was related to their chosen style of conflict management. The chi-square test was statistically significant, X^2 (4, N = 470) = 29.5, p < 0.001, with Cramer's Value of .25 indicating that there was a small association between intrapersonal and conflict management style.

Table 2: Intrapersonal and Conflict Management Style

	Competing	Collaborating	Compromising	Avoiding	Accommodating	Total

High	55	87	92	122	81	437
Low	11	11	11	0	0	33
Total	66	98	103	122	81	470

In table 3 below, the result showed the relationship between interpersonal and conflict management style. For 98% of participants with high interpersonal score, avoidance is the highest chosen conflict management style with 27% of them chose avoidance as mode of conflict management, compared to 22% chose compromising, followed by 21% chose collaborating, 17% chose accommodating and the lowest chosen style is competing with only 13% of them chose this as their style of managing conflict. Some 2% of those with low interpersonal score, tend to choose only two style of managing conflict of competing and collaborating with both 4% for each style.

A chi-square test-for-independence was used to examine whether stress management was related to their chosen style of conflict management. The chi-square test was statistically significant, X^2 (4, N = 470) = 20.22, p < 0.001, with Cramer's Value of .21 indicating that there was a small association between interpersonal and conflict management style.

Table 3: Interpersonal and Conflict Management Style

	Competing	Collaborating	Compromising	Avoiding	Accommodating	Total
High	61	93	103	122	81	460
Low	5	5	0	0	0	10
Total	66	98	103	122	81	470

In table 4 below, the result showed the relationship between Stress Management and conflict management style. There are 86.4% participants with high stress management score, avoidance is the highest chosen conflict management style with 28% compared to collaborating with 22%, compromising 20%, accommodating 16% and the lowest of 15% chose competing as mode of conflict management style. Some 6.9% of the participants are with low stress management score, tend to choose compromising as their mode of conflict management style with 32% of them chose this style. Second choice for those with low stress management score is accommodating with 25% of them chose this style, followed by 17% chose collaborating and 9% chose competing.

A chi-square test-for-independence was used to examine whether stress management was related to their chosen style of conflict management. The chi-square test was not statistically significant, X^2(4, N=470) = 11.28, p > .001.

Table 4: Stress Management and Conflict Management Style

	Competing	Collaborating	Compromising	Avoiding	Accommodating	Total
High	60	87	82	112	65	406
Low	6	11	21	10	16	64
Total	66	98	103	122	81	470

In table 5 below, the result showed the relationship between adaptability and conflict management style. 88.5% of participants with high intrapersonal score, avoidance is the highest chosen conflict management style with 23% of them chose avoidance as mode of conflict management, compared to 23.4% of them chose compromising, followed by 20% chose collaborating, 18% chose accommodating and the lowest chosen style is competing with only 13% of them chose this as their style of managing conflict.

Some 11.5% participants with low interpersonal score, tend to choose only three style of managing conflict of competing, collaborating and compromising with each style scored 9%.

A chi-square test-for-independence was used to examine whether stress management was related to their chosen style of conflict management. The chi-square test was statistically significant, X^2 (4, N = 470) = 26.77, p < 0.001, with Cramer's Value of .24 indicating that there was a small association between adaptability and conflict management style.

Table 5: Adaptability and Conflict Management Style

	Competing	Collaborating	Compromising	Avoiding	Accommodating	Total
High	55	93	98	94	75	415
Low	11	5	5	28	6	55
Total	66	98	103	122	81	470

In table 6 below, the result showed the relationship between general mood and conflict management style. Participants were reported to have high general mood score with non-reported to have low general mood score, with the highest chosen style of managing conflict is avoiding with 26%, followed by compromising with 22%, collaborating 21%, accommodating 17% and the least preferred style of managing conflict is competing with 14%.

Therefore, there are relationship found between conflict management style and general emotional intelligence, intrapersonal, interpersonal and adaptability, but no relationship was found between stress management and conflict management style.

Table 6: General Mood and Conflict Management Style

	Competing	Collaborating	Compromising	Avoiding	Accommodating	Total
High	66	98	103	122	81	470
Low	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	66	98	103	122	81	470

It can be summarized that within emotional intelligence subcategories, participants with both high and low level chose avoidance as their most preferred style of managing conflict, with the highest percentage of those choosing avoiding as their preferred choice of conflict management style is between 26% and 2%. The second most chosen style of managing conflict is collaborating with the percentage of participants choosing this is 22% to 1%. Third most chosen style of managing conflict is compromising, between 22% and 1% of participants choose this style of managing conflict. Next choice is accommodating as style of managing conflict, with 17% to 1% of participants tend to choose this style of managing conflict. The least favored style of managing conflict is competing with 14% to 1% of the participants chose this style. These results have added substantial values to the knowledge of understanding emotional intelligence. This research has given guidance on how important emotional intelligence is in ensuring quality conflict resolution practice.

DISCUSSION

The relationship between emotional intelligence and conflict management style was significantly supported by this research, corresponding positively to the previous research findings (Der Foo, Elfenbein, Tan and Chuan, 2004; Fulmer and Barry, 2004). Intrapersonal, interpersonal and adaptability showed significant relationship with conflict management, whilst, stress management and general mood showed no significant relationship with conflict management style. This study found that higher emotional intelligence individuals mostly choose compromising as their way of managing conflict. High emotional intelligence individuals have the ability to identify, assess and control the emotions of oneself and of others. Compromising style of managing conflict suggests that an individual will find the best possible solutions that are acceptable by both parties. Therefore, having the high sense of empathy and adaptability, high emotional intelligence individuals are easy to handle conflict by compromising as proven in this research and congruent with the findings of previous researches higher level of emotional intelligence is positively correlated with collaborating (Morrison, 2008).

Individuals with high levels of intrapersonal skills are in tune with their inner self, assertive, independent, and self-actualize. They are able to express their feelings, independent, strong and confident in conveying their ideas and belief. This

research shows that there is a significant relationship between level of intrapersonal skills and their conflict management style (Goleman, 2006).

However, this research suggests that high intrapersonal individuals favour the avoiding style of managing conflict. This may be because their high level of independence and self-actualization causes them to preserve the idea of managing the conflict immediately and wait for the best time for the solution in order to conserve their reputations and positive environment. These findings needs to be elaborated further in future research. A significant relationship was also found between interpersonal and conflict management style. Individuals with high levels of interpersonal skill have high empathy, are responsible, dependable and have great social skill (Bar-On, 2004).

This research suggested that high interpersonal individuals choose compromising as their style of managing conflict. Individuals who use compromising style of managing conflict will find the middle ground that will satisfy both parties, with their high level of empathy and social skill, it is easy for high level interpersonal individuals to find this middle ground.

Adaptability has a significant relationship with conflict management style. This research suggested that individuals with high level of adaptability choose compromising as their way of managing conflict. Individuals with high level of adaptability will be able to cope (Bar-On, 2004) with the demands of the other party during the negotiation of solving the conflict. Their flexibility, realistic and understanding makes it easier for them to use compromising in getting the conflict resolved. No relationship was reported for stress management and general mood. Further research is needed to understand the reason of the insignificance.

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