Understanding the Association between Personality and Conflict Management Style of Counselors in Selangor

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Abstract

Understanding the personality and conflict management style among counselors is important in order to help the school counselors in guiding themselves better through their daily job roles. This study is aimed in examining the relationship between personality and conflict management style among counselors. This study employed survey research method using 2 standardized scales. To identify personality, Keirsey Temperament Sorter was used, and for conflict management style, the study used Thomas and Kilmann's Conflict Management Mode Instrument (TKI). A total of 470 respondents participated in this study. Data were analyzed using Chi-square for Independence. Result showed that there were significant relationship between extroverts, introverts and conflict management style, sensing, intuitive and conflict management style, and judging, perceiving and conflict management style but no significant relationship between thinking, feeling, and conflict management style. These findings implied the need for a counselor to understand their style of managing conflict in order to deliver better conflict cases handling in the future. It is recommended that future research should focus on other respondents like managers and volunteer workers to better understand the relationship.

Keywords: Personality, Conflict Management Style, Counselors.

1. Introduction

Life is a changing journey in an environment full of traditional norms and values. In adapting to the changes, new norms and values developed subsequently and parallel with the changing environment of different values, traits, and interests. These differences are responsible for the emergence of conflicts in everyday life. Conflicts cannot be eluded and it is part of the life development and it exists in all social levels, intrapersonal, interpersonal, and intergroup (M. Afzalur Rahim, 1990). For the reason of intricacy in working environment, conflicts can be seen as vicious and disruptive which can be the cause of emotional pain and stress, lower job satisfaction, morality and increase of turnover (Goleman, 2000).

Conflict is an inevitable fact of human existence. Working towards understanding and managing, it effectively can improve both the satisfaction and productivity of social relationships (Fisher, 2000). Conflicting situations usually involves a combination of motives and interest, either competitively or cooperatively (Fisher, 2000). To understand these motives and intentions and establish a relationship to gain trust of the conflicting parties, a person will need a certain personality and emotional empathy (Boulter, Bergen, Miller & Wells, 2001). Individual behavior and differences are among constitutions that develop a person's personality. A number of theories has explained and elaborated the concept of personality in relation to behavioral and personal experiences. Theorists have categorized personality into commonalities and differences which identify the motivation of an individual towards life (Whitworth, 2008).

With this categorization of differences, personality has been considered as having an effect to how a person manages their conflict situations. Past researches support association of personality and conflict management style (Antonioni, 1998), with findings of agreeableness and extraversion as two significant variables of personality that effect conflict management style of individuals (Wood & Bell, 2008).

Having to understand a person's personality is one of the solutions in understanding how to manage conflict and with particularity in attentiveness of personality types and categorizations which facilitate individuals in improving and achieving the positive outcome in conflict situations (Wood & Bell, 2008). Excellence in conflict management is essential in providing effective resolutions of goal achievement. In ensuring excellence in conflict management, a number of past researches ventured in understanding the effect of personality on conflict management. Openness, extraversion are among the personality traits that has been related to conflict management (Basim, Cetin & Tabak, 2009), and more researches are needed in understanding the relations.

Recent worries over the increasing number of social problems like baby dumping, "mat rempit", gangsterism among other things have caused tension in the education system. Although there are many factors contributing to the matter like parenting style, socio economic status, and peer pressure, the role of a teacher at school plays a big part in nurturing the students' disciplinary attitude. With this in mind, having critical and dedicated school counselors is essential in determining the path of creating healthy and successful youths. As counselors deal with conflict daily as part of their life, it is essential that they are equipped with the most suitable type of managing conflict. Hence, this research will take the first step into exploring the conflict management style among counselors, it will explore the personality of the counselors, and how they choose their conflict management style.

In psychoanalytic theory, Sigmund Freud (1991), divide the human mind into three components. First, the ego, the organized conscious mediator between the internal person and external reality. Second, the superego, the internalization of the conscious extenuated by rules, conflict, morals, and guilt. Third, the id which is the psychological energy derived from instinctual needs and drives. The combination of these three components shaped personality (Wang, 2010).

Psychoanalytic theorists defined personality by emphasizing the function of the unconscious internal conflicts which are desires vs. conscience, desires vs. fear, and the good vs. the bad. In other phrase, personality is the development of control and fears, development of control and defenses mechanisms which serves to regulate one's thoughts and realities and protects oneself from any disturbing emotions (Wang, 2010).

Behaviorist believes that personality can be shifted with the change of new environment (Wang, 2010). Watson studied the adjustment of organism on their environment and found that organism react from the environmental stimuli (Wang, 2010).

Humanistic theorists of personality perceived that individuals have their own freedom to choose in how they act. Carl Jung (1981) believed that it is human beings' basic goodness and their motivational factors that push them toward higher levels of functioning and fulfillment in their lives (Wang, 2010). Needs can be induced from environmental as well as internal processors (Sandy, Boardman and Deutsch, 2006).

There are five main qualities in life according to Carl Jung (1981) in person centered therapy. These include openness to experience which is the perception accuracy according to a person's feelings and openness. The existential living which refers to a person's way of living in the present rather than the past or the future. The organismic trusting which refers to a person's thoughts and feelings and doing things naturally. The experiential freedom which refers to a person's acknowledgement on the freedom and responsibility of any action taken. Lastly, creativity which refers to the full participation in the world including contributing to others' lives (Wang, 2010).

Social cognitive theories affirm that expectations to the world and the view towards other people direct a person's behavioral development. In social learning, behavior is a function of a person in their environment, cognition; other personal traits and the environment mutually influence one another (Sandy, Boardman and Deutsch. 2006). Trait theory of personality concluded that personality becomes stable by the age of thirty. The theory divides personality into four measureable factors. Among the famous trait theory model are four-factor model by Isabel Briggs Myers and Katherine C. Briggs (2003). The model was further elaborated by David Keirsey. The four-factor model indicates four dimensions, extraversion vs. introversion, intuition vs. sensing, thinking vs. feeling, and perceiving vs. judging.

Extraversion refers to an outgoing physical stimulation oriented, whereby introvert refers to quiet and physical stimulation averse. Intuition refers to trust in conceptual or abstract models of reality, and sensing refers to concrete sensory oriented facts. Thinking refers to thinking as the prime-mover in decision-making, and judging refers to desire to perceive events versus desire to have things done so judgements can be made (Costa and McCrae, 1995).

Five factor models describes five independent personality dimensions, neuroticism, extroversion, openness to experience, conscientiousness and agreeableness (Costa and McCrae, 1995). Neuroticism refers to the tendency of experiencing negative emotions which consist of six subscales, anxiety, hostility, depression, self-consciousness, impulsiveness, and vulnerability. Extraversion refers to the desire to engage in social activity and interpersonal relationship, which covers facets like warmth, gregariousness, assertiveness, activity, excitement seeking, and positive emotion. Openness to experience refers to the acceptance to ideas and experiences with subscales like openness to fantasy, aesthetics, feelings, actions, ideas, and values. Conscientiousness refers to the capability to organize and plan with sense of duty to achievement, and self-discipline. Its facets include competence, order, dutifulness, achievement striving, self discipline, and deliberation. Agreeableness, refers to being friendly, generous, sympathy, trusting, lenient, and good natured, which covers sub-dimensions like trust, straightforwardness, altruism, compliance, modesty and tender-mindedness.

An improved way of viewing how personality affects the preference of conflict management style is fundamentally less explored (Moberg, 2001). Personality is a proof of how different people are with each other. Different personality affects how people perceive life and how they actually react towards it. Salimi, Karaminia & Esmaeili (2011) studied the personality of managers and how it affects their managerial style and conflict management style. The research was assessing two hundred military unit senior managers. The result showed a positive relationship between extrovert personality and the participatory style of managing conflict (Salimi, Karaminia & Esmaeili, 2011).

In a study to determine the influence of personality characteristics on conflict management approach, Basim, Cetin and Tabak (2009) have studied three hundred and two university students within the age ranged of 18 to 26 years old, undergoing education in Ankara, Turkey. The result showed that openness to experience, extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness personality characteristics does affect how individuals manage conflicts; however, neuroticism does not establish any relationship. These findings supported the important role of personal characteristics in determining conflict management process (Basim, Cetin and Tabak, 2009).

In understanding the effect of personality traits and negotiation outcomes, Yiu and Lee (2011) used a moderated multiple regression analysis to examine the effect of personality on the negotiating behavior and outcomes. The result showed that there are significant effect between personality and negotiation behavior and outcome. Extraversion, openness, and conscientiousness were identified to give positive facilitation in negotiation outcome and behavior by which helped the improvement and optimization of negotiation behavior and outcome (Yiu & Lee, 2011). Whitworth (2008) did a study determining the relationship between personality factors and conflict management. This study selected ninety seven female registered nurses in South Mississippi were selected to participate in the study. The result showed no relationship between personality and conflict management style, however, understanding conflict management styles increased nurses' positive conflict outcomes and lead to improved relationships, increased job satisfaction, and increased retention of registered nurses (Whitworth, 2008).

Wood and Bell (2008) examined the relationship between two dimensions of personality factor, extraversion, and agreeableness with conflict management style of competing, collaborating, accommodating and avoiding. This study selected two hundred and eighty eight students of Colorado State University as participant. The findings showed that extraversion and agreeableness are significant predictors of all four conflict management style suggesting that measuring personality is helpful in mediation and negotiation situations (Wood and Bell, 2008). As study, examining the link between personality and conflicts has found that agreeableness is closely associated with the processes and outcomes during conflicts (Jensen, Lauri and William, 2001). Bono, Boles, Terry, Timothy, Lauver and Kristy (2002) explored the relationship between personality and conflict which resulted in a positive relationship between agreeableness and openness with individual conflict, and extraversion and conscientiousness were positively related with relationship conflict (Bono, Boles, Terry, Timothy, Lauver and Kristy, 2002). A study of relationship and personality on 234 children revealed that agreeableness is most closely associated with their perception, processes, and outcomes related to interpersonal conflict and adjustment in children (Jensen, Gleason, Adams and Malcolm, 2003).

Bass (1997) had summarized that an individual's personality would determine how tolerant they can be in a conflict situation. In his findings, task oriented individuals with low interpersonal orientation tend to engage in conflict in small group discussions and are more willing to be the secondary role in the arguments.

The relationship between styles is still not well understood, in which, the relationship between the personality and preference of conflict management styles is narrowly studied (Bass, 1997). Although some researcher reports personality indeed uniquely predicted individuals' conflict management style (Bass, 1997), there are researchers who found no relationship between personalities, and how it affected the preferred conflict management style, which was reported by Whitworth (2008) in his study of conflict management style among nurses.

Antonioni (1998) investigated the relationship between personality factors and conflict management styles. The samples were students from major university in the Midwest of the United States, and mid-level managers who were participating in managerial development seminars sponsored by the same university. The researcher reported different findings from both samples; the student showed that extraversion, conscientiousness, and openness had positive relationship with integrating. However, the student sample showed a negative relationship between both agreeableness and neuroticism and avoiding. In addition to that, the results from the managers showed a positive relationship between agreeableness and avoiding, but a negative relationship between conscientiousness and avoiding. From his research, Antonioni (1998) noticed that assertiveness which was one of the facets of extraversion might moderate the relationship between the extraversion and the integrating style or between the extraversion and the integrating or between the extraversion and the dominating style.

Moberg (2001) examined the relation of individual differences in personality to one's preferences for handling conflict in work settings. This study selected two hundred and forty nine managers and supervisors from public, governmental and private organizations participated in the research. The researcher found that a preference for the non-confrontation strategy was positively related to neuroticism and negatively related to extraversion and conscientiousness preference. The confrontation strategy was related negatively to neuroticism and positively to extraversion. Openness and conscientiousness preferred compromising style of managing conflict. Compromising style also positively related to agreeableness. Furthermore, surprisingly positive to neuroticism is preference for the control strategy which was negatively related to only agreeableness (Moberg 2001).

Increasing conflicts in the workplace has made conflict management more important than ever. Different conflict management style resulted in different outcome positive or negative. Personality is one of the factors that influence one's preference on conflict management style. From previous literature review analysis, it revealed that there was a gap in the literature in studying the relationship between five-factor model of personality and conflict management styles due to scarcity of research in the area and also due to the inconclusive and conflicting results, therefore, the need for the study is essential (Wang, 2010).

A research by Gardner, Varela, Scogin and Boccaccini (2011) on the association between the interpersonal conflict and the personality inventory of law enforcement officers revealed that there were moderate correlations in the Inwald Personality Inventory (IPI) and Interpersonal Conflict Measures (Gardner, Varela, Scogin & Boccaccini, 2011). Solveig (2010) studied personality characteristics and conflict resolution tactics among police officers and the public. In the research, Solveig (2010) found that there were differences in how a police officer chooses the conflict resolution tactics, however, in measuring personality with Big Five taxonomy, it was found to be a weakly relation to such differences (Solveig, 2011).

A research on how personality traits affect the negotiation behaviors and outcomes in a construction dispute negotiation by Yiu and Lee (2011) found that there was a significant moderating effects on these relationships which revealed personality traits of extraversion, openness, and conscientiousness is significantly moderating the negotiating behavior (Yiu & Lee, 2011). Wood & Bell (2008) studied the relationship of personality and the conflict management styles of two hundred and eighty eight students in Colorado State University. It was evidently found that personality were significant predictors of conflict resolution styles and was helpful predictors in resolution style in negotiation situations (Wood & Bell, 2008). Jensen, Gleason, Adam & Malcolm (2003) developed a research connecting the Personality dimensions to interpersonal conflict in childhood. The findings showed that personality justified how a child handles their conflicting situations. Agreeableness was associated with a more harmonious constructive conflict management tactics (Jensen, Gleason, Adam & Malcolm, 2003). Previous researches has concurred the fact that individual's personality has actually plays a part in determining the best possible solution for any challenges encountered.

With this in hand, the understanding and identifying personality of an individual is substantial in understanding and determining a conflict handling. This research will look into further understanding the association between an individual's personality and how it relates to the choice of conflict management.

2. Method

2.1 Respondents

This research employed a survey method in which a set of standardized questionnaires were administered. A total of 470 respondents were involved in this study. The respondents consist of
school counselors practicing in Selangor districts.

2.2 Instruments

The questionnaires used were:

i. Thomas-Kilman's Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI)

Thomas-Kilman's Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI) was designed by Kenneth W. Thomas and Ralph H. Kilmann in 1975. This instrument is designed to measure a person's style of managing conflict. The styles can be either, accommodating, competing, collaborating, compromising, or avoiding. 30 pairs of items were designed to measure the styles. From previous research, it has been reviewed that a moderate range of consistency coefficients was reported for the instruments. An average coefficient of .60 and the test–retest reliability in the range from .61 to .68. (Kilmann & Thomas, 1975). Stanley and Algert (2007) in their exploratory study of conflict management in a research university has found that Thomas-Kilman's Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI) possess an average of 0.60 alpha coefficient with validity ranging from 0.50 to 0.82 with 0.77 reported to be the highest range (Stanley & Algert, 2007).

ii. Keirsey's Temperament Sorter II by David Keirsey (1998)

Keirsey's Temperament Sorter II was developed by David Keirsey in 1998 which has close relation to Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. It is a self-assessed personality questionnaire designed to help people better understand themselves and others. Keirsey's Temperament Sorter II consists of 70 items with 4 pairs of alternatives, which are Extraverted vs. Introverted, Sensory vs. Intuitive, Thinking vs. Feeling, Judging vs. Perceiving. The temperaments will be presented by the accumulation of highest score of each item. A high score of each subscale will define the outcome of each individual's personality profile.

Varlami & Bayne (2007) found adequate reliabilities of the KTS II for research purposes of 0.78 (Extraversion and Introversion), 0.79 (Sensing and Intuition), 0.70 (Thinking and Feeling) and 0.73 (Judging and Perceiving). Francis, Craig and Robbins (2008) also reported similar alpha coefficient of 0.71 (Extraversion and Introversion), 0.82 (Sensing and Intuition), 0.86 (Thinking and Feeling), and 0.84 (Judging and Perceiving). Rosswurm, Pierson and Woodward (2001) in their research of identifying the relationship between MBTI personality types and attachment styles of adults have found good internal consistency of KTS II with cronbach alpha of .74 to .89 (Rosswurm, Pierson and Woodward, 2001). Fearn, Francis and Wilcox (2001), in their research of religiosity and personality type have found a considerably good alpha coefficients of each of the KTS II components, with extraversion, 0.68, introversion, 0.68, sensing, 0.73, intuition, 0.73, thinking, 0.75, feeling, 0.74, judging 0.83 and perceiving, 0.82 (Fearn, Francis and Wilcox, 2001).

3. Results and Discussion

Result shown in table 1 showed the number of extroverts and introverts with their conflict handling styles. 59% of participants are extroverts, among them, 31% chose avoiding as conflict management style, followed by compromising with 26%, collaborating 16%, competing 15% and accommodating as the least chosen style with 13%. 41% participants are introverts, this group of participants chose collaborating as their choice of managing conflict with 29%, followed by accommodating and avoiding at 23%, and the least style chosen was competing with 16%. A chi-square test-for-independence was used to examine whether extrovert and introvert was related to their chosen style of conflict management. The chi-square test was statistically significant, X^2 (4, N = 470) = 24.24, p < 0.001, with Cramer's Value of .23 indicating that there was a small association between extrovert, introvert and conflict management style.

Table 1: Extrovert, Introvert, and Conflict Management Style

	Competing	Collaborating	Compromising	Avoiding	Accommodating	Total
Extrovert	40	43	71	84	37	275
Introvert	26	55	32	38	44	195
Total	66	98	103	122	81	470

The result shown in table 3.2 indicates that 30% of participants are sensory, among them, 36% chose collaborating as conflict management style, followed by accommodating and competing with 21%, avoidance 1%, and compromising as the least chosen style with 10%. 70% participants are intuitive, this group of participants chose avoiding as their choice of managing conflict with 33% in each style, followed by compromising at 27%, accommodating at 15%, collaborating 15% and the least style chosen was competing with 11%. A chi-square test-for-independence was used to examine whether sensory and intuitive was related to their chosen style of conflict management. The chi-square test was statistically significant, X^2 (4, N = 470) = 50.12, p < 0.001, with Cramer's Value of .36, indicating that there was a moderate association between sensory, intuitive and conflict management style.

Table 2: Sensory, Intuitive and Conflict Management Style

	Competing	Collaborating	Compromising	Avoiding	Accommodating	Total
Sensory	35	48	103	105	51	342
Intuitive	31	50	0	17	30	128
Total	66	98	103	122	81	470

And result on judging and perceiving showed that 54% of participants are judging, among them, 26% chose compromising as conflict management style, followed by avoiding with 23%, collaborating 22%, competing at 16%, and accommodating as the least chosen style with 14%. 46% participants perceive, this group of participants chose avoiding at 30% as their choice of managing conflict. Followed by collaborating at 23%, accommodating at 21%, compromising at 15% and the least style chosen was competing with 12% in each style. A chi-square test-for-independence was used to examine whether judging and perceiving was related to their chosen style of conflict management. The chi-square test was statistically significant, X^2 (4, N = 470) = 30.47, p < 0.001, with Cramer's Value of .26, indicating that there was small association between judging, perceiving and conflict management style.

Table 3: Judging, Perceiving and Conflict Management Style

	Competing	Collaborating	Compromising	Avoiding	Accommodating	Total
Judging	40	48	69	56	35	246
Perceiving	26	50	34	66	46	220
Total	66	98	103	122	81	470

Contradicts with previous personality traits, there was no indication of relationship between thinking, feeling and conflict management style. This suggests that both of these personality traits do not contribute to how an individual chooses their conflict management style. 31% of participants are thinkers, among them, 27% chose compromising as conflict management style, followed by collaborating with 23%, collaborating 34%, avoiding and competing with 18%, and accommodating as the least chosen style with 14%. 69% participants are feelers, this group of participants chose avoiding at 30% as their choice of managing conflict. Followed by collaborating at 20%, compromising at 20%, accommodating at 18%, and the least style chosen was competing with 12%. A chi-square test-for-independence was used to examine whether thinking and feeling was related to their chosen style of conflict management. The chi-square test was not statistically significant, X^2 (4, N = 470) = 11.25, p > 0.001. This signifies that an individual way of decision making does not impact the way they manage their conflict. This contradicts with previous studies saying that decision making style indeed impacts conflict management style vise versa (Kuhn and Poole 2006; Thomas, 2006).

Table 4: Thinking, Feeling, and Conflict Management Style

	Competing	Collaborating	Compromising	Avoiding	Accommodating	Total
Thinking	25	32	39	25	21	142
Feeling	41	66	64	97	60	328
Total	66	98	103	122	81	470

4. Conclusion

In can be concluded that personality six out of eight personality traits are significantly related to the way an individual chooses their conflict management style. This result acknowledged the relationship personality and conflict management style has with each other. This result has contributed to a better understanding of individuals' conflict handling style based on their personality and eventually this will help counselors in guiding them better through their daily job roles as counselors.

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