Relationship Between Self-Awareness and Conflict Management Style: A Correlation Study

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Abstract

Conflict may both be a problem and a solution. The people involved determine whether a disagreement will simply be a problem or a solution as well. To transition from ineffective or even harmful conduct to productive behaviour and turn the problem into a solution, it might be essential to understand one's behavioural and communication patterns through self-awareness. Present research aims to study the association between self-awareness and conflict management styles. Data was gathered from 400 participants. To measure self-awareness and conflict management an online self-report questionnaire Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Scale by Schutte et al. and the Conflict Management Style questionnaire by Thomas Kilman were used. Results revealed, significant positive Pearson correlation between emotional intelligence and collaborative (r=369[**], p=0.00) accommodating (r=288[**], p=0.00) and compromising (r= 263[**], p=0.00) conflict management styles. This suggests that emotionally intelligent individuals manage conflict in a more productive manner than individuals with low emotional intelligence

Keywords: *Self-Awareness, Conflict Management, Emotional Intelligence.*

Introduction

Everyone has come across some sort of conflict in their lives. When we talk of a conflict, we experience disharmony, disagreement, and clash; between people, ideas, interests, or even capabilities.

Conflict is a mental struggle that can happen unconsciously when two people have differing perceptions of themselves or their surroundings. The types of conflicts include task conflict, relational conflict, competitive conflict, and cooperation conflict (Tjosvold et al., 2006). The goal of conflict management is to find a satisfactory solution for all parties involved to a conflict. According to Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Modes Instrument, there are five types of conflict management styles. Competitive or Dominating style is seen when the individual prioritises their own needs and is assertive and the communication is often one-sided. The individual is defending their position, standing up for their rights or simply trying to win. Collaborative or Integrative style is when there is mutual problem-solving taking place that focuses on satisfying the needs of all parties involved. The parties involved are willing to cooperate and listen to each other's side. Compromising is when the parties involved try to find a middle ground. They make concessions and both parties will either give up a goal in order to find a mutually beneficial

solution. Accommodative style also called Yielding or obliging, is when one of the parties yields to the other. The individual sacrifices their own needs in order to leave the other party satisfied. Avoidant or withdrawal style is when the solution is delayed or avoided altogether. Research evidence suggests, individuals with high extraversion personality trait exhibited good relationships with integrating, obliging, avoiding, and compromise styles. More emotionally secure people have a negative relationship with the dominating style and a good relationship with the integrating style. (Ayub et al., 2017).

In the present research, Emotional Intelligence is used to to study awareness among individuals. The capacity to inspire oneself and effectively manage one's emotions in order to achieve the best outcomes for oneself and for the relationships in our lives is known as emotional intelligence, David Goleman (1998). He suggested that emotional intelligence consists of four domains: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. Emotional Self-Awareness, Accurate Self-Assessment, and Self-Confidence are the three competencies listed under "Self-Awareness" (Goleman et al., 2002). According to Goleman (1995), According to researches, people with higher emotional intelligence are better at resolving conflicts and work together more. This claim is supported by the notion that people with high emotional intelligence want to sustain connections. The intrapersonal skills of nurses, such as self-awareness and self-expression, were found to be positively correlated with the integrating, obliging, dominating, and compromising conflict management strategies in a study on the role of emotional intelligence in the conflict management of nurses (Basogul & Ozgür, 2016), but it was discovered that the same component was negatively and significantly correlated with the avoiding strategy. The same study found that individuals' emotional self-awareness and empathy are positively correlated with the integrating and dominating strategies, but that their emotional self-awareness is negatively correlated with the avoiding strategy. In a study conducted on Malaysian employees working in the Human Resources Division of a company (Abas et al., 2010), there were positive correlations between self-awareness and obliging, compromising, dominating and avoidant styles. Similarly, a study conducted on Thai project managers and engineers showed positive correlations between the accommodating style and self-awareness (Sunindijo et al., 2007).

Current study aims to understand the inference of awareness on conflict management and purposes of the research is to demonstrate that people who are more self-aware tend to utilise more effective conflict resolution techniques, such as collaborative, accommodating, and compromising methods.

Donohue and Kolt (1992) mention in their book that if an individual is aware of their strengths, limitations and emotions while in a conflict, their ability to manage the conflict productively dramatically increases. Present study, focus on the relationship between awareness and conflict as a person with a certain degree of self-awareness is not only able to monitor their own emotions and their effect on themselves but also how it affects the other people involved in the conflict. Similarly, Chahal (2017) said that self-awareness and awareness of and sensitivity to others are essential elements of successful communication.

Method
Research Design
The present study is a quantitative research analysis that focuses on the relationship between two variables, i.e., self-awareness and conflict management. In total 400 individuals participated in the study. The snowball sampling method was employed. The analysis was done using the Pearson correlation method.

Objective
To study the relationship between self-awareness and conflict management.

Hypothesis
There will be a significant positive relationship between self-awareness and conflict management.

Sample
The sample comprised 400 participants. 49% of the participants were female while the remaining 51% were male. The sample consisted of the urban population. They were between the ages of 20-80. The participants were mostly of a non-psychology background.

Measures
Schutte Self Report Emotional Intelligence Scale (SSREI)
For measuring self-awareness, we used the Schutte Self Report Emotional Intelligence Scale (SSREI). The SSREI was developed by Schutte et. al in 1998. The SSREI scale has 33 items that were on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from "not at all true" to "very true." SSREI had good reliability of .90.

Conflict Management Questionnaire

For measuring conflict management techniques, we used the Conflict Management Questionnaire. It consists of 15 items for assessing an individual's conflict management style. Responses were 5-point Likert scale ranging from "always" to "never". Scores of 5,4,3,2, or 1 were respectively given to the responses from "always" to "never".

Results

Information collected through self-report measures from 400 participants was analysed using Pearson Correlation

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Collaborating	8.5591	2.01051	400
Competing	7.8115	1.90300	400
Avoiding	7.9968	2.13862	400
Accommodating	9.2652	1.80898	400
Compromising	8.1885	1.81507	400
EI	162.5080	19.65620	400

Table 1 reports the means and standard deviations for the five conflict management styles and Emotional Intelligence. EI, as well as the five styles of handling conflict, were computed by averaging the responses to items for each questionnaire. The values for the conflict management styles and emotional intelligence are as follows: emotional intelligence (M= 162.5080, SD= 19.65620), collaborative (M= 8.5591, SD= 2.01051) conflict management style, accommodating (M= 9.2652, SD=1.80898) conflict management style, and compromising (M= 8.1885 SD=1.81507) conflict management style, avoiding (M= 7.9968, SD= 2.13862) conflict management style, competing (M= 7.8115, SD= 1.90300) conflict management style.

Table 2
Correlation between Conflict Management Styles and Emotional Intelligence

		Collaborating	Competing	Avoiding	Accommodatin	Compromising	EI
EI	Pearson	.369**	.097	.052	.288**	.263**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.088	.356	.000	.000	

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
N=400

In Table 2, a Pearson correlation coefficient was computed to assess the linear relationships between conflict management styles and emotional intelligence. There was positive correlations between Collaboration and Emotional intelligence (r=.369** n=400, p=0.00), Compromising and Emotional intelligence (r= .263** n=400, p=0.00) and Accommodating (r= .288** n=400, p=0.00). For Avoiding (r= .052 n=400, p $\neq$0.00) and Competing (r= .097 n=400, p $\neq$ 0.00), styles positive correlations was not significant.

Discussion

This study aimed to investigate the relationship between self-awareness and conflict management. Results show a strong positive correlation between Emotional Intelligence and the Compromising, Collaborating, and Accommodating styles of conflict management. Thus, findings confirms the hypotheses. Similarly, in a study conducted in over seven different countries by Rahim et al. (2002), it was seen that self-awareness is positively associated with subordinates' use of the collaborative strategy of conflict management. The present study extends the current knowledge about the relationship between conflict and self-awareness by finding a link between self-awareness and productive conflict management styles. In a study conducted by Morrison (2008), it was found that individuals with higher self-awareness tend to use the collaborative style of conflict management, similar to what was found in this study. The collaborative conflict management style is a 'win-win' situation for both parties and is hence considered to be a mode of productive conflict management. Similarly, in a compromising conflict management style, both parties make a concession in order to maintain a good relationship. In accommodating conflict management style, one party forsakes their own desires for the other party. In all three constructive modes of conflict management, the end result is the same, i.e., the relationship between the conflict parties is maintained. However, in the avoidance style of conflict management, one party deliberately avoids confrontation and leaves the other party hanging and in the competing style of conflict management, the individuals involved are assertive, uncooperative, and unwilling to budge from their own concerns. In both these conflict management styles, there are many negative emotions like anger and frustration involved. Due to which, these two styles are considered to be destructive modes of conflict management.

The reason why individuals with higher self-awareness use more constructive modes of conflict management may be due to their understanding of what is at stake. They may be able to look at their current interpersonal relationships and assess if their communication is positively or negatively impacting the relationship. People with lower self-awareness may look at a conflict as a competition, where one wins and the other loses. They may ignore the gap between intent and impact. The overall implications of the current study is that individuals with higher self-awareness will manage conflict in a more productive manner. It is critical for people to raise their self-awareness and in turn their Emotional Intelligence, so that they may handle conflicts in a better manner. (Schlaerth et al., 2013)

Therefore, it may be necessary for individuals to increase their self-awareness and emotional intelligence in order to manage conflict in a more constructive manner. To achieve this goal, training in conflict management and attending workshops in emotional intelligence may be of help. Developing EI is a never-ending journey as people can improve it at any stage of life by following a consistent and systematic approach (Bankovskaya, 2012). Some of the most essential steps in coaching in raising self-awareness include providing feedback (Wall, 2007)

The limitations of the present study are mostly related to the sample population. The sample is mainly urban in nature, and hence, the study cannot be used to speak for the relationship between awareness and conflict management of people living in rural areas. The population is also homogenous and not so vast in nature. Furthermore, the present study used a long questionnaire with two parts that may take a long time for the participants to fill out, and it may be associated with a reporting bias and providing socially desirable responses. Moreover, the study is quantitative and not qualitative in design. Future studies should be carried out on a wider and more heterogeneous population and should be more qualitative in nature. Despite these limitations, the present study provided new insights regarding the relationship between awareness and conflict management styles.

Conclusion

The management of conflict can have awareness of the conflict in totality as its prime step.

Awareness about the conflict brings in space for one to understand what they want, which brings in a focus on what is needed from their end to manage the conflict. Raising self-awareness and emotional intelligence can lead to more constructive management of conflict.

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