

**Emotional Intelligence and Conflict Management Styles**

by

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**Abstract**

The research was carried out to study emotional intelligence and conflict management styles using employees in the Human Resources Division at XYZ University in Malaysia. Specifically, it aims to examine the correlation of supervisors' emotional intelligence assessed by themselves and by their subordinates. Second, this study explored if there is a relationship between emotional intelligence possessed by the supervisors and styles of handling conflict as reported by their subordinates. Three sets of surveys were used to measure the results: Emotional Quotient Index (EQI) (Self-rating), Emotional Quotient Index (EQI) (Observer) and Rahim Organisational Conflict Inventory-II (ROCI-II) Form A surveys. Results from these surveys showed that supervisors had the highest ratings on empathy but the lowest on self-regulation. Subordinates used more integrating and compromising styles when handling conflicts with their supervisors, while dominating styles were the least used. Results from multiple regression analysis showed that there were significant relationships between emotional

intelligence and conflict management styles: integrating and compromising for the employees in the HR division. Interestingly, there were mixed findings between emotional intelligence ratings by the supervisors themselves and their subordinates; only one out of six supervisors gave themselves the same emotional intelligence ratings as subordinates provided.



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## Chapter I: Introduction

### Statements of the Problem

In the past decades, traditional qualities associated with leadership, such as intelligence, toughness, determination, and vision, appeared to be sufficient to be considered successful. In 1983, Howard Gardner had challenged the idea and proposed the *multiple intelligence theory* that consists of seven categories in order to accurately define the concepts of intelligence and to succeed in the field. Two of them are *intrapersonal intelligence*, the ability to understand oneself and act on the basis of self-knowledge, and *interpersonal intelligence*, the ability to work cooperatively and communicate with other people effectively (Helfrich, 2009). Today, they are now often referred to in association with *emotional intelligence*, which is the ability to comprehend, perceive and manage the feelings, emotions and motivation of one's self and of others (Goleman, 1998).

Conflict is a situation where there are at least two differing perspectives, which can lead to nonproductive results or can be beneficially resolved and lead to quality final products. Therefore, learning to resolve conflict is integral to high performance teams and profit achievements. According to past research, there are significant relationships between emotional intelligence and subordinates' styles of handling conflict with supervisors (e.g., Yu, Sardesai, Lu & Zhao, 2006). Subordinates who have supervisors with high emotional intelligence will use the integrating style (both parties find a creative solution to satisfy both parties' concerns) and the compromising style (both parties win some and lose some, in an attempt to reach a consensus) of conflict management.



This leads to the following problem statements

- Emotional intelligence
  - Do supervisors have the same assessment results about their own emotional intelligence level as reported by their subordinates?
- Emotional intelligence and conflict management styles
  - Do subordinates who have supervisors with high emotional intelligence use the integrating and compromising styles of conflict management when handling conflicts with their supervisors?
  - Do subordinates who have supervisors with low emotional intelligence use the avoiding, obliging and dominating styles of conflict management when handling conflicts with their supervisors?

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to provide XYZ University with insight about the relationship between emotional intelligence and managing conflicts between supervisors and their subordinates. These findings give XYZ University the necessary information to motivate their employees in increasing their work performance; if it is shown that a lack of emotional intelligence hinders the communication between them. Failing to take the results into consideration, potentially increases the risk of a downward shift towards inflexibility and malfunction of collaborative relationships and effective job performance.

The US Department of Labor, Employment, and Training Administration 1989, 1996 carried out a national survey on the criteria that employers are looking for in entry level employees (Goleman, 1996). Some of the criteria include personal management and confidence, interpersonal and group effectiveness, listening and oral communication, and adaptability and

creative responses to feedback. These results show the potential of having the necessary emotional intelligence skills in order to be accepted while working in an organization, and eventually be able to work independently and successfully within a team.

By conducting this study, it is the researcher's intent that more recognition would occur in examining the value of having emotional intelligence explored between the cultures instead of technical skills alone. The study also seeks to identify the key value changes in the current economy, which is shifting towards intangible assets (for example innovativeness, cognitive intelligence), and also a shift from individual work to teamwork.

Also of equal importance is the increased amount of literature provided by this research on emotional intelligence in the local community. The outcome of this research and its components can be utilized by researchers, who intend to study the extent of the relationship between emotional intelligence and the styles of managing conflicts. It would also be beneficial to the local community if they apply further research offered by these insights.

### **Assumptions of the Study**

Past studies have reported a potential relationship between emotional intelligence and subordinates' styles of handling conflict with supervisors. Subordinates who have supervisors with high emotional intelligence will use the integrating and compromising styles of conflict management in handling conflict among themselves (Yu, Sardesai, Lu & Zhao, 2006). It is expected in the study that subordinates who have supervisors with low emotional intelligence will use the avoiding, obliging and dominating styles of conflict management in handling conflicts in organizations. It is also can be assumed that the results of the present study will be similar as the same surveys were utilized in both pieces of research.

## Organization Introduction

**Human Resources Division at XYZ University.** The Human Resources Division is a division under the Registry that covers three sub-divisions: Administrative Division, Human Resource Management Division and Human Resource Development Division. The employees at the Human Resources Division are responsible for generating and providing a pool of qualified human capital, which is consistent with the university's human resource policies. For this research, the researcher will employ XYZ instead of the real of the name university in order to protect the university's privacy and keep the information identified confidential.

## Definition of Terms

**Emotional Intelligence.** Emotional intelligence can be referred to as knowing and using one's feeling in appropriate manner, motivating oneself and others effectively, and managing the relationships by exhibiting empathy and interacting smoothly to one another (Goleman, 1998). Emotional intelligence plays a vital role in the organizations because 1) emotions that are handled effectively may contribute to how one handles the needs of individuals, 2) how one motivates employees and 3) how comfortable the employees feel at work. According to Goleman (1998), the five components of emotional intelligence are self-awareness, self-regulation, social skills, motivation and empathy.

- Self-awareness (SA) is associated with the ability to know one's internal state, preferences, resources, and intuitions, e.g., a supervisor is aware of which emotions he is experiencing.
- Self-regulation (SR) refers to the ability to manage one's internal states, impulses, and resources, e.g., a supervisor remains calm despite having to deal with violent situations.

- **Motivation (MO)** represents the emotional tendencies that guide or facilitate reaching goals, e.g., a supervisor sets his motivation high and attains challenging goals.
- **Empathy (EM)** refers to the ability of being aware of other's feelings, needs and concerns, e.g., a supervisor understands the feelings transmitted via verbal and non-verbal language.
- **Social skills (SS)** are associated with one's ability to induce desirable response in others, e.g., a supervisor does not let his negative feelings restrain collaboration.

**Conflict Management Styles.** Conflict management styles refer to how we approach the other party in a conflict situation. For effective conflict management in organizations, employees should learn to apply different conflict management styles in different situations. According to Rahim (1986), the five styles for resolving conflicts in preparation for negotiation are integrating, obliging, compromising, avoiding and dominating.

- **Integrating (IN)** involves openness, exchange of information, and examination of differences to reach an effective solution acceptable to both parties, e.g., both supervisor and subordinates encourage mutual commitment to a project through incorporating each others' ideas into the final agreement.
- **Obliging (OB)** is associated with attempting to play down the differences and emphasizing commonalities to satisfy the concerns of the other party, e.g., a supervisor's thoughts are more important than the subordinates in reaching a consensus.

- **Dominating (DO)** is identified with a win-lose orientation or with forcing behaviours to win one's position, e.g., a supervisor takes advantage of his position in making a business decision.
- **Avoiding (AV)** is identified with withdrawal, buck-passing, or sidestepping solutions, e.g., a subordinate refuse to co-operate with his supervisor in a project physically and mentally.
- **Compromising (CO)** involves give-and-take whereby both parties give up something to make a mutually acceptable decision, e.g., both supervisor and subordinates needs a fast but temporary solution for a complex issue.

**Supervisors.** In the present study, supervisors can be defined as people who supervise, are in charge of a particular department or unit, and are responsible for continuous operations in their unit. According to the Merriam-Webster's online dictionary, "a supervisor is an administrative officer who is in charge of a business, government or school unit or operation" ("Supervisor", 2010).

### **Limitations of the Study**

There are two apparent limitations of this study including

- The small number of employees in the Human Resources Division that may affect the reliability of the findings.
- Subordinates may not be honest in filling out the personal information and feedback on their supervisors' sections.

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## Methodology

This research study consists of a quantitative approach. Three sets of surveys were used in this study. Emotional Quotient Index (EQI) (observer) to measure the emotional intelligence among the supervisors, Emotional Quotient Index (EQI) (self-rating) to measure oneself, and Rahim Organisational Conflict Inventory-II (ROCI-II) to assess the five styles of handling conflict with supervisors. Emotional Quotient Index (EQI) (observer) and Emotional Quotient Index (EQI) (self-rating) that will be used in this research are developed by Rahim et al. (2002a), while Rahim Organisational Conflict Inventory-II (ROCI-II) is developed by Rahim (1983b). The results of the surveys were analyzed using Excel to weigh and score participants' responses. The clean data were then thoroughly analyzed utilizing SPSS Regression to investigate the relationship between emotional intelligence and conflict management styles among employees of Human Resources Division at XYZ University.

## Chapter II: Literature Review

### Emotional Intelligence

#### Emotional intelligence history.

Emotional intelligence was first proposed in the management literature by Salovey and Mayer (1990). They refer emotional intelligence to emotional construction and regulation, and to some emotional processing aspects (Mayer & Salovey, 1995). Researchers have begun to construct what components improve the moods of people, such as individuals' coping styles and their mood regulation. They also described emotional intelligence as a set of abilities that refer in part to how one effectively deals with emotions within oneself and others (Salovey & Mayer, 1990).

Several alternative models of this construct exist, but only three have been generated in terms of research and application. They are the findings of Bar-On (1997), Goleman (1996), and Salovey and Mayer (1990). Unlike Salovey and Mayer's (1990) definition of emotional intelligence, other models define it in terms of behaviors, self-management, and social skills (Herbst & Maree, 2008).

In Kerr, Garvin, Heaton and Boyle's (2006), they described Mayer and Salovey's (1997) popular model of emotional intelligence. The four hierarchical branches of their model include 1) accurately perceive emotions in oneself and others, 2) use emotions to facilitate thinking, 3) understand emotional meanings and 4) manage emotions. This model of emotional intelligence by Mayer and Salovey (1997) and the five elements of emotional intelligence by Goleman (1996) that will be discussed later, have led to a breadth of research emphasizing the role of emotional intelligence in interpersonal relationships, leadership, customer service, and work place communications. The present study particularly examines Goleman's five domains of



emotional intelligence and conflict management styles within customer-oriented workplace settings.

### **Five domains of emotional intelligence.**

Daniel Goleman adapted the Salovey and Mayer's model to explore how it relates to working life. His definition is as follows

Emotional intelligence refers to the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships (Goleman, 1998, p. 317).

Emotional competence on the other hand is “a learned capability based on emotional intelligence that results in outstanding performance at work” (Goleman, 1998, p. 24). Thus, our emotional competence demonstrates how much of the potential we have translated into on-the-job capabilities. For example, being a good listener to a depressed friend is an example of emotional competence based on empathy. Below is the framework by Goleman (1998) based on the emotional competence skills.

The Emotional Competence Framework	
<b>Personal Competence:</b>  These competencies determine how we manage ourselves  Self-awareness: Knowing one's internal states, preferences, resources, and intuitions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emotional awareness: recognizing one's emotions and their effects</li> <li>• Accurate self-assessment: knowing one's strengths and limits</li> <li>• Self-confidence: a strong sense of one's self-worth and capabilities</li> </ul>	<b>Social Competence:</b>  These competencies determine how we handle relationships  Empathy: Awareness of others' feelings, needs, and concerns <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding others: sensing others' feelings and perspectives, and taking an active interest in their concerns</li> <li>• Developing others: sensing others' development needs and bolstering their abilities</li> <li>• Service orientation: anticipating, recognizing, and meeting customers'</li> </ul>

<p><b>Self-regulation: Managing one's internal states, impulses, and resources</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-control: keeping disruptive emotions and impulses in check</li> <li>• Trustworthiness: maintaining standards of honesty and integrity</li> <li>• Conscientiousness: taking responsibility for personal performance</li> <li>• Adaptability: Flexibility in handling change</li> <li>• Innovation: Being comfortable with novel ideas, approaches and new information</li> </ul> <p><b>Motivation: Emotional tendencies that guide or facilitate reaching goals</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Achievement drive: striving to improve or meet a standard of excellence</li> <li>• Commitment: aligning with the goals of the group or organization</li> <li>• Initiative: Readiness to act on opportunity</li> <li>• Optimism: Persistence in pursuing goals despite obstacles and setbacks</li> </ul>	<p><b>needs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leveraging diversity: cultivating opportunities through different kinds of people</li> <li>• Political awareness: reading a group's emotional currents and power relationships</li> </ul> <p><b>Social skills: adeptness at inducing desirable responses in others</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Influence: wielding effective tactics for persuasion</li> <li>• Communication: listening openly and sending convincing messages</li> <li>• Conflict management: negotiating and resolving disagreements</li> <li>• Leadership: inspiring and guiding individuals and groups</li> <li>• Change catalyst: initiating or managing change</li> <li>• Building bonds: nurturing instrumental relationships</li> <li>• Collaboration and cooperation: working with others toward shared goals</li> <li>• Team capabilities: creating group synergy in pursuing collective goals</li> </ul>
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Figure 1: The framework of emotional intelligence components by D. Goleman (2006), *Working with Emotional Intelligence*, pp. 26-28.

People have questioned whether high emotional intelligence is an inherited or a learned trait. Research and practice demonstrated that emotional intelligence can be learned, and that it increases with age (Goleman, 2004). Emotional intelligence training programs will only be effective if they focus on the right part of the brain. Goleman (2004) claimed that emotional intelligence is born in the neurotransmitters of the brain's limbic system and can be learned best through experiences. Therefore, these kinds of training programs must include the limbic system

in their focus, or else they will not be effective. Such training programs include the ones involving motivation, extended practice and feedback.

In a comparison between emotional intelligence and emotional skills, emotional intelligence is broader than the emotional skills approach because it involves the ways that emotions inform mental processing (Riggio & Reichrad, 2008). Emotional skills emphasize the social skills of emotional intelligence on transaction of emotions between people in social interaction.

### **The connection between Emotional Intelligence Quotient (EQ) and Intelligent Quotient (IQ).**

Intelligence quotient (IQ) is defined as a psychological test that can predict jobs people can hold (Goleman, 2006). It is a score derived from a standardized test and covers an individual's intelligence, emotion, personality, attitude and ability. Goleman (2006) also states that technical skill can determine if an employee is able to attain and perform in a given job, but these two factors alone are not sufficient in evaluating employee's performance and leadership capability in a workplace.

Goleman (2004) conducted a study in determining what the personal capabilities are that drive outstanding performance within 188 large global companies, including Lucent Technologies, British Airways and Credit Suisse. He started by grouping the personal capabilities into three categories: technical skills, cognitive abilities, and emotional intelligence. Results showed that emotional intelligence may be as important as technical skills and cognitive abilities for outstanding performance. Therefore, emotional intelligence can be considered a main ingredient for excellent performance. These results applied for jobs at all levels.

According to Riggio and Reichard (2008), emotional intelligence (EI) is a multidimensional construct, composed of different and somewhat distinct abilities from intelligence quotient (IQ). When Salovey and Mayer (1990) carried out a comprehensive test to establish emotional intelligence as one of the intelligences, they found that intellect and emotional intelligence were different because they use different parts of the brain. They found this by using a test that measured emotional intelligence in a similar way to IQ. Later on, they succeeded in producing a norm tested EQ scale, called Multifactor Emotional Intelligence Scale (MEIS) (Langley, 2000).

Moreover, Palmer, Walls, Burgess and Stough (2000) found that intellectual stimulation is not correlated with either of the EI-subscales. Intellectual stimulation can be demonstrated when transformational leaders, leaders that are inspirational, creative thinkers and encourage subordinates to follow (Bass, 1998), stimulate their subordinates by presenting them with challenging new ideas and different ways to tackle problems. This finding showed that intellectuality does not necessarily have an impact towards people with higher emotional intelligence.

However, it would be unwise to assume that IQ and technical ability are not important ingredients in effective leadership. Emotional intelligence is just the other ingredient that most leaders need to have in order to achieve higher performance in organizations. All three facets need to be attended to during the training of supervisors so they will be equipped with sufficient leadership skills (Herbst & Maree, 2008).

### **The assessment of emotional intelligence and leadership in the workplace.**

Goleman (2004) discovered that emotional intelligence capabilities are the main reason for the effectiveness of a star performer as reported in a study of competency models from 188

companies. He stated that self-regulation, which is one of the components of emotional intelligence, is crucial for leaders because it enables them to create an environment of trust and fairness. Not only that, but they would be able to master their emotions in competitive situations, and enhance integrity for both personal virtue and organizational strength. In addition, he also found that an extreme display of negative emotion is never a driver of good leadership. Empathy on the other hand, plays a role in effective leadership for three reasons “the increasing use of teams, the rapid pace of globalization, and the growing need to retain talent” (Goleman, 2004, p. 89). The last component of emotional intelligence, social skills, is considered a key leadership capability because it is a culmination of other components of emotional intelligence and it moves people in a desired direction.

Most organizational context indicates that transformational leadership is significantly correlated to leadership effectiveness in organizations. The studies that investigated the relationship between emotional intelligence and leadership style found mixed results. Using a multifactor leadership questionnaire, Palmer et al. (2001) studied a relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) in transformational leadership, and EI in leadership, leaders that concentrate on simple rewards and punishment, and rely on managing-by-exception (Bass, 1998). Results showed that several components of transformational leadership are correlated with EI, indicating EI may be an important factor in becoming an effective leader in an organization. However, in Weinberger’s (2002) study there was no significant correlation between a group of transformational leaders and emotional intelligence.

In the model of emotional intelligence, individuals’ accurate emotion perception could guide behavioral responses (Byron, 2008). Managers that can accurately determine the meaning of others’ non-verbal emotional expressions will know how to provide appropriate responses to

their subordinates (Zaccaro et al., 1991). This is consistent with leadership and managerial theories which state that the most effective leaders and managers are those capable of perceiving and responding accurately to others (Hall et al., 1998; Tsui and Ashford, 1994; Zaccaro et al., 1991).

Additionally, multiple studies on emotional intelligence also state that leaders with higher emotional intelligent are capable in nurturing the quality and effectiveness of social interaction roles with other individuals (House & Aditya, 1996) and monitoring work group members' feeling and taking appropriate action (Mayer et al., 2000). The higher emotional intelligent leaders also motivate and inspire others, nurture positive behavior at work, and create a sense of contribution and importance with and among employees (Hogan et al., 1994).

### **The value of emotional intelligence at work.**

Since we are in the new millennium, new ideas about measuring management potential in emotional intelligence skills are emerging (Langley, 2000). These new ideas do not solely rely on IQ and technical abilities alone. People can become more effective participants through social interaction. The workplace is one of the environments in which people learn about behavior and emotions which take on a greater significance in organizational life. In a study of emotional intelligence and interpersonal relations, Schutte's et al. (2001) conducted seven studies to test Gardner's *theory of multiple intelligences*, Averill and Nunley's *emotional creativity theory* and Saarni's *theory of emotional competence*. Results from Schutte's et al. (2001) research showed that people with higher emotional intelligence have

- Higher empathetic perspective taking and self-monitoring in social situations
- Higher social skills
- Higher cooperation toward partners

- Higher levels of affection in relationships
- Higher marital satisfaction, and
- Higher satisfaction in relationships

The finding may be considered as important as it suggests that emotional intelligence could be perceived as a desirable quality and leads to interpersonal attraction. This is supported by Mayer, Salovey & Caruso (2000c) who found that people with high emotional intelligence could be more socially effective than their counterparts and thus, could be more skilful in motivating people to achieve goals, aims and missions in organizations.

Employees who have high levels of emotional intelligence have smoother interactions with members of their work teams (Mayer et al, 2000a) and are able to accurately perceive, understand and appraise others' emotions and build supportive networks (Salovey, 1999). They are also considered more interpersonally sensitive and understanding (Davis and Kraus, 1997; Rosenthal and Benowitz, 1985), warm, protective of others, less critical and deceitful, and more likely to turn to the better perceivers for advice and reassurance (Funder and Harris, 1986). Psychologists, counselors, and physicians were also rated as more sensitive than other professions (DiMatteo et al., 1979; Rosenthal et al., 1979).

In the area of selection alone, Dattner (2003) gathered two interesting findings from two surveys on emotional intelligence and success. According to the National US Department of Labor survey, corporations are increasingly listing emotional competencies for new hires and more companies are seeking MBA's with emotional intelligence from the Graduate Management Admission Council survey (Dattner, 2003). The findings that linked how emotional intelligence relates to the workplace can lead to significant advances in leadership training and development programs, thus effectively selecting potential true leaders (Palmer, Walls, Burgess & Stough,

2001). This also can be applied in human resources practitioners and leadership search firms in the area of selection, leadership development, organizational wellness and performance.

### **Emotional intelligence, demographic factors and cross-cultural findings.**

Emotional intelligence guides intra and interpersonal behavior in all cultures, and gives rise to how and what emotions are appropriate to express in the work environment. In Mann's (2007) study, it was shown that British expected people who are working in service sectors (shop assistants, restaurant servers, and supermarket managers) to show more positive displays than people that they work with. Americans on the other hand, expected more positive displays from the people they work with than the people in service sectors. Between gender, females were reported to display behaviors associated with warm feelings while males, were exhibited more genuine use of feelings verses women.

In a study of the relationship between both male and female managers and their subordinates in non-verbal expression, subordinates were more satisfied with the female managers who were emotionally perceptive (Byron, 2008). However, female managers were not as significantly persuasive as male managers. Female managers who had a combination of feminine and masculine stereotypes experienced higher ratings than having either characteristic alone. Employees that are able to accurately utilize their emotion perception for behavioral responses are consistent with the model of emotional intelligence which states that non-verbal emotion perception provides cues to regulate behavior (Salovey and Mayer, 1990).