Original Article

Emotional Intelligence and Conflict Management Styles of Faculty Members Teaching Nursing and Other Allied Health Programs

Jestoni D. Maniago,1Majed Alamri,2

[1] Assistant Professor, 2 Associate Professor, Department of Nursing,
College of Applied Medical Sciences, Majmaah University, Majmaah, 11952, Saudi Arabia

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Corresponding Author: Jestoni D. Maniago,1 Assistant Professor, College of Nursing, P.O. Box 66, Majmaah University, Majmaah 11952, Saudi Arabia, Mobile: +966-535838019,
Email address: je.maniago@mu.edu.sa / maniagojestoni@gmail.com

Abstract

Background: A basic difficulty underlying many of the serious problems of academic administration is the inability to deal effectively with conflict among faculty members, between faculty members and administrators, between faculty and students, and between representatives of the institution and external stakeholders. When those responsible for institutional policy are able to focus and resolve conflicts arising from different ideologies, values and vested interests, it is possible for decision-making and problem-solving to be governed by commitment to the pursuit of academic excellence.

Objective: This study analyzed the correlation of emotional intelligence (EI) and conflict management styles (CMS) of faculty members teaching nursing and other allied health programs.

Materials and Methods: Adopted questionnaires were used to collect data from respondents (n=104) and structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to tabulate and statistically analyze the data.

Results: Some EI components of faculty members affect their CMS skills; specifically, on EI awareness and management to CMS collaborating (β=-0.157, $p<.05$), EI social skills to CMS competing (β=-0.216, $p<.05$), and EI social skills to CMS avoiding (β=0.198, $p<.05$).

Conclusion: Some aspects of EI were significantly related to CMS. Further study is needed to explore other indicators for both EI and CMS in higher education and other sectors to create appropriate recommendations and theory-based actions to optimize the efficiency and effectiveness of organizations.

Keywords: Educational Management; Emotional Intelligence; Conflict Management Styles; Saudi Arabia

الملخص

أحد الصعوبات الأساسية وراء الكثير من المشكلات الخطيرة للإدارة الأكاديمية هو عدم القدرة على التعامل بفعالية مع الصراع بين أعضاء هيئة التدريس، كذلك بين أعضاء هيئة التدريس والإداريين او الطلاب او أصحاب المصلحة من خارج المؤسسة. عندما يكون المسؤولون عن السياسة المؤسسية قادرين على تركيز وحل النزاعات الناشئة عن الأيديولوجيات والقيم والمصالح الخاصة المختلفة ، فمن الممكن أن يكون صنع القرار وحل المشكلات من خلال الالتزام بالسعي لتحقيق التميز الأكاديمي.

الهدف: حللت هذه الدراسة العلاقة بين الذكاء العاطفي وأساليب إدارة الصراع لأعضاء هيئة التدريس الذين يقومون بتدريس التمريض وبرامج الصحة الأخرى المرتبطة بها.

طريقة البحث: تم استخدام الاستبيانات المعتمدة لجمع البيانات من عينة الدراسة (العدد = ١٠٤) وتم استخدام نمذجة المعادلة الهيكلية لجدولة وتحليل البيانات إحصائياً.

النتائج: تؤثر بعض مكونات الذكاء العاطفي لأعضاء هيئة التدريس على مهارات وأساليب إدارة الصراع الخاصة بهم؛ على وجه التحديد، بشأن مهارة الوعي والإدارة - التعاون (β = -٠,١٥٧, p <.٠٥) التنافس (β = -٠,٢١٦, p <.٠٥) التجنب (β = ٠,١٩٨, p <.٠٥)

الخلاصة: كانت بعض جوانب الذكاء العاطفي مرتبطة بشكل كبير بأساليب إدارة الصراع، هناك حاجة إلى مزيد من الدراسات لاستكشاف مؤشرات أخرى لكل من الذكاء العاطفي وأساليب إدارة الصراع في التعليم العالي والقطاعات الأخرى لإنشاء التوصيات المناسبة والإجراءات المستندة إلى النظريات لتحسين كفاءة وفعالية المنظمات.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الإدارة التربوية؛ الذكاء العاطفي؛ أساليب إدارة الصراع؛ المملكة العربية السعودية

Introduction

One of the most researched areas in applied medical science education is the Emotional Intelligence (EI). It is described as the person's ability to monitor his own feelings, understand emotions and feelings of other people and to use this understanding to in influence his thinking and action [1]. The assumption that there is a relationship between EI and successful management in education (such as decision-making process, planning process, functional relationships, performance assessments) institutions began to emerge in management literature in the early 1980s.

In light of this recent academic focus on EI, it is imperative to investigate its role in the management of schools, especially Saudi universities which are mandated to prepare youth for gainful employment and good citizenship. It is undisputed that the current focus of universities in the age of globalization should be to hire faculty members who have the ability to manage workplace conflicts which are inherent in culturally diverse organizations [2-4].

More than ever, institutions of higher learning, like other organizations, are faced with the challenge of formalizing effective management approaches and leadership styles, taking into account the phenomenon of conflict in its many forms and dimensions. Holt and DeVore pointed out that "conflict and violence are a part of our world, both on the microscopic and macroscopic levels" [5]. In the context of a rapidly changing society, higher education systems are inevitably beset with various types of conflict. Universities have to recognize not only the challenge of educating future professionals with appropriate knowledge and skills in dealing with conflict, but also to manage actual conflicts in their organizations [6,7]. Schools are not free from the stressful pressures of conflicting issues which involve not only economic, cultural, and political factors but also those borne by technology-related concerns [8].

Certain forms of conflict can also provide managers with information about the operations for which they are accountable and where corrective actions might be needed. An understanding of conflict and the concomitant remedial skill should be a significant part of the administrator's tasks in order for the organization to prosper. It is thus imperative that educational managers should acquire skills that will help them to manage conflict effectively [9,10].

Studies reveal that conflict management requires skills and competencies that are emotionally based. It is clear that with a dynamic environment and changing human values, organizations continually undergo change. But change is almost always accompanied by conflicts [9]. Today's organizations are confronted by daily conflicts caused by a multitude of factors ranging from struggles for power, the desire for economic gain, the need for status, the realization of unfulfilled values, the assertion of rights not yet fulfilled, and many other human and non-human components of an institution [11-13].

Background of the study

Primarily, this study is based on three leading theories on personality, emotional intelligence and conflict management: Daniel Goleman's [14] groundbreaking theory on the functions and components of EI and Thomas and Kilmann's [15] "Conflict Handling Mode Model".

Goleman's theory avers that EI is more important than technical skills and intelligence quotient (IQ) for career success at all levels. In measuring success in senior leadership positions, EI is a better predictor than IQ; the importance of EI increases proportionately with rungs up the career ladder. Goleman states that EI consists of four fundamental capabilities: "self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and social skills". Each capability is associated with a specific set of attributes or behaviors. Nineteen EI-related capabilities and attributes are listed as basic components of EI. These factors are claimed to influence with an individual's family life and career progression [14].

Self-awareness is understanding one's own personal preferences, strengths and limitations. Self-management is ability of one person to manage personal internal states and intuitions to assist in pursuing goals. On the other hand, social awareness is the ability of a person to sense and understand what other people are going through including their feelings and concerns. Social skill is the ability to encourage appropriate responses in other people

In identifying existing conflicts, different conflict management approaches are appropriate for different types of conflict. The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Handling Mode Model was used in this study. According to Thomas and Kilmann, conflict management styles are classified according to the two basic dimensions of personal intentions: assertiveness and cooperativeness [15]. Assertiveness refers to the person's concern for himself and his own personal goals. Cooperativeness, on the other hand, refers to the person's concern for relationships (interpersonal and intergroup) and the goals of others. There are five (5) Conflict Management Styles (CMS), each has advantages and disadvantages.

The avoiding style is low in assertiveness and cooperativeness. This style can be expressed in several ways such as when the manager avoids confrontational situations or when he defers answering a disturbing letter or by maintaining neutrality by not expressing any views on the conflict. Here, the manager may act merely as a communication link by transmitting messages between superiors and subordinates [15].

However, an avoiding style can make sense when a conflict situation has relatively minor implications for managerial effectiveness, when there appears to be little chance for the person to win, when the potential damage of confronting a conflict outweighs the benefits of its resolution. The avoiding style is likewise appropriate in order to reduce tensions and when others can resolve the conflict more effectively.

The compromising style is moderate

in both assertiveness and cooperativeness dimensions. Through this style, a manager may sacrifice his personal opinion and interest on controversial issues to seek a middle ground by splitting the differences in conflict situations. Compromise is a cornerstone to negotiation. Conflicting parties discuss proposals concerning terms and conditions of a possible agreement to find a mutually acceptable solution to satisfy their interests and concerns partially. They share in some degree of winning and losing because both have to give up something. It does not dig into the underlying problem but rather seeks a more superficial arrangement like splitting the difference. It is based upon party concessions and is seen as the most practical approach to conflict management. It is useful when goals are moderately important, when there is a need to achieve temporary settlements to complex issues or arrive at expedient solutions under pressure [15].

However, the early use of compromise may leave the parties feeling uneasy and somewhat dissatisfied. This style should not be used too early in the conflict episode when the problem-solving approach is more appropriate.

The competing style is high in assertiveness and low in cooperativeness. This style relies upon the power in the formal position or possible superior knowledge, to require a resolution satisfactory to only one of the parties. The manager assumes that the conflict involves a win-lose situation. When dealing with conflicts between subordinates or between organizational levels, the manager may threaten or actually invoke punishments, which may include demotion, dismissal, or threat of a poor performance evaluation. This style may be useful when a quick, decisive course of action must be done, when the issues are vital to company welfare, when the manager knows that he is right [15].

However, this style may coerce, suppress or intimidate other parties to a conflict. Subordinates may avoid communication with the manager who uses this style. A competing style may prevent the real causes of a conflict from coming into the open.

The collaborating style, which is high in both assertiveness and cooperativeness, requires the willingness to identify underlying causes of conflict, openly share information and search out an alternative considered to be mutually beneficial. This happens when the conflicting parties recast the scheme into a problem-solving situation. This involves accepting both parties' concerns as valid and digging into an issue in an attempt to find innovative possibilities. It also means being open and exploratory [15].

Collaborating style is useful when both sets of concerns are too important to be compromised, when there is a need to merge insights from people with different perspectives on a problem, and to gain commitment by incorporating the other party's concern into a consensual decision. While collaborating style is high in both the assertiveness and cooperativeness dimensions, it does not mean that it is always the best approach to conflict

management. Other styles are more practical and beneficial under certain situations.

The accommodating style is low in assertiveness and high in cooperativeness. In this approach, the manager acts as though the conflict will pass time, and he merely invokes the need for cooperation. The manager tries to reduce tensions by reassuring and providing support to the parties. This approach may be useful as a starting point to defuse a potentially explosive conflict situation. This allows time for further efforts toward changing negative perception and communication patterns [15].

Hopkins stressed that leadership is a dynamic interpersonal process integrating an extensive range of cognitive as well as emotional competencies and functioning in a gendered social context [16].

Moreover, Ellis [17] utilized respondent who were MBA students at a small university and found significant relationships between EI and CMS. Ellis stressed that there is an increasing importance in higher education and corporate America to use interpersonal skills, EI, and the ability to resolve conflict in the workplace.

As society aspires to growth and modernization, there is a need for greater knowledge and expertise in leadership and an earnest commitment to pursue a systematic and long-range program for improving an institution. This expertise in leadership includes effective management of conflict to ensure higher productivity and efficiency of both the academic and administrative personnel of an educational institution.

The literature has clearly shown that the characteristic approaches to conflict management are diverse and varied. Moving the organization to fulfill its mission is a formidable task every manager must face. The task can be a lot easier if employees in the organization are able to capture the mind of the manager. No organization can achieve its mission if the organization's requirements are in conflict with the individual needs, wants and values.

However, organizations at present have become a "complex human arena" with diverse idiosyncrasies, beliefs, racial ideologies, personal interests, value systems, and educational backgrounds on which needs of its members for self-worth and satisfaction must be significantly met. Man after all is a creative being and as such has the power to explore challenges, to discover and utilize new ideas and new ways of doing things, and to develop personally to achieve his needs and wants even, at times, at the expense of the organization [16].

Conflict is not new for humankind or for academia. That said, faculty are finding themselves dealing with new conflicts in a complex environment. At no time in history has there been a greater demand for strong and competent faculty members. Changing values, philosophies, legislative mandates, and technological developments are among the many factors that reinforce the need for competent faculty members to guide and direct educational organizations.

Therefore, faculty members must be

competent in every aspect of management especially in terms of instructional leadership and conflict management since the ability to manage conflict is undoubtedly one of the most important skills a manager can possess.

Objective

This study analyzed the correlation of EI and CMS of faculty members teaching nursing and other allied health programs. It sought to answer the research question "How does EI affects the CMS of faculty members teaching nursing and other allied health program?". Moreover, it is hypothesized that more emotionally intelligent faculty members possessed the capability to effectively manage conflicts. This study is deemed as an opportunity to institute management innovation that is applicable to the prevailing culturally diverse academic environment.

Materials and methods

We used a descriptive-correlational design and utilized two adopted questionnaires as the main instrument in gathering data.

This study involved 104 faculty members of different nationalities (Saudi, Filipino, Indian, Egyptian, Sudanese, and Tunisian) from the College of Applied Medical Sciences at Majmaah University between November and December 2017. Purposive sampling was used based on the characteristics of the target population and the objective of the study. The college includes the departments of Medical Equipment Technology, Medical Laboratories, Physical Therapy, Radiological Sciences and Medical Imaging, and Nursing.

This study adopted two instruments, namely the Goleman's Emotional Intelligence Inventory and the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument [15]. EI inventory is a 32-item checklist used to gather information about emotional intelligence in its four components, such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and social skills. A 5-point Likert scale was use to score each of the four capabilities is associated with a specific set of attributes or behaviors.

The second part is designed to describe the conflict management styles of participants. This study used a standardized questionnaire developed by Thomas and Kilmann and patented and distributed by XICOM, Inc [15]. It is designed to assess an individual's behavior to conflict situations. It consists of 30 pairs of statements which are dichotomous in nature. Each CMS mode ("competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding and accommodating") is paired with other modes three times and items describing a given mode are evenly distributed between the "A" and "B" choice of pairs which are randomly distributed throughout the instrument. The answers indicate conflict management behaviors which are described along two basic dimensions: Assertiveness and Cooperativeness. The five modes are represented by the five columns which consist of the possible scores on that mode, from 0 (for every low use) to 12 (for very high use).

Approval for this study was secured from the dean of the College of Applied Med-

ical Sciences and the Ethics Review Board at Majmaah University prior to data collection. Also, the anonymity and confidentiality of study participants were assured.

The WarpPLS software was used to analyzed the data. Because of the small sample size issue of this study, we decided to use the partial least squares-structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) approach which entails less rigid measurement levels of variables [18, 19]. PLS-SEM is component based. In comparison to covariance-based SEM, PLS-SEM requires less stringent assumptions related to measurement levels of the manifest variables, multivariate normality, and sample size [18-19]. The two-stage approach suggested by Hulland [18] was adopted in testing the SEM. This approach includes the evaluation of the measurement model in the first stage, and evaluation of the structural models in the last stage. The former assesses the reliability and validity of the study measurements, while the latter illustrates the statistical support provided for the hypothetical relationships among constructs. criteria undertaken by Kock [20] The following goodness of fit and quality indices are within the acceptable range: "Average path coefficient (APC) = 0.138 (p<.062), Average block VIF (AVIF) = 1.004 (acceptable if <= 5, ideally <= 3.3), Average full collinearity VIF (AFVIF) = 1.487 (acceptable if <= 5, ideally <= 3.3), Tenenhaus GoF (GoF) = 0.196" [20]. If the p value if greater than .05, it means not statistically significant

Results

On this study, a factor analysis was conducted for the four variables of EI. Some model fit and quality indices are not acceptable if EI will be treated as one factor. The factor analysis yielded two factors, namely: emotional intelligence social skills (EI-SS) and emotional intelligence awareness and management (EI-AM). On the other hand, CMS consist of five dimensions. One model fit and quality index (specifically, the average full collinearity value inflation factor [VIF]) is very large if variable "compromising" is included in the model; hence, variable "compromising" was excluded from the model. The CMS questionnaire was designed by the authors so the total score of the five dimensions is constant (equal to 30). This scoring system extremely affects the value of the full collinearity VIF.

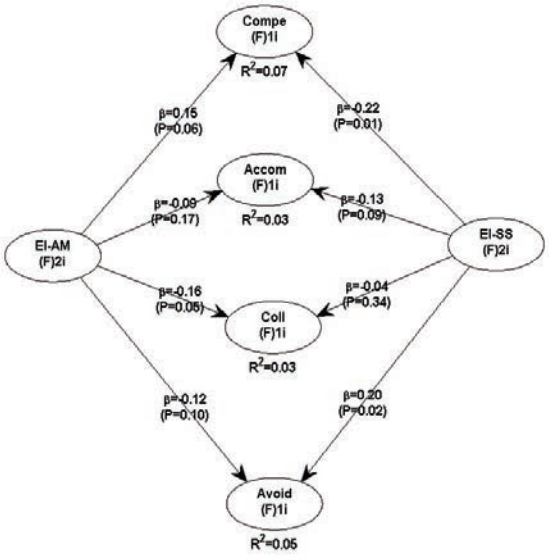


Figure 1. Factor analysis of emotional intelligence and conflict management styles.

The structural equation model as a whole presented a statistical confirmation that the estimates of the model are appropriate. According to the criteria undertaken by Kock,[9] the following goodness of fit and quality indices are within the acceptable range: "Average path coefficient (APC) = 0.138 (p<.062), Average block VIF (AVIF) = 1.004 (acceptable if <= 5, ideally <= 3.3), Average full collinearity VIF (AFVIF) = 1.487 (acceptable if <= 5, ideally <= 3.3), Tenenhaus GoF (GoF) = 0.196" [9].

The structural model shown that EI, on the aspect of awareness and management (EI-AM), is significantly associated to the conflict management style of collaborating (β=-0.157, p<.05). On the other hand, EI, on the aspect of social skills (EI-SS), is significantly related to the conflict management style of competing (β=-0.216, p<.05). Moreover, the structural model reveals that the EI-SS is significantly associated to the conflict management style of avoiding (β=0.198, p<.05).

Table 1. The relationship of Emotional Intelligence on the Conflict Management Styles of the participants.

	Path Coefficient	p-value	f^2
EI-AM* →Competing	.146	.062	.022
EI-AM →Collaborating	**-.157**	**.049**	.025
EI-AM →Avoiding	-.124	.096	.015
EI-AM →Accommodating	-.093	.166	.009
EI-SS† →Competing	**-.216**	**.011**	.047
EI-SS →Collaborating	-.040	.341	.002
EI-SS →Avoiding	**.198**	**.018**	.038
EI-SS →Accommodating	-.128	.090	.017

*Awareness and Management
†Social and Skills

Discussion

This descriptive correlational study established the relationship between EI and the CMS of faculty members teaching nursing and other allied health programs in Saudi Arabia. The sample size is small (N= 104) to perform covariance-based SEM, that is why PLS-SEM approach was used which entails less rigid measurement levels of variables.

Goleman's Emotional Intelligence Inventory was used to measure the respondent's EI on the components: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and social skills. However, some model fit and quality indices are not acceptable if EI components will be treated as one factor. For this study, EI was presented with 2 factors: EI-SS and EI AM.

Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument assessed the CMS of the respondents on 5 components: competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding and accommodating. However, one model fit and quality index is very large if the variable "compromising" is included. Hence, CMS was presented with 4 factors: competing, collaborating, avoiding and accommodating.

This study found that EI and awareness and management (EI-AM) are significantly related to the conflict management style related to collaborating. A number of related studies presented that a manager with self-awareness is significantly beneficial in preventing job burnout, increasing workplace satisfaction and hurdling organizational commitment of members [21-23]. Goleman said

that self-awareness is the foundation of EI [14]. Knowing one's internal state of emotion, allows for self-control and leads to empathy toward others [6-8]. The knowledge of the gaps between the values and expectations of one's principles and expectations and those of one's organization may serve as a useful tool to adopt and cope with the requirements of leadership including dealing with everyday conflicts on the job [7-10, 23, 24].

Goleman associates this competency to the capacity to calm oneself, to effectively manage anxieties, convert pessimism, and transforms the results of failure [14]. People who are poor in this ability are constantly battling feelings of distress, while those who excel in it can bounce back far more quickly from life's setbacks and upsets [8]. This study revealed that faculty members can manage their own internal states and impulses. They can hold back anger, anxiety, gloom, and turn them to become active in work and life. Faculty members possessed the skill to adjust in changing situations and overcoming organizational challenges. Developing EI in self-management contributes to improving professional and personal life. In addition, Jordan and Troth believed that individuals with high EI preferred to seek collaborative solutions when confronted with conflict [10-12, 22].

On the other hand, this study established that EI on the aspect of social skills (EI-SS) affects faculty members who uses the conflict the management style of competing. Strong social skills facilitate the leading and moving of people in the desired direction [10-13].

Further analysis revealed that the EI-SS is significantly related to the conflict management style of avoiding. Understanding emotions and feelings during conflicts will result to more acceptable outcomes [11, 23, 24]. Hence, a more direct approach such as accommodating and collaborating could manage conflicts.

Conclusion

In conclusion, some aspects of EI are significantly related to CMS such as EI-AM to collaborating, EI-SS to competing, and EI-SS to avoiding. Therefore, effective conflict management in a university setting can be achieved by improving the EI of faculty members.

Further studies are recommended to explore other indicators and parameters for EI and CMS in higher education and other sectors, to create appropriate recommendations and theory-based actions that optimize the efficiency and effectiveness of organizations.

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Conflict of interest:

The authors declared no conflicts of interest on this paper.

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