Exploring the Relationship between Emotional intelligence and conflict management among IT employees of Delhi/NCR

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Abstract: The present study aims to analyze the effect of Emotional intelligence on the conflict management style of the employees of IT sector. The investigation was done on 120 employees from few private organizations of Delhi/NCR. Two sets of survey were used to measure the results: Wong and Law EI scale (2002) and Rahim organizational conflict Inventory- II (ROC-II) form C. The result of regression analysis revealed several significant relationships between EI dimensions and conflict management styles. Out of the four subscale of EI, self-management and relationship management were directly related to integration and compromising style of conflict management.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Conflict management styles, Organizations, IT sector

INTRODUCTION

Conflicts are inevitable part of one's life. It is an internal discord that occurs because of a difference in ideas, values or perceptions or in the interpretation of a situation (Marquid, cited by Kelley, 2006). It is very natural to have conflict in every organization, so it's very important to handle it effectively with others as unresolved conflict affects the performance negatively. Generally people react to any situation emotionally, hence in times of conflict; this emotional reaction may control the process. To understand the role of emotions in context with conflict is especially important to understand as conflicts are emotionally charged (Jones, 2000). In the past few years emotional intelligence has been the subject of a tremendous amount of research in the past few years. Emotional intelligence is an ability to understand and recognize our and others' emotions as they surface. EI is a personal attribute which is very effective in easing conflict.

The overall aim of this study is to examine the relationships between emotional intelligence and conflict management style among the employees of IT sector. Specifically, this research will explore the connections between EI dimensions and different styles of managing conflict.

The article focuses on managing conflict by being emotionally equipped. The article is structured as follows. The first section contains the literature review, identification of gaps and development of objectives and hypotheses. The methodology is discussed in the following section and also includes sample, instruments and data collection design. The third section contains the analysis, conclusions and limitations of the study.

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

The construct of Emotional Intelligence (EI) is one of the most frequently researched topics in organizational study as it is a significant aspect in interpreting and analyzing human behavior at work. The concept of emotional intelligence evolved from the theory of social intelligence, which involves the ability to understand and interact with others. The term emotional intelligence was first used by Salovey & Mayer (1990). According to Salovey & Mayer emotional intelligence is defined as "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". This term was later popularized by Daniel Goleman's book. "Why it matters more than IQ". To achieve the objectives of the organization, a manager needs to understand their employees' feelings and emotions and build strong and close relationships with them. Cherniss (2003) noted that a leader who has a high level of emotional intelligence will have a greater effect on an organization than a leader with a low level of emotional intelligence.

In this research paper, emotional intelligence has been discussed on the basis of four- component model of Goleman. Hence it has been discussed with the help of following dimensions:

- Self – awareness – Self-awareness is being conscious of one's emotions and how they affect thoughts and behavior.
- Self – management- It is the ability to control impulsive feelings and behaviors, taking initiative and managing emotions.
- Social awareness – social awareness is understanding the emotions and concerns of other's people and recognizing the power of dynamics in a group or organization.
- Relationship management- It is all about knowing how to develop and maintain good relationships.

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STYLES

According to Rahim (1986), conflict is defined as an "interactive state manifested in incompatibility, disagreement, or difference within or between social entities" (p. 13). Conflict management styles refer to the way of approaching the other party in a conflict situation. In order to manage the conflict effectively it's very important for the employees to learn to apply different conflict management styles in different situations. The five styles for resolving conflicts in preparation for negotiation are integrating, obliging, compromising, avoiding and dominating (Rahim 1986)

- Integrating (IN)-involves high concern for self as well as the other party involved in the conflict. This style is concerned with collaboration between parties to reach a solution. It involves openness, exchange of information, and examination of differences to reach an amicable solution acceptable to both parties.
- Obliging (OB)-low concern for self and high concern for the other party involved in the conflict. Attempts to play down the differences and emphasize the commonalities to satisfy the concerns of the other party.

- Dominating (DO)-high concern for self and low concern for the other party. It is a win-lose orientation and forces behavior to win one's position.

- Avoiding (AV)-low concern for self as well as the other party. Associated with withdrawal, passing-the-buck, sidestepping, or "see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil.

- Compromising (CO) involves give-and-take whereby both parties give up something to make a mutually acceptable decision.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies by various researchers have suggested that Individuals with higher level of EI are more adept at managing & resolving conflict situations successfully (Bodtker &Jameson 2001, Jones &Bodtker 2001). An empirical study showed that individuals with high EI preferred to seek collaborative style of handling conflict when confronted with it (Jordan & truth 2002). In another study collaborative and compromising conflict management styles were found to significantly influence by the level of Emotional intelligence (Yu *et al.* 2006). Strong negative emotions may present the essential information processing for managing the conflict in a constructive way (Baron, 1991). In a study analyzing the relationship between EI and negotiations revealed that EI is a significant factor toward realizing integrative outcomes (Foo et al, 2004). Individuals with high level of EI experience less relationship conflict or they manage it more effectively (Lopes et al 2005). A study proposed that group with high level of EI decreases group level task and relationship conflict (Yang & Mossholder 2004). Ayoko *et al.* (2008) proposed that teams with less well- defined EI may have more task and relationship conflict. Fulmer & Berry (2004) theorize that Emotional intelligence could influence negotiation outcomes. They would be more accurate in understanding and managing highly charged situations. In the above literature, most of the studies have found some significance between higher level of EI and the ability to resolve conflict effectively. This study is based on the existing research analyzing the relationship between different dimensions of EI and different modes of conflict management.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The first objective of this study is to evaluate the conflict management style (Integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding and compromising) of the employees.The second objective tries to examine relationship between conflict management style and employees' level of Emotional intelligence.

HYPOTHESIS

To achieve the above-stated objectives which hypothesize that

There is a significant relationship between conflict management style which employee's choose and their level of Emotional intelligence

H1: Emotional intelligence is found to be significantly associated with the use of the integrating style of handling conflict.

H2: Emotional intelligence is found to be significantly associated with the use of the obliging style of handling conflict.

H3: Emotional intelligence is found to be significantly associated with the use of the dominating style of handling conflict.

H4: Emotional intelligence is found to be significantly associated with the use of the avoiding style of handling conflict.

H5: Emotional intelligence is found to be significantly associated with the use of the compromising style of handling conflict.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Sample and Data Collection

This study was conducted using a cross-sectional descriptive design .A total of 120 questionnaires were distributed to the middle level employees of IT sector. Against the targeted sample of 120 questionnaires, 100 valid responses have been collected and analyzed.

Instrument used

In order to collect the data structured questionnaire was designed. The entire questionnaire was divided into two sections. The first section inquired about the Emotional Intelligence level of the respondents and the second focused on the conflict management style.

Wong & Law EI scale (2002) – This scale is allocated to measure the emotional intelligence by four dimensions self-emotional appraisal (4 items), others – emotion appraisal (4 items), use of emotion (4 items) and regulation of emotion (4 items).

The *Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory–II* (ROCI–II) is a 28 item questionnaire measuring conflict management styles. It is designed to measure five independent dimensions of the styles of handling interpersonal conflict: Integrating (IN), Obliging (OB), Dominating (DO) , Avoiding (AV), and Compromising (CO). The instrument contains Forms A, B, and C to measure how an organizational member handles her (his) conflict with her (his) supervisor, subordinates, and peers, respectively. The five styles of handling conflict are measured by 7, 6, 5, 6, and 4 statements, respectively, selected on the basis of repeated factor and item analyses. An organizational member responds to each statement on a 5–point Likert scale.

RESULTS

Table 1
Descriptive statistical indices

	Mean	*Std. Deviation*
SELFAWARENESS	15.6400	2.14862
SELFMANAGEMENT	14.8900	2.99796
SOCIALAWARENESS	14.880000	3.35231
RELATIONSHIPMANAGEMENT	14.5700	3.32500
INTEGRATION	4.0029	.65239
OBLIGING	3.5442	.63076
DOMINATING	2.8356	.87469
AVOIDING	3.2426	.73905
COMPROMISING	3.4851	.58386
Valid N (listwise)		

This table revealed that employees scored the highest on self-awareness (M= 15.64, SD= 2.14) and self – management (M= 14.89, SD=2.99) followed by social awareness (M=14.88, SD=3.35) and relationship management (M=14.57, SD=3.325). In the study, employees used more integration (M=4.00, SD=0.65) obliging (M=3.54, SD=0.63) and compromising style (M=3.48, SD=0.583) when dealing with conflicts. On the other hand dominating (M=2.83, SD=0.874) and avoiding (M=3.24, SD=0.739) style of handling conflict was least used by the employees when they faced conflict.

Table 2
Pearson correlation between EI subscale and Conflict Management style

S. No	Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1	Integration	1									
2	Obliging	0.441*	1								
3	Dominating	-0.051	-0.06	1							
4	Avoiding	-0.3	0.11	0.122	1						
5	Compromising	0.444**	0.233**	0.088	0.164	1					
6	Self-Awareness	0.163	-0.013	0.114	0.071	0.023	1				
7	Self-Management	0.303**	0.216*	-0.04	-0.011	0.293**	0.039	1			
8	Social Awareness	0.164	0.47	0.12	-0.09	0.09	0.265**	0.258**	1		
9	Relationship Management	0.210*	0.101	0.132	0.047	0.18	0.206*	0.122	0.245	1	
10	EI	0.334**	0.148	0.13	-0.004	0.208*	0.512**	0.580**	0.734**	0.66**	1

** Correlation is significant at 0.01 level (2 tailed)

* Correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2 tailed)

Results of Pearson correlation showed that EI has positive and significant relation with integration and compromising conflict management style. It shows that the more EI the individual uses more integration and compromising style when confronted with conflict. Further it reveals that out of the four subscale of EI, integration style is found significantly correlated with self-management (0.303**) and relationship management (0.210*). Similarly compromising style is found to be significantly correlated with self-management (0.293**) dimension of EI.

To gain a further insight into the relationships between the independent and dependent variables and to identify the predictive relationships between the two sets of variables, if any, multiple regression analysis was done.

Table 3
Multiple Regression Analysis of Emotional Intelligence and Conflict Management Styles

Independent variables	Dependent Variables				
	Integration	Obliging	Dominating	Avoiding	Compromising
Self-awareness	0.115	-0.034	0.07	0.877	0.06
Self-management	0.274**	0.211*	-0.777	0.116	0.300*
Social Awareness	0.027	-0.02	0.096	-1.19	-0.111
Relationship Management	0.186*	0.087	0.103	0.555	0.169
R^2	0.137	0.054	0.036	0.021	0.118

Notes: Standard regression coefficients are shown N=100, *p<0.05; **p<0.01

The result of variance and regression analysis showed F= 5.76 between the scores of integration style with emotional intelligence subscale is meaningful at P<0.01 and (R=0.370) was obtained. The R^2 is found to be 0.137 which suggests that 13.7% of variance in integration style of conflict management is determined by Emotional Intelligence subscale. However, out of four subscale only two EI subscale of Self-management (β=0.274, p<0.01) and relationship management (β= 0.186, p<0.05) are statistically significant predictor of integration style of managing conflict.

The regression among the score of compromising style with the subscales of emotional intelligence resulted in F= 4.74 and it was meaningful in P<.001 and (R= 0.343) was obtained. The R^2 is found to be 0.118 which suggests that 11.8% of variance in compromising style of conflict management is determined by Emotional Intelligence subscale. Regression coefficients show that only self-management (â=0.30, p<0.05) could determine the variance of compromising style in a meaningful way.

DISCUSSION

The study aims at finding whether there is any linkage between an individual's preferred style of conflict management and their level of Emotional intelligence and in particular the components of EI which will be most pertinent in predicting conflict behavior. The result shows that EI has a positive and significant correlation with integration and compromising style of conflict management and is negatively correlated with avoiding style of conflict management. This explains that higher the level of emotional intelligence an individual has more likely he is to use integration and compromising style of managing conflict. This study supports the findings of Jordon & Troth (2002) who noted that individuals with higher level of EI are more likely to engage in collaborative approach when confronted with conflict. Even Goleman (1998) noted that individuals high in Emotional intelligence level are more likely to engage in greater collaboration. EI facilitates individual's ability to have successful interaction and positive relations with others (Law et al, 2004; Lopes et al 2001). In particular self-management and relationship management were exposed to be the most important EI abilities used with multiple styles of conflict management. It therefore suggests that managing oneself and taking of responsibility for one's own behavior and managing relationship with others facilitates individual's ability to resolve conflict effectively by using integration and compromising style rather than using avoiding and dominating style of conflict management.

CONCLUSION

The study examines the relationship between the dimensions of EI and conflict management styles of the employees of IT sector in India. In this study Emotional intelligence dimensions were identified and studied as independent variable that facilitates individual's ability to select constructive style of managing conflict when confronted with conflict. The study reveals that emotions are an important factor affecting the individual's decision making capability to effectively manage the conflict. Specifically our study has identified the relationship between the different dimensions of EI and different style of conflict management. This study is able to contribute to our understanding that EI abilities are crucial in influencing the various approaches of managing conflict.

Human beings face conflict at every point as it's inevitable of their life. Even after the adoption of various approaches like grievance procedure, focusing on the root cause of conflict, giving equal voices to all parties, every organization still experiences conflict issues which lead to low level of job involvement,

less productivity and job dissatisfaction. The given approaches might have failed as they have been ineffective in considering the emotional dimensions of human resource. Salovey and Meyer (1990) pointed out that Emotional intelligence is usually stable, yet it doesn't have strict limits or boundaries and may improve with suitable training. To reduce the destructive effect of conflict, management training programs should be considered in the organization as a part of their development. These programs can better inculcate the development of self-management and interpersonal skills and conflict management style in the young employees so that they become capable of identify the source of the conflict and to intervene it with the appropriate conflict management style.

LIMITATIONS AND AREAS FOR FUTURE STUDY

The study too has its limitation that needs further attention in the future. Since all the measures used are self-reported, common method variance due to single source bias is a problem. The sample size of the study is too small to generalize the result. The research is done on the middle level employees hence the future studies should attempt to replicate these findings on higher management too. Future research should focus on investigating other significant variables that explain people's choice in choosing the different conflict management style.

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