

ORIGINAL ARTICLES

The Relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Conflict Management Styles in Employees of Gilan Nongovernmental Universities

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ABSTRACT

Conflict is an inevitable phenomenon in human life and is one of the problems each organization encounters. Individuals with high emotional intelligence recognize their own feelings and those of others and respond to it in an appropriate way. These people have better performance under pressure, make better decisions, and try to create an atmosphere that will avoid conflict. One of the most important skills in effective resolution of conflicts which has been very much noted these days is emotional intelligence. A correlational-descriptive method has been applied in this research. The statistical population of this research includes all the full-time employees (male and female) of 14 nongovernmental (Azad) universities of Gilan Province in 2010, totaling 996 individuals. Based on Morgan's table, 200 subjects (130 males and 70 females) were chosen as statistical sample. In this research, three questionnaires have been used to measure the variables and to collect data; namely, personal specification questionnaire, Siberia-Shring emotional intelligence questionnaire, and Robbins' conflict management strategies questionnaire. In addition to using descriptive statistics, we have applied Kolmogorov-Smirnov test to examine the normality of the distribution of data and considering the non-normal distribution, Kendall rank correlation coefficient has been used; chi-square test has been applied to test research hypotheses.

Key words: emotional intelligence, conflict management strategies, employees

Introduction

The concept of intelligence incorporates a broad range of capabilities such as eloquence, logical reasoning, comprehensive general knowledge, common good, understanding, creativity, non-discrimination, sensitivity to one's limitations, rational reasoning, and learning from experience. The general public considers intelligence as the ability to learn, to understand new situations and to properly deal with those situations.

Conflict is an inevitable phenomenon in human life and is one of the problems each organization encounters. Each organization is comprised of individuals who interact with one another in order to realize a set of specific and common objectives, while the interests of these individuals do not necessarily coincide. On the other hand, organizations have limited resources for ensuring such interests [1]. As we said, conflict can manifest itself as a serious problem in an organization. People usually have a negative attitude toward conflict and are afraid of it and try to avoid, suppress or neglect it [2]; while not all conflicts and oppositions in an organization are unfavorable. Conflict is like a coin with two faces [3]. Thus, we can say that conflict per se cannot lead to dissension and disintegration of relations within an organization. What leads to such undesirable consequences is the ineffective management of such conflicts. In order to properly manage the conflicts, one must neither suppress them nor let them go out of control [4].

One of the effective skills for resolving conflicts is emotional intelligence [5]. Emotional intelligence is a concept introduced by Peter Salovey and John Mayer in 1990 and was later propagated through the publication of Daniel Goleman's book "Working with Emotional Intelligence" in 1995 [5]. Goleman defines emotional intelligence as the capacity for motivating ourselves, recognizing our feelings and those of others

and managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships with others [6].

People with high emotional intelligence respect their own emotions and those of others and relatively respond to them. These people have better performance under pressure, make better decisions, and try to create an atmosphere that will avoid conflict [7].

One of the most important skills for effective resolution of conflicts that has recently been very much noted is emotional intelligence [8]. Barsade (2000), in a study dealing with emotional intelligence, found that inducing positive emotions within a group leads to improved cooperation and contribution of members and decreases conflicts [9]. Darling and Walker (2001) demonstrated that great leaders are those with high emotional intelligence who properly appear at the time of conflicts and easily overcome the risk conditions [10]. Yet, the only finding of Kaushal and Kwantes (2006) who studied the role of culture and personality in choice of conflict management strategy was the significant negative relationship between emotional intelligence and the avoidance style of conflict resolution [11]. The results of the research of Sheng *et al.* (2006) were different in China. They found that there is a significant positive relationship only between emotional intelligence and the integrating, competitive and compromising conflict management styles [12].

Observing the differences in the researches carried out necessitates a more meticulous examination of the relationship between emotional intelligence and conflict resolution styles. Considering the relations between employees, organizational structure and the types of responsibilities and missions, occurrence of conflict is a normal phenomenon. Thus, the researcher aimed to study the relationship between emotional intelligence and conflict management styles in nongovernmental universities of Gilan Province.

Koustelios (2006) in a research titled "Role ambiguity, role conflict and job satisfaction among physical education teachers in Greece" concluded that role ambiguity and role conflict are significant predictors of job satisfaction; moreover, physical education teachers were satisfied with the nature of their jobs, their supervisors, and their working conditions, but were dissatisfied with their salaries and promotion opportunities.

Petrides and Furnham (2006) studied the relationship between emotional intelligence and organizational variables such as job stress and job satisfaction. The results of their research revealed that there is a positive and significant relationship between emotional intelligence and job satisfaction in both male and female groups [13].

Research Method:

A correlational-descriptive method has been applied in this research.

Statistical Population of the Research:

The statistical population of this research includes all the full-time employees (male and female) of 14 nongovernmental universities of Gilan Province in 2010, totaling 996 individuals. Based on Morgan's table, 200 subjects (130 males and 70 females) were chosen as statistical sample. In order to choose the statistical sample of this research, using stratified sampling method, 14 employees of Gilan Azad University were chosen and finally, considering the irrevocability of some of the questionnaires and by discarding the faulty ones, 200 questionnaires were analyzed.

Research Materials:

In order to measure the variables and to collect data, three questionnaires have been used in this research; namely, personal specification questionnaire, Siberia-Shring emotional intelligence questionnaire, and Robbins' conflict management strategies questionnaire.

Statistical Procedures:

In addition to using descriptive statistics, we have applied Kolmogorov-Smirnov test to examine the normality of the distribution of data and considering the non-normal distribution, Kendall rank correlation coefficient has been used; chi-square test has been applied to test research hypotheses.

Conclusion:

In this section, with regards to the collected data, first the researcher describes the demographic characteristics of the research samples and then analyzes the data and evaluates research hypotheses through presentation of tables and graphs.

Testing Research Hypotheses:

In this section, we examine the research hypotheses. All research hypotheses have been examined at the significance level of $p \leq 0.05$. First, Kolmogorov-Smirnov test has been applied to test the normality of the distribution of data and considering the non-normal distribution, Kendall rank correlation coefficient has been used; besides, chi-square test has been applied to test research hypotheses and the obtained results have been presented in their respective tables.

Hypothesis 1:

Hypothesis (H_0): there is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and the competitive style of conflict resolution among the employees of Gilan nongovernmental universities.

Table 1: Relationship between emotional intelligence and its dimensions and the competitive style of conflict resolution

Indices Variables	r	Sig.	N
Self-Awareness	0.125*	0.005	200
Self-Control	0.037	0.285	200
Motivation	0.101*	0.033	200
Empathy	0.137*	0.012	200
Social Skills	0.023	0.614	200
Emotional Intelligence	0.108*	0.017	200

* Significant at the $p \leq 0.05$ level

As shown in table 1, considering the Kendal rank coefficient correlation and the significance level ($r=0.109$), there is a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and the competitive style. Among the dimensions of emotional intelligence, there is a direct significant relationship between the competitive style and self-awareness, motivation and empathy. There is no significant relationship between social competence and self-control with the competitive style.

Hypothesis 2:

Hypothesis (H_0): there is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and the avoidance style of conflict resolution among the employees of Gilan nongovernmental universities.

Table 2: Relationship between emotional intelligence and its dimensions and the avoidance style of conflict resolution.

Indices Variables	r	Sig.	N
Self-Awareness	0.125*	0.005	200
Self-Control	0.352*	0.014	200
Motivation	0.111*	0.018	200
Empathy	0.302*	0.021	200
Social Skills	0.197*	0.011	200
Emotional Intelligence	0.270*	0.007	200

* Significant at the $p \leq 0.05$ level

As seen in table 2, considering the Kendal rank coefficient correlation and the significance level ($r=0.212$), there is a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and the avoidance style of conflict resolution. Among the dimensions of emotional intelligence, there is a direct significant relationship between all the dimensions of emotional intelligence and the avoidance style.

Hypothesis 3:

Hypothesis (H_0): there is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and the accommodating style of conflict resolution among the employees of Gilan nongovernmental universities.

As seen in table 3, considering the Kendal rank coefficient correlation and the significance level ($r=0.112$), there is a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and the accommodating style of conflict resolution. Among the dimensions of emotional intelligence, there is a direct significant relationship between self-control and empathy and the accommodating style. There is no significant relationship between the accommodating style and social competence, self-awareness and motivation.

Table 3: Relationship between emotional intelligence and its dimensions and the accommodating style of conflict resolution.

Indices Variables	r	Sig.	N
Self-Awareness	0.021	0.312	200
Self-Control	0.116*	0.038	200
Motivation	0.061	0.028	200
Empathy	0.176*	0.018	200
Social Skills	0.015	0.538	200
Emotional Intelligence	0.112*	0.011	200

* Significant at the $p \leq 0.05$ level*Hypothesis 4:*

Hypothesis (H_0): there is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and the compromising style of conflict resolution among the employees of Gilan nongovernmental universities.

Table 4: Relationship between emotional intelligence and its dimensions and the compromising style of conflict resolution.

Indices Variables	r	Sig.	N
Self-Awareness	0.350*	0.014	200
Self-Control	0.238*	0.014	200
Motivation	0.181*	0.018	200
Empathy	0.135*	0.001	200
Social Competence	0.159*	0.003	200
Emotional Intelligence	0.217*	0.012	200

* Significant at the $p \leq 0.05$ level

As seen in table 4, considering the Kendal rank coefficient correlation and the significance level ($r=0.217$), there is a significant positive relationship between emotional intelligence and the compromising style of conflict resolution. Among the dimensions of emotional intelligence, there is a direct significant relationship between all the dimensions of emotional intelligence and the compromising style.

Hypothesis 5:

Hypothesis (H_0): there is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and the collaborative style of conflict resolution among the employees of Gilan nongovernmental universities.

Table 5: Relationship between emotional intelligence and its dimensions and the collaborative style of conflict resolution.

Indices Variables	r	Sig.	N
Self-Awareness	0.012	0.985	200
Self-Control	-0.118	0.028	200
Motivation	0.003	0.854	200
Empathy	-0.035	0.331	200
Social Competence	0.188*	0.002	200
Emotional Intelligence	-0.074	0.047	200

* Significant at the $p \leq 0.05$ level

As seen in table 5, considering the Kendal rank coefficient correlation and the significance level ($r=0.074$), there is a significant inverse relationship between emotional intelligence and the collaborating style of conflict resolution. Among the dimensions of emotional intelligence, there is a significant inverse relationship between self-control and social competence and the accommodating style. There is no significant relationship between social motivation, empathy and self-awareness.

Discussion:

The results of the present research showed that there is a weak, direct and significant relationship between emotional intelligence and the compromising, accommodating, competing and avoiding styles of conflict management, but the relationship between emotional intelligence and the collaborating style was weak, significant and inverse. Also there was a significant relationship between some of the components of emotional intelligence and different styles of conflict management. Of course all the relationships and correlations obtained in the research are weak.

Considering the components of emotional intelligence and the results of the researches of Goleman (1998), Barsade (2000), Darling and Walker (2002), Ayoko (2008) and others, emotional intelligence improves cooperation and contribution and decreases conflicts among members by infusing positive emotions within a group. People with high emotional intelligence can recognize their own emotions and those of others and can properly react to them. These people are emotionally stable, are able to properly control their own emotions and those of others under difficult conditions, and in the time of conflicts, can bring the situation under control with discretion and ingeniousness. Upon contemplating and examining the components of emotional intelligence and with a review of the findings of available researches, one comes to imagine that people with high emotional intelligence have the capability of empathizing and understanding others' emotions and, using their developed social skills and their ability to manage relations, they are willing to use collaborating and compromising styles and that they avoid accommodating, avoiding and competing styles; yet, there are no findings that would prove such relationships. On the other hand, using collaborating and compromising styles is not always the best and the most effective choice and in order to choose the most effective style of conflict management, we have to take many factors into consideration. In other words, using different styles of conflict management styles is a matter of expedience. Considering this issue and bearing in mind the fact that emotional intelligence is, according to studies, an essential factor of an individual's success, people with high emotional intelligence need to use the most effective style that suits the existing conditions of their organization in order to be successful. Thus, we cannot claim that people with high emotional intelligence constantly use collaborating and compromising styles of conflict resolution and that they never use accommodating, competing and avoiding styles; rather, it appears that they consider the existing situation and choose a style that will lead to a better result and consequently to success.

Thus, in order to analyze research results, we have to pay specific attention to the conditions of the organization and study the obtained relationships in the light of the exclusive properties of that organization.

In the first research hypothesis, we studied the relationship between emotional intelligence and the competitive style of conflict management. The results showed that there is a weak significant positive relationship between emotional intelligence and the competitive style which is consistent with the results of Sheng *et al.* (2006). In the competitive style, the individual is after protecting their own interests and disregards its consequences for other parties involved in the conflict.

In the second research hypothesis, the relationship between emotional intelligence and the avoidance style of conflict management was studied. The results showed that there is a weak significant positive relationship between emotional intelligence and the avoidance style ($r=0.212$); although this relationship is weak, it is considered as the strongest relationship between emotional intelligence and different styles of conflict management. This finding is inconsistent with the results of Kaushal and Kwantes (2006). An individual with high emotional intelligence can manage problems under difficult conditions and has the ability to step by step settle disagreements in conflict situations; thus, they are less likely to choose the avoidance style which has a temporary effect and cannot resolve problems fundamentally.

In the third hypothesis, we studied the relationship between emotional intelligence and the accommodating style of conflict management. The results of the research revealed that there is a weak significant positive relationship between emotional intelligence and the accommodating style ($r=0.112$). The accommodating style encourages cooperation and leads to recognizing and understanding the other side of the conflict; yet it is not an effective style, since it disregards person's own wishes and fails to fundamentally resolve the conflict.

In the fourth research hypothesis, the relationship between emotional intelligence and the compromising style of conflict management was studied. The results showed that there is a weak significant positive relationship between emotional intelligence and the compromising style ($r=0.217$) and this finding is consistent with the results of the research of Sheng *et al.* (2006). Compromising style is the most common strategy for conflict resolution in organizations. In this style, interests and wishes of both sides of the conflict are taken into consideration and it is a win-win situation. Thus, it is considered as one of the effective styles of conflict resolution and a person with high emotional intelligence is expected to use this style.

In the fifth hypothesis, we examined the relationship between emotional intelligence and the collaborating style of conflict management. The results revealed that there is a weak, significant inverse relationship between emotional intelligence and the collaborating style ($r=-0.088$). Goleman (1998) too stated that individuals with high emotional intelligence try to maintain their relationship and therefore have better conflict resolution skills and are more cooperative; hence we are skeptical about the validity of our finding.

Considering the fact that the studies and theoretical bases of emotional intelligence show that this skill is associated with effective resolution of conflicts, it is recommended to consider emotional intelligence, beside education and curriculum vitae, when employing or selecting subordinates.

Since the emotional intelligence of the employees of Gilan nongovernmental universities was rather low and since emotional intelligence can be effective in the way employees deal with conflict situations, it is recommended to hold courses that would teach emotional intelligence skills to employees.

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