

Assessing the Relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Conflict Management Strategies among the Staff of Economy and Finance Ministry

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Abstract-“Conflict” is not an avoidable phenomenon in organizations, so the management and staff must detect it and reduce its negative effects. If the appropriate strategies are not used to resolve the conflict among the staff, it will lead to a serious damage to the organization. The main purpose of the present paper is to assess the relation between emotional intelligence and management strategies among the staff of economy and finance ministry which has been performed as a case study in Iran. In order to analyze the data collected from 279 employees of the economy and finance ministry, SPSS software has been used; in this regard, the questionnaires of emotional intelligence and conflict management strategies have been applied. The results of correlation coefficients show that there is a significant relation between the emotional intelligence and conflict management strategies; also, the employees with high emotional intelligence apply solution-orientated strategy to encounter with conflicts.

Key words-Conflict; Organization; Management

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1. INTRODUCTION

Any organization is consisted of individuals who interact with each other; therefore, ignoring organizational psychology, individuals' differences, interpersonal relationship, involvement of others in decision making, diversity and dissent, as well as lack of control over emotions can put the organizational resources at risk. Actually, the global interest in emotional intelligence is resulted from the fact that the approach addresses all human and emotional aspects and social as well as interpersonal skills needed to realize the organizational goals and encourage the productive actions. The studies show that the staff with high emotional intelligence and technical experiences can resolve the new conflicts and errors in relations as well as enhance poor and strained group and organizational communications more quickly than the others (Cooper, 1998).

Globalization has caused the diversity to draw the attraction; in fact, boundaries have been eliminated and different cultural, social, and political factors such as individualism/collectivism and power distance are influenced by interpersonal styles and methods of conflict resolution. Conflicts can be caused by two parties with different cultures, policies, or strategies along with different motivations, goals, or actions in micro level of an organization. The process of conflict greatly influences the society. If the conflict management is not implemented properly, respect for the values, beliefs, and cultures will significantly decrease (Kaushal and Kwantes, 2006).

The results of previous studies show that the correlation of emotional intelligence with strategies such as accommodation and collaboration is significant that means the increase of emotional intelligence causes the application of strategies such as avoidance, competition and compromise to be reduced; in other words, the results can be interpreted in a way that the variables such as self-assessment and emotional intelligence can affect social interactions; thus, the individuals with high self-assessment can show appropriate behavior in situations, are environmentally sensitive and show the necessary behavior based on the environment demand. Such features make the individuals get better results in daily relationships and take advantage of conflicts to their growth (Kaushal and Kwantes, 2006).

In this paper, the emotional intelligence and conflict management strategies have been respectively considered as the independent and dependent variables. In fact, the staff's emotional intelligence and its relation with conflict management strategies form the present study's framework. The approaches applied in previous studies and definitions regarding emotional intelligence are divided into three groups:

- 1) The mixed model provided by Golman
- 2) The ability model provided by Mayer and Salovey
- 3) The mixed model provided by Bar-On

In this paper, emotional intelligence theory of Mayer-Salovey has been selected as the main approach of the research. The emotional intelligence is defined as understanding and managing your own and others' emotions as well as empathizing with others and positively using the emotions. The background of emotional intelligence goes back to the time when Kessler attempted to explain the non-cognitive aspects of general intelligence. He believed that in addition to the factor of intelligence, there are specific non-intelligent factors determining the intelligent behaviors (Keramati, Mir Kamali, and Rafiyi, 2009).

Mayer and Salovey (1997) defined the emotional intelligence as the perceptual capacity, cognitive tools, as well as using and managing ones' own and others' emotions. This definition includes attention to feelings, the feelings clarity, and the mood repair (Keramati, Mir Kamali, and Rafiyi, 2009). Also, literature review was used to classify the conflict management strategies based on the Thomas's theory selected as the theoretical bases of this study. Thomas inspired by the concept of network management introduced two specific types of conflicting behaviors including "assertiveness" and "cooperativeness".

The Assertiveness includes the behaviors aimed at self-satisfaction while the Cooperativeness includes the behaviors aimed at others' satisfaction. Based on these two tendencies, five strategies are defined regarding conflict management including compromise, cooperation, avoidance, compatibility, and competition.

Putnam and Wilson have classified the five strategies (listed above) as three more general strategies including solution-orientated, non-confrontation, and control strategies (Keramati, Mir Kamali, and Rafiyi, 2009).

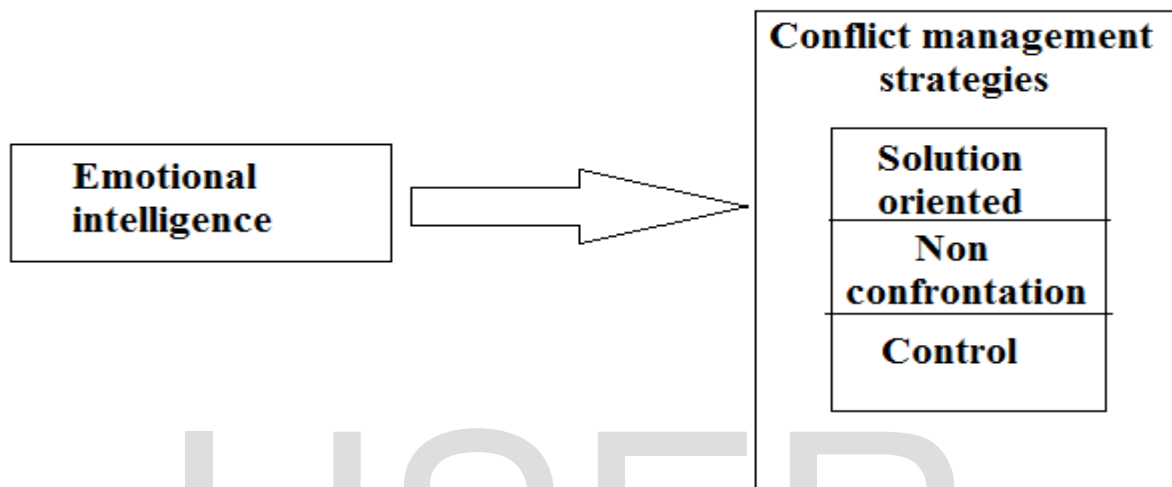


Figure (1) The research conceptual model

Mayer and Salovey's definition of emotional intelligence includes the ability of expressing and regulating ones' own and others' emotions as well as efficient use of them. They believe that people cope with their emotions in different ways including:

- 1) **Consciously:** some people are aware of their mood and morale; therefore, they can control their emotional life. In fact, their enlightenment about emotions may reinforce their other personal aspects. Actually, such people act independently and are aware of their limits; as a result, they have good mental health and this helps them to control their mind when they are in a bad mental state; in other words, their thoughts help them to control their emotions.
- 2) **In depressed:** depressed people are often involved in emotions and cannot find a way to escape from their feelings. In fact, they are unstable people who do not know

much of their emotions and drown in their feelings without any prospects. Thus, they do not have any control over their emotional life and do not attempt to rescue themselves from that bad mental state. As a result, they usually feel inadequate and, consequently, feel like a failure in life. Therefore, they feel that their emotions are uncontrollable (Nikoo Goftar, 2006).

- 3) **Surrendering:** some people are aware of their feelings, but they still tend to stay in that mental state; as a result, they do not attempt to change their feelings. Such people are divided into two groups: the first group includes people who are usually in a good state of mind; therefore, they have little incentive to change their attitudes, but the second group includes people who are prone to moodiness, however, they do not make any attempt to change it. These people surrender to despair at depression (Nikoo Goftar, 2006).

In this regard, the findings of Mayer-Salovey et al. are considered as the most respected and influential ones. In 1990, they formally provided a definition about emotional intelligence for the first time. They scientifically assessed different components of emotional intelligence. Their primary definition included detailed assessment, appropriate expression, and regulation of emotions to improve life (Nikoo Goftar, 2006).

1.1. Cooper vision

In 1996-1997, Cooper provided a tool called “map of emotional EQ” which evaluates the response to the current environment, emotional literacy, emotional quotient adequacy, attitudes and values, and emotional quotient outcomes. The scope of responding to the current environment includes pressures and satisfaction of life; the scope of emotional literacy includes dimensions of emotional consciousness (emotion expression and awareness); the scope of emotional quotient adequacy includes creativity, resilience against stress, and interpersonal communication; the scope of attitudes and values includes patience, intuition, confidence, and personal power; finally, the scope of emotional quotient outcomes includes public health, life quality, communication interest, and optimal

performance. The map of emotional EQ provides a broad interpretation of emotional intelligence structure and evaluates the various scopes mentioned above (Cooper, 1998).

A study done by Fahim Dowin (2005) as “the relation of emotional intelligence and communicational skills with conflict management strategies among educational and executive managers’ of physical education faculties in Iran universities” showed that the relation between control strategy in conflict management and “emotional intelligence and managers’ communicational skills” is not significant at alpha level of 0.05. In addition, there is no significant relation between managers’ emotional intelligence and non-confrontation strategy, but there is a positive significant relation between managers’ emotional intelligence and conflict at alpha level of 0.05. The research findings also showed that statistically there is no significant relation between “emotional intelligence, communicational skills, and conflict management strategies” and educational and executive managers’ personal characteristics such as the age, the years of experience, the education level, and the academic degrees.

The other study done by Abedi (2005) as “assessment of the relation between emotional intelligence and transformational leadership” showed that the relation between the variables is strong and significant. In addition, using stepwise multiple regression analysis method, it was found that among the five components of emotional intelligence, the components of empathy, self-awareness, and motivation can explain 78% of changes in transformational leadership.

Another study done by Shahtalabi (2007) as “assessment of the relation between emotional intelligence and conflict management styles used by the managers of girls high schools in Isfahan-Iran” showed that there is significant relation between emotional intelligence and the five styles of conflict management, but the relation between managers’ self-awareness and the competition style is not statistically significant at a level lower than 0.05. However, the relation between managers’ self-regulation and “the compromise, avoidance, and collaboration styles” is significant at a level lower than 0.01. Also, there is statistically significant relation between the motivation and “the compromise and collaboration styles”

at the level of $P=0.01$, but the relation between the motivation and “the competition and avoidance styles” is not significant at a level lower than 0.05. In addition, there is statistically a significant relation between the sympathy and compromising styles as well as between collaboration and avoidance ones at the level of 0.01. Also, the relation between social skills and “the competition and compromise styles” is statistically significant at a level of 0.05.

2. REEASERCH HYPOTHESES

2.1. The Main Hypothesis

There is a significant relation between the staff’s emotional intelligence and the conflict management strategies.

2.2. The Research sub-Hypothesis

- 1) There is a significant relation between the staff’s emotional intelligence and the solution-orientated strategy.
- 2) There is a significant relation between the staff’s emotional intelligence and the non-confrontation strategy.
- 3) There is a significant relation between the staff’s emotional intelligence and the control strategy.

3. DATA COLLECTION

Any phenomenon includes quantitative and qualitative features which are described by their nature and achievement methods. Phenomena are transformed over time; thus, the objective of any descriptive or explanatory research is to obtain information about the changes. In any research, it is needed to collect data and test the proposed hypotheses to solve a selected problem (Khaki, 2007).

Data collection for this study is done based on two methods: library and field methods. The library method includes assessment and study of various Persian and English materials (such as books, articles, journals, and so forth) related to the literature of emotional

intelligence and the conflict management strategies. In addition, to collect necessary information regarding the population and ministry of economy and finance affairs, it is referred to related documents. In the field method, the researcher collects necessary data through developing a questionnaire and distributing it among the statistical sample; then, using the collected data, the research hypotheses are tested.

4. MEASUREMENT RESEARCH TOOLS

In this research, a questionnaire is used as measurement tool. In fact, questionnaires are common and direct ways for collecting data. Any questionnaire includes several questions which are answered by respondents who are members of the statistical sample. The answers form researchers' necessary data. The questions of a questionnaire can be considered as a type of stimulus-response. It is possible to evaluate the individuals' interests, knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs regarding a specific issue through questionnaires. Therefore, it is possible to gain knowledge about respondents' previous and current experiences through a questionnaire (Sarmad, 1998).

In a survey research, the questionnaire should include targeted questions measuring respondents' opinions and visions using various scales (Khaki, 2007).

The questionnaire of this study as a measurement tool includes the following question types:

- 1) General or demographic questions
- 2) Mayer and Salovey's emotional intelligence questionnaire
- 3) Porter's conflict management strategies questionnaire

4.1. The emotional Intelligence Questionnaire

To measure the emotional intelligence, a questionnaire (questionnaire 1) including 28 questions and developed based on the Mayer-Salovey meta-mood model (including the components of attention to feelings, the feelings clarity, and the mood repair) has been

used. The following table shows the distribution of questions based on the emotional intelligence components.

Table 1: the questions distribution based on the emotional intelligence components

The emotional intelligence components	Questions numbers
Attention to feelings	2-3-4-7-10-12-17-18-21-23-24-27
The feelings clarity	5-6-11-14-15-16-20-25-28-22
The mood repair	1-8-9-13-19-26

5. THE CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES QUESTIONNAIRE

To measure the conflict management strategies, a questionnaire (questionnaire 2) including 30 questions and developed according to the Putnam-Wilson views (including the solution-orientated, non-confrontation, and control components) has been used. Table 2 shows the distribution of questions based on the conflict management strategies.

Table 2: the questions distribution based on the conflict management strategies

The conflict management components	Questions numbers
Solution-orientated	1-4-5-6-8-9-11-13-16-19-20-21
Non-confrontation	2-7-12-14-15-23-24-25-27-28-29
Control	3-10-17-18-22-26-30

6. DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

Here, the statistical indices describing the sample society such as the mean, standard deviation, and variance are assessed regarding the parameters of “Mayer and Salovey’s emotional intelligence questionnaire” and “Putnam-Wilson conflict management strategies questionnaire”.

6.1. Demographic Description of the Sample

The respondents’ gender

Table 3: the frequency distribution of studied samples based on the gender

Gender	Frequency	Frequency percentage
Female	124	42%
Male	173	58%
Total	297	100%



Figure 2: the frequency distribution of studied samples based on the gender

According to table 3, the number of males and females participated in the statistical sample are 173 and 124, respectively. Thus, the frequency percentage of males and females are 58% and 42%, respectively; as a result, it is concluded that the male frequency is higher than the female one.

6.2. Assessing the Research Hypotheses

6.2.1. Assessment of the Main Hypothesis

To discover the relation between the emotional intelligence and the conflict management strategies, the components of emotional intelligence and conflict management strategies

were rated together and Spearman's rank correlation coefficient was calculated for the components. Table 4 shows the results of the test.

H_0 : There is not a significant relation between the emotional intelligence and the conflict management strategies.

H_1 : There is a significant relation between the emotional intelligence and the conflict management strategies.

$H_0: P = 0$

$H_1: P \neq 0$

Table 4: Spearman's rank correlation coefficient test to assess the relation between the emotional intelligence and the conflict management strategies

	Correlation coefficient (R)	Significance (P)
The conflict management strategies	0.303	0.023
Emotional intelligence		

7. THE TEST RESULTS

According to table 4 and the obtained values ($Sig \leq 0.05$), it is concluded that there is a significant relation between the emotional intelligence and the conflict management strategies; therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected and the researcher's one is accepted. Thus, the relation between the emotional intelligence and the conflict management strategies is confirmed.

7.1. Assessment of the first sub-hypothesis

H_0 : There is not a significant relation between the emotional intelligence and the solution-orientated strategy.

H_1 : There is a significant relation between the emotional intelligence and the solution-orientated strategy.

$H_0: P = 0$

$$H_1: P \neq 0$$

Table 5: Spearman's rank correlation coefficient test to assess the relation between the emotional intelligence and the solution-orientated strategy

Emotional intelligence Conflict management strategies	attention to feelings		the feelings clarity		the mood repair	
	(R)	(P)	(R)	(P)	(R)	(P)
The solution-orientated strategy	0.348	0.005	0.431	0.001	0.372	0.002

Table5 interpretation: according to the table, the Spearman's rank correlation coefficients for assessing the relation between the solution-orientated strategy and the components of emotional intelligence are reported equal to 0.348, 0.431, and 0.372. As it observed, all correlation values are higher than 0.3 and all P-values are lower than 0.05; as a result, it is concluded that there is a significant relation between the emotional intelligence and the solution-orientated strategy. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected and the relation between the emotional intelligence and the solution-orientated strategy is confirmed.

7.2. Assessment of the Second Sub-Hypothesis

H_0 : There is not a significant relation between the emotional intelligence and the non-confrontation strategy.

H_1 : There is a significant relation between the emotional intelligence and the non-confrontation strategy.

$$H_0: P = 0$$

$$H_1: P \neq 0$$

Table 6: Spearman's rank correlation coefficient test to assess the relation between the emotional intelligence and the non-confrontation strategy

Emotional intelligence Conflict management strategies	attention to feelings		the feelings clarity		the mood repair	
	(R)	(P)	(R)	(P)	(R)	(P)
The non-confrontation strategy	0.161	0.186	0.044	0.719	0.006	0.955

Table6 interpretation: according to the table, the Spearman's rank correlation coefficients for assessing the relation between the non-confrontation strategy and the components of emotional intelligence are reported equal to 0.161, 0.044, and 0.006. As it observed, all correlation values are lower than 0.3 and all P-values are higher than 0.05; as a result, it is concluded that there is not a significant relation between the emotional intelligence and non-confrontation strategy. Hence, the researcher's hypothesis is rejected and the relation between the emotional intelligence and the non-confrontation strategy is not confirmed.

7.3. Assessment of the Third Sub-Hypothesis

H_0 : There is not a significant relation between the emotional intelligence and the control strategy.

H_1 : There is a significant relation between the emotional intelligence and the control strategy.

$$H_0: P = 0$$

$$H_1: P \neq 0$$

Table 7: Spearman's rank correlation coefficient test to assess the relation between the emotional intelligence and the control strategy

Emotional intelligence Conflict management strategies	attention to feelings		the feelings clarity		the mood repair	
	(R)	(P)	(R)	(P)	(R)	(P)
The control strategy	0.186	0.127	0.15	0.21	0.033	0.789

Table7 interpretation: according to the table, the Spearman's rank correlation coefficients for assessing the relation between the control strategy and the components of emotional intelligence are reported equal to 0.186, 0.15, and 0.033. As it observed, all correlation values are lower than 0.3 and all P-values are higher than 0.05; as a result, it is concluded that there is not a significant relation between the emotional intelligence and control strategy. Hence, the researcher's hypothesis is rejected and the relation between the emotional intelligence and the control strategy is not confirmed.

8. The summary Results of Testing the Research Hypotheses

Table 8 shows the summary results of testing the research hypotheses.

Table 8: the summary results related to the correlation of the emotional intelligence variables and the conflict management strategies

Emotional intelligence Conflict management strategies	attention to feelings		the feelings clarity		the mood repair	
	(R)	(P)	(R)	(P)	(R)	(P)
The solution-orientated strategy	0.348	0.005	0.431	0.001	0.372	0.002
The non-confrontation strategy	0.161	0.186	0.044	0.719	0.006	0.955
The control strategy	0.186	0.127	0.15	0.21	0.033	0.789

9. CONCLUSION

9.1. Comparing the results of research with previous studies

1) Comparing the main hypothesis results with previous studies

The results of the main hypothesis show that there is a significant relationship between the emotional intelligence and the conflict management strategies. The results are consistent with the results obtained from the previous studies done by Ming Lee (2004), Jordan and Truss (2003), Malek (2000), Keramati and Roshan (2005), and Dini (2002). Ming Lee has concluded that there is a significant relationship between the emotional intelligence and the conflict management strategies. The managers and staff obtained higher scores regarding the emotional intelligence usually apply more effective strategies to cope with conflicts. The study done by Jordan and Truss (2003) as “benefits of the emotional intelligence and prediction of applying the conflict management styles in nursing” showed that there is a significant relation between the emotional intelligence and solution-orientated strategy.

The study done by Finley, Esser Ford and Timms (2000) showed that teaching the skills of emotional intelligence to students can reinforce their collaboration and communication within groups. Malek has concluded the same results by his research. The results of the study done by Keramati and Roshan confirm the relation between “staff’s and managers’ self-awareness” and “applying the solution-orientated strategy for coping with conflicts”. The results of Dini’s study show that the relation between “emotional abilities” and “the compromise strategy” is significant.

2) Comparing the first sub-hypothesis results with previous studies

The results of the first sub-hypothesis show that there is a significant relationship between the emotional intelligence and the solution-oriented strategy. The results are consistent with the results obtained from the previous studies done by Ming Lee (2004), Malek (2000), Keramati and Roshan (2005), and Nasrabadi (2003). The study done by Nasrabadi as

“assessing the impact of emotional intelligence on the educational achievements of female students in secondary schools” showed that teaching the social problem-solving skills to students significantly and positively affects their emotional intelligence. According to the studies done by Afzalwar (2002), Ashkan (2005), and Dowin (2005), there is a significant relation between “the staff’s and managers’ emotional intelligence” and “the solution-orientated strategy” confirming the results of present study as well. The study done by Kalhor (2007) showed that there is no significant relation between these two variables so the results of the study are not consistent with the findings of this research.

3) Comparing the second sub-hypothesis results with previous studies

The results of the second sub-hypothesis show that there is not a significant relationship between the emotional intelligence and the non-confrontation strategy. The results are consistent with the results obtained from the previous studies done by Ming Lee (2004), Iyushen (2003), Afzalwar (2002), Ashkan (2004), and Kalhor (2007). All mentioned studies confirm that there is not a significant relationship between the emotional intelligence and the non-confrontation strategy.

4) Comparing the third sub-hypothesis results with previous studies

The results of the third sub-hypothesis show that there is not a significant relationship between the emotional intelligence and the control strategy. The results are consistent with the results obtained from the previous studies done by Kalhor (2007) and Malek (2000).

10. RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

Accordingly, one of the most important issues in any research is to identify the problems and limitations of that research, because it helps researches to solve the problems and improve their research. Therefore, the limitations of present research are as follows:

- Data collection method (using questionnaire): in fact, the available sample and the type of research (correlation) limit generalizing and interpreting the findings.
- The statistical population is limited only to Tehran-Iran.

- The studied population is limited only to the staff of economy and finance ministry; on the other hand, the ministry scope is very extensive and related to different organizations, which makes it difficult to study all staff of this ministry.
- The absence of staff at their offices due to their meetings or being sent on duty.

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