

# Impact of emotional intelligence on conflict management



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Purpose – This paper aims at exploring the role of emotional intelligence in affecting the conflict management styles used.

Design/methodology/approach – A self-administered questionnaire was used to survey 233 employees from several banks. Correlation and regression was used to analyze the results. The findings are discussed in the paper along with some recommendations for managers and researchers.

Findings – The results revealed a significantly positive relationship between high emotional intelligence and usage of integrating, compromising and obliging styles of handling conflict. Low emotional intelligence was found to be associated with high use of avoiding and dominating style.

Research limitations/implications – The study has limitations which hold suggestions for future research including self-report issue, focus on only one sector i. e. banking sector for analysis located in Islamabad/ Rawalpindi. Also, the study was one shot therefore there is need for longitudinal research to validate the findings. The need for applied research is also emphasized.

Practical implications – The paper provides practitioners with some advice about understanding and managing conflict through usage of emotional intelligence and the importance of its training is highlighted.

Originality/value – The paper is a contribution to the existing limited research on the topic. However previous researches offered an important base for the study regarding the consequences of emotions on conflict management; nevertheless, they have not addressed the particular approaches that people are more likely to use when confronted with conflict. It explores the link

between the EI and all the five styles of conflict management which has not been yet researched by any academician.

Keywords Emotional intelligence, Integration, Compromising, Avoiding, Competing, Obliging

Paper type Research Paper

## INTRODUCTION

The study particularly focuses on the individual emotional intelligence abilities to manage a conflict as emotions play a key role in effecting behavior in general (Weiner, 1992) and negotiation behavior in particular (Barry & Oliver, 1996). Emotional intelligence shall be analyzed for its connection to the recognition of conflict formation and its influence on the selection of conflict management strategies under different situations.

The concept of emotional intelligence can be traced back to Thorndike's (1920) concept of social intelligence, Wechsler's (1940) proposition of non-intellective abilities as well as Gardner's (1983) conceptualization of personal intelligence. However, the term of 'emotional intelligence' (EI) was originated by Salovey and Mayer (1990). Thereafter, it was the work of Goleman (1995) which globally popularized the construct of emotional intelligence and as a result of that, both practitioners and academia have started recognizing its importance in the world of organizations. In recent years the construct of emotional intelligence has been advanced as providing greater insight into organizational behavior (Mayer, Salovey & Caruso, 2000).

Thus, this research focuses on analyzing the impact of individual's emotional intelligence on individual's ability to effectively manage the conflict.

Therefore, it was analyzed that which of the conflict management styles are mostly used by individuals with high emotional intelligence.

Findings regarding the relationship between emotional intelligence and conflict management and conflict resolution patterns have mixed results. A very little research has been done on this topic, as to analyze the impact of emotional intelligence on all the five styles of conflict management. Previous researches have offered an important base for the study regarding the consequences of emotions on conflict management; nevertheless, they have not addressed the particular approaches that people are more likely to use when confronted with conflict. Other studies have explored limited, only two to three conflict management styles. This study explores all the five styles of conflict management. Moreover, the study aims to find out that the individual's high in emotional intelligence are inclined to which of the conflict management styles i. e. relationship between EI and conflict management styles. Further, it aims to recognize the importance of emotional intelligence and constructive and destructive conflict management styles. Exploring these relationships will prove to be a great contribution to the existing body of knowledge by revealing important findings in the study. This study will prove to be a source of understanding the benefits of using emotional intelligence in context of realizing conflict management. It will prove to be beneficial for the organizations in a way that it will induce them to recognize the importance of emotional intelligence for the healthy functioning of their

organization which will result in several training programs for employees to develop emotional intelligence abilities.

A foundation is laid to better explain the construct of 'emotional intelligence' as supported by various researchers. Further, research investigates the emotional competencies of individuals within the organization that promote constructive conflict management styles.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Emotions

Emotion in organizations as an academic field in its own right did not emerge until recently (Yeomans, 2007). Understanding the behavior in the workplace requires grasping the nature and effect of human emotion. Our behavior and feelings at work are affected when we experience emotions. This situation is particularly prevalent in the state of conflict in which emotions are experienced regularly when individuals interact with each other (Jordan & Troth, 2004). Whether focus is placed on distinguishing between felt emotions and revealed emotions, recognizing distinct emotions that appear in workplaces or the temporary effects of negative mood, each of the authors see emotions an important determinant of employees' response to workplace situations (Jordan, Lawrence & Troth, 2006).

### Emotional Intelligence

The concept of emotional intelligence (EI) was first proposed by Mayer and Salovey (1990) which was then popularized by Goleman in his famous book "Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ", in which he made <https://assignbuster.com/impact-of-emotional-intelligence-on-conflict-management/>

strong claims about contribution of emotional intelligence to individual success and specifically in workplaces. He identified intellectual intelligence as a contribution of 20 % towards success in workplace and remaining 80% may be attributable to emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995). Since then, this area has got much attention in the field of leadership, Human Resource Management and Organizational Behavior. Researchers have defined EI as a distinct psychological skill that can be consistently gauged. Interest among social scientists on emotions as a domain of intelligence has grown in recent years.

Before the importance of EI was realized in organizations, IQ was supposed to be sufficient for good human performance. Workers were indeed advised to put away their emotions at their homes before coming to work. But it is unrealistic to suppose that emotions can be left home or set aside when you arrive at work. Some people may assume, for a variety of reasons, that emotional neutrality is an ideal, but it is usually not good for an organization for it can hinder people to move into management roles. As emotional intelligence is critical to high performance, a person who knows how to stay motivated under stress, motivate others, manage complex interpersonal relationships, inspire others and build teams who are recognized specialists on a product or service are likely to get better results (Goleman, 2005).

Thus, the idea of EI has attained some attention from some researchers in this age of customer-focused organizations due to the perception of it as a means to survive in present era of unfriendly, competitive and volatile environment (Suliman & Al-Shaikh, 2007). According to some scholars, e. g.

Johnson and Indvik (1999) and McGarvey (1997), an employee's emotional  
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intelligence is likely to be higher when the organization is richer in the terms of emotions.

It is easy to recognize low emotional intelligence in others. If the insensitive managers try to bulldoze their staff through steady criticism, loud voice, and veiled threats of joblessness will prompt the staff to great efforts. This attitude is emotionally unintelligent. The behavior of people to start having a dispute shouting match is also an emotionally unintelligent attitude. And once this behavior starts, it creates a downward spiral of low morale, avoidance and negative politics (Dreu, 1997). The reason for this behavior stems from emotions. Emotions provide us energy. Negative emotions create negative energy and positive emotions create positive energy. However, the emotionally intelligent are aware of this. They do not continuously think about how they feel. They do not reach the extremes of showing or hiding everything. They express what they feel when suitable, so that molehills do not grow into mountains (Bagshaw, 2000).

The significance of emotions in work settings has been well-known.

Emotional intelligence is a multi-dimensional concept that links emotion and cognition to improve human interactions (Jordan, Peter, Lawrence, Sandra, 2009). Salovey and Mayer (1990) defined emotional intelligence as “ the subset of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one’s own and others’ feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one’s thinking and actions” (p. 189). This definition is comprised of three categories of abilities: evaluation and expression of emotion, regulation of emotion, and using emotions in decision making.

Based on Mayer and Salovey's model of emotional intelligence, Wong and Law (2002) devised their own model of emotional intelligence which comprises of four abilities, Appraisal and Expression of Emotion (own and others), Use of Emotions and Regulation of emotions (own and others). Recognizing emotional intelligence as a set of cognitive abilities involves that a degree of individual effort is required for these abilities to be successfully utilized (Mayer, Salovey & Caruso, 2000).

Appraisal and expression of emotion is the ability to properly determine and express one's own emotions as well as to be sympathetic, appraise and express emotions of others (Zhou & George, 2003). Management of our own emotion can help us avoid annoyance, worry and grief and guide to become dynamic in our jobs and personal lives. Thus for a content life, one should learn how to manage one's emotion. Emotions and cognitions are highly interconnected and emotional intelligence allows people with the ability to use emotions to aid the effective cognitive processing of information. Individuals vary not only in awareness, appraisal and expression of emotions but also in their ability to use emotions in collaboration with their cognitive processes to enhance effective functioning (Gross, 1998).

Individuals with low emotional intelligence cannot effectively use their emotions to aid cognitive processes and may find it difficult to coordinate among how they feel and what are they doing (Zhou & George, 2003). People not only understand the emotions of others but also make an effort to manage these emotions. The management of emotion enables an individual to join or not to join himself from an emotion in a given situation depending on its utility at that given time. This is apparent in the individual's ability to <https://assignbuster.com/impact-of-emotional-intelligence-on-conflict-management/>



have control on his immediate reactions and postpone his judgment and then to communicate them in a measured and careful manner (Dodgson, 1993).

## Conflict

Conflict is a collective dilemma in which two or more individuals, families, societies or regions disagree with each other (Dzurgba, 2006). Interpersonal conflict comprises of two or more persons in disagreement. Organizational conflict refers to a disagreement between or within groups in an organization. The groups might be of employees, workers' union or management. Organizational conflict is the one mostly prevalent in the workplace due to the fact that people continuously hold opposing views on different issues, interests, beliefs, objectives and ambitions (Deutsch, 1990). Some harmful consequences of conflict can demoralize an organization's efforts. However, handling them correctly can be useful for individuals and organizations by creating effective, more flexible working relationship which would enhance innovative output and create novel solutions (Omoluabi, 2001).

## Conflict Resolution

During previous number of decades, researchers took a keen interest in conflict and its impact on organizations. Many researchers have focused on numerous factors such as styles of handling conflict (Jehn, 1997; Jehn, Northcraft & Neale, 1999), resolution strategies (Van de Vliert & Euwema, 1994), conflict and justice (Ohbuchi, Suzuki & Hayashi, 2001), theories of managing conflict (Rahim, 2002), conflict of interest and objectives (Vilaseca, <https://assignbuster.com/impact-of-emotional-intelligence-on-conflict-management/>

2002) and conflict management techniques (Fillbeck & Smith, 1997). Conflict resolution is an alternative approach to handling conflicts. It is a procedure in which parties in conflict, through interpersonal communication are reached to an acceptable and harmonious point of agreement (Omoluabi, 2001).

Based on the conceptualizations of Follett (1940), Blake and Mouton (1964), and Thomas (1976), Rahim and Bonoma (1979) differentiated the styles of handling interpersonal conflict on two basic dimensions, concern for self and for others. The first dimension explains the degree (high or low) to which a person attempts to satisfy his or her own concern. The second dimension explains the degree (high or low) to which a person attempts to satisfy the concern of others. These two dimensions result in five distinct behavioral conflict management strategies: integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding, and compromising.

Integrating (high concern for self and others) style involves openness, exchange of information, and assessment of dissimilarities to reach an effective solution acceptable to both parties. It is associated with problem solving, which may lead to creative solutions. Obliging (low concern for self and high concern for others) style is associated with attempting to minimize the differences and focusing commonalities to satisfy the concern of the other party. Dominating (high concern for self and low concern for others) style has been linked with win-lose orientation or with forcing behavior to win one's position. Avoiding (low concern for self and others) style has been associated with withdrawal, or escape situations. Compromising (intermediate in concern for self and others) style involves give-and-take

whereby both parties give up something to make a mutually acceptable decision (Rahim, 2002 ).

### Emotional Intelligence and Conflict Management

The basic notion throughout this paper is the intrinsically emotional nature of conflict. According to Gayle and Preiss (1998), a small amount of research has explored the emotional understanding of conflict in the workplace.

However, Jehn (1997) suggests that emotions are an important component of conflict. Others including Thomas (1992), Ashkanasy and Daus (2002), and Bodtker and Jameson (2001) advocate that workplace conflict and emotions are strongly linked. They argue that as conflict is related to stress and pressure, it escalates emotional response and negative stimulation. Pinkly (1990) found a discrete rational versus emotional dimension to conflict management frame from his study on the disputant's interpretations of conflict. Individuals, in the emotional frame which includes feelings such as jealousy, hate, anger and frustration, are more likely to work less effectively because emotions infest and generalize the rational and instrumental way of thinking (Thomas, 1992).

Weisinger (1998) recognized emotional management as a major ability essential to handle conflict in the workplace and improve relationships in workplaces. Subsequently, Goleman (2001a) listed conflict management as a core competency in his model of emotional intelligence, noting that effective conflict management is important for retaining business relationships. Lubit (2004) stated that emotional intelligence is a competency that increases the

individual's capability to deal with "toxic" managers by means of enhanced conflict resolution skills.

Suliman & Al-Shaikh (2007) concluded in their study that employees with higher levels of emotional intelligence are expected to have more established life due to fewer conflicts and calmness which evokes creativity and innovation in employees. One needs to have good relationships with co-workers and supervisors and should have an understanding of their emotions and feelings to be creative.

### Emotional Intelligence and Conflict Handling Styles

Influence of personality characteristics, interpersonal needs, individual behaviour, organizational status, emotions, power, rewards, beliefs, basic values amongst others also have a direct impact on the styles applied (Bodtker & Jameson, 2001). Jordan and Troth (2002) study discovered that individuals with higher levels of emotional intelligence were more likely to search for integrative solutions when confronted with conflict and preferred not to avoid. They asserted that, for the emotionally intelligent individual, integration in the appropriate conditions may be a sign of their ability to recognize and regulate emotions. As a result, integration serves to enhance employees' relationships with their co-workers and assists to accomplish their goals during times of change. Indeed, in move ahead with their research, Jordan and Troth (2004) showed that groups having higher levels of emotional intelligence were more likely to inform using integrative conflict resolution style to settle on a real decision-making task. Alternatively, those teams having less ability to deal with their own emotions had more chances

to engage in greater use of avoidance tactics which resulted in lower performance. The study by Jordan, Ashkanasy and Ascough (2007) also found out the less use of avoidance techniques by those having high emotional intelligence.

However, Foo, Elfenbein, Tan, and Aik (2004) in their study using student groups in a simulated negotiation, somewhat surprisingly found that individuals with high emotional intelligence actually landed up with low performance in the negotiation due to the reason that to reach an integrative solution, these individuals agreed to the lowest to achieve an integrative solution. However they noted that their findings needed to be approached with some caution. However, Lawrence and Lorsch (1967) indicated that integrative style dealing with intergroup conflict was considerably used to a greater extent in higher performing organizations than in low performing ones. Ogungbamila (2006) found that the forcing strategy had a direct significant relationship with work frustration while confronting, withdrawing, smoothing and compromising strategies did not.

Burke (1970) suggested that the integrating style was related to the effective management of conflict, while forcing (dominating) and withdrawing (avoiding) were related to the ineffective management of conflict. Goleman (1998) suggests that emotionally intelligent employees are well able to negotiate and effectively handle their conflicts with organizational members.

Silvia (2002) determined that high emotional self-awareness acts as an impediment on individuals' experience of strong emotions. In other words,

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individuals with higher emotional self-awareness will experience lower levels of emotional response in reply to emotion generating situations, and will be better able to resolve conflict effectively with their fellow members.

“ The management of own emotions involves an individual’s ability to connect or disconnect from an emotion depending on its usefulness in any given situation” (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). In some conditions, emotions of other members need to be managed to ensure that working relationships are sustained. For instance, unmanageable anger in the workplace can have a negative impact on relationships, particularly if the anger is communicated to specific individuals (Davidson, MacGregor, Stuhr, & Gidron, 1999; Fitness, 2000). On this basis, managing own and others’ emotions may be the key to avoiding these negative consequences during a conflict situation.

For example, when faced with personal injustice during a conflict episode, an individual’s feelings of anger may motivate or distract them for resolving the conflict. The individual with high emotional intelligence would be attentive of their anger, be able to administer their anger and regulate it to motivate their behavior beneficially. On the other hand, an individual with low emotional intelligence may not be aware of their emotions or the source of their emotions and allow anger to consume their feelings and reside on the unfairness that may have hurried their anger in the first place. Each of these emotional abilities has suggestions for how individual perform in organizations and in particular how they resolve conflict (Suliman & Al-Shaikh, 2007).

Extending the benefits of EI to the negotiation context, we expect that by regulating one's emotions, and by maintaining a positive negotiating environment, a negotiator high in emotional intelligence can create an environment in which both negotiating sides are satisfied with the way the negotiation was performed. Despite the possible benefit of high EI individuals to create a positive negotiating experience for both themselves and for the negotiating partners, it is uncertain whether an individual benefits by negotiating with a high EI partner. One dimension of EI is to direct their emotion abilities to improve personal performance (Law, Wong & Song, 2004). Conceivably the high EI partner can extract greater value from the negotiation; for instance a high EI person can use abilities at understanding others (Wong, Law, & Wong, 2004) to recognize that his or her partner is satisfied with the offer and not increase the offer further.

Despite this possibility of personal performance at the expense of the partner, we expect that individuals profit by negotiating with high EI partners. Individuals high in EI can better gain the trust of others and trust encourages integrative bargaining (Naquin & Paulson, 2003). Further, positive emotions lead to cognitive elasticity and innovative strategies in fashioning integrative negotiation outcomes (Kumar, 1997). In contrast, negative emotions guide negotiators to identify the situation as distributive rather than integrative. Integrative bargaining is helpful because the negotiation parties can discover each others' interests and find ways to increase joint outcomes (Fisher, Ury & Patton, 1991).

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

## Independent Variable Dependent Variable

In order to give a clear picture of the proposed research, a conceptual framework has been developed. This gives a logical sense of the relationship between the selected dependent and independent variables. According to the above literature review the variables defined are as follows:

Emotional Intelligence (Independent Variable)

Integrating (Dependent Variable)

Compromising (Dependent Variable)

Dominating (Dependent Variable)

Obliging (Dependent Variable)

Avoiding (Dependent Variable)

As it is evident from the conceptual diagram that as the increment in one variable i. e. Emotional Intelligence, produces a positive increase in the integrating, compromising and obliging style. The relationship is said to be direct and highly positive as the increase in Emotional intelligence produces a positive effect on the three styles. Whereas, high emotional intelligence will have a negative impact on dominating and avoiding styles of conflict management. In short, high emotionally intelligent individual will be less likely to use the dominating and avoiding style to manage a conflict.

## HYPOTHESES



H1: Individuals high in emotional intelligence are more inclined to adopt integrating style during conflict.

H2: Individuals high in emotional intelligence are more inclined to adopt compromising style during conflict.

H3: Individuals low in emotional intelligence are more inclined to adopt dominating style during conflict.

H4: Individuals high in emotional intelligence are more inclined to adopt obliging style during conflict.

H5: Individuals low in emotional intelligence are more inclined to adopt avoiding style during conflict.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Participants

The targeted population for this research was banking sector of Pakistan. As like other organizations, banks also have their own hierarchy including chain of command, span of control. This organization structure and psychological contract may often result in various conflicts within the organization.

Hierarchy describes the structure of the management from top to down.

Chain of command is mechanism in which power and authority is exerted and delegated from senior management to every employee at every level of the organization. Whereas, span of control, is the number of people who report to one manager in a hierarchy. Psychological contract refers to the perception of the two parties including the employee and employer where

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their mutual obligation may be viewed as promises and expectations towards each other. These all may have negative impact on job satisfaction, organization commitment and low trust level causing various task and relationship conflicts (Ali, 2008). Moreover, due to differences in personalities, a conflict can also occur e. g. a quality oriented person will have conflict with quantity oriented person.

So to cope up with these issues, this study presents the importance of emotional intelligence in dealing with the individuals who cause conflict. The sample was selected from the private banks located in Islamabad/Rawalpindi. Total number of employees among which questionnaires were distributed was 260 employees out of which 233 employees returned the filled questionnaires. Response rate was 89 %. Each employee was working at managerial level. 66 % of the respondents were male and 33% were female.

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy was applied to check whether the sample used was adequate or not. The value of our measure was 0. 584 which showed that the sample selected was adequate and the results of the factor analysis would be useful. If the value is less than . 50, the results of the factor analysis probably won't be very useful.

### Procedures

The total questionnaires distributed were 260 in number among the participants. The questionnaire was self administered as by visiting the banks, employees were individually requested to fill out the questionnaire.

Before giving the questionnaires, all questions were explained to the  
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participants so they can easily complete the questionnaire and provide the accurate and relevant information. Only one questionnaire was provided to each respondent. After the completion of the experiment, 15 participants were excluded from the study as they were found to fill the questionnaire randomly without reading the questions. In addition, 12 of the returned questionnaires were not completed correctly. Therefore, these 27 were also excluded from the study, leaving a total of 233 usable questionnaires, with an overall response rate of 89%. The chances of error in the responses were also reduced by this method. The convenient sampling technique was followed as the data collection was done from the employees of private banks who were conveniently available to provide information.

The data collected from the 233 questionnaires were analyzed using the statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS) 13. Regression and Correlation was applied to the data to achieve the results regarding the relationship between the variables.

### Measures

A single questionnaire (See Appendix) was distributed among employees of the bank, which was adopted from Wong and Law (2002) and Rahim (1983). The questions were carefully worded to avoid misinterpretation. The questionnaire layout was formatted in logical manner to ensure a higher response rate. Questionnaire included only closed-ended questions. Structured questionnaire was designed to measure all the independent and dependent variables on a 5-point likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree

(coded as “ 5”) to Strongly Disagree (coded as “ 1”). The questions also sought data on demographics of respondents.

### Conflict Management

For getting responses on conflict management styles, one of the most commonly used models, Rahim (1983) who developed an instrument known as the Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory-II or ROCI-II (Rahim, 1983) was used. This instrument measures the five conflict management styles of dominating, avoiding, obliging, compromising and integrating. The ROCI-II comprises 28 statements, seven of which relate to the integrating style, six each to the obliging and avoiding styles, five to the dominating style and four to the compromising style. Notwithstanding the different terminology, these styles are broadly parallel to those of Blake and Mouton (1964). The items were measured on a 5 point likert scale. The instrument has been tested in numerous studies and has been found to have a high degree of validity and internal consistency (Rahim, 1992; King and Miles, 1990; Weider- Hatfield, 1988). The respondents typically require 8 minutes to complete the ROCI II (Rahim, 1983). The population appropriate for taking responses is any member of the organization. As employees at the workplace has not much time to spend on filling out the questionnaire correctly, so this questionnaire was selected keeping in mind the time factor as well as the comprehensives of the questionnaire. The questionnaire measures all the conflict management styles in a brief and concise manner.

### Emotional intelligence

As emotional intelligence is all about keeping one's own as well as other's emotions in mind, regulating them and using them to solve a conflict, so a questionnaire having all these dimensions was aimed to be used. Emotional Intelligence was assessed using Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS) (2002), based on the model developed by Davies, Stankov and Roberts (1998) and Mayer and Salovey (1997). This scale consists of 16 items. The WLEIS was designed as a short measure of EI for use in organizational research. It comprises of 16 items, responded to on a 5-point Likert scale and measuring four dimensions: ' Self-Emotion Appraisal', ' Emotion Appraisal of Others', ' Use of Emotion', and ' Regulation of Emotion'. Wong and Law (2002) report good internal consistency reliabilities for their measure.

## RESULTS

The targeted population for this research was the employees of the banking sector of Pakistan. However, sample considered was 233 employees from several private banks in Islamabad/ Rawalpindi. All the result and analysis were based on these 233 responses.

### Data Analysis Technique

Results were analyzed by using the statistical analysis software named Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) version 13. 0. The demographic data included gender, name of organization, type of work, department, and duration of job. Correlation and regression tests were applied to analyze the variables where emotional intelligence was treated as

independent variable while integration, compromising, dominating, obliging and avoiding were considered a