Exploring the Interplay of Emotional Intelligence and Conflict Resolution Approaches in the IT Industry Workplace

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Abstract

This study investigated the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and conflict resolution styles among IT professionals, while also exploring potential gender differences in these factors. A correlational design was employed with 200 participants aged 25-35 working in the IT sector in India. The Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test was used to test emotional intelligence, and a questionnaire was used to examine conflict resolution styles. The results revealed a significant negative correlation between EI and conflict resolution scores, indicating that higher EI was associated with lower conflict resolution scores. No significant gender differences were found in either EI or conflict resolution styles. These insights have implications for training programs and organizational practices aimed at fostering positive work environments and effective conflict resolution strategies in the IT industry.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Conflict Resolution, IT professionals

Introduction

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional Intelligence (EI), a concept encompassing the ability to recognize, assess, and manage emotions both one's own and those of others holds significant relevance in the realm of personal and interpersonal skills. In the corporate landscape, research underscores the pivotal role of mastering these skills as the foremost determinant of performance success. Emotional Intelligence not only influences how individuals feel, think, and act but also shapes their self-awareness, ability to navigate challenges, and interactions with others. The roots of Emotional Intelligence trace back to Darwin's pioneering work, highlighting the survival and adaptive significance of emotional expression. Throughout the 20th century, as traditional definitions of intelligence focused on cognitive aspects, influential researchers recognized the importance of non-cognitive factors. Howard Gardner's introduction of Multiple Intelligences in 1983 broadened the understanding of cognitive abilities, emphasizing interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences. The term "Emotional Intelligence" gained prominence in Wayne Payne's 1985 thesis, with subsequent models proposed by Greenspan, Salovey and Mayer, and Goleman. Salovey and Mayer's definition in 1990 characterizes it as the ability to monitor, discriminate, and use emotional information effectively. Emotional Intelligence distinguishes itself from other personality traits, such as empathy, emotional self-efficacy, socio-emotional effectiveness, and socio-emotionally effective behavior. These characteristics,

while conceptually and empirically distinct from Emotional Intelligence, play a role in shaping individuals' overall behavioral patterns and effectiveness in interpersonal interactions.

Emotional Intelligence (EI) transcends gender, challenging the belief that one gender is inherently more emotionally intelligent than the other. While women and men may display emotional intelligence in different ways, overall, their similarities outweigh their differences. Analyzing emotional intelligence in thousands of men and women revealed nuanced distinctions. On average, women tend to be more emotionally aware, empathetic, and adept in interpersonal relationships. Men, on the other hand, exhibit more self-confidence, optimism, and adaptability.

An integrative model based on Petrides and Furnham's (2001) work on trait EI was employed to examine the relationships between trait EI and work-related constructs. By adopting a gender-specific perspective, the study considers existing gender differences in work-related variables and perceptions of EI (Furnham, 1994; Petrides, Furnham, and Martin, 2004). While many empirical studies merge male and female data, acknowledging systematic differences in how each gender experiences the workplace and its demands is crucial (Roxburgh, 1996). Emotional Intelligence has gained significant relevance in organizational development, offering a new lens to assess behaviors, management styles, attitudes, and interpersonal skills. The research explores how Emotional Intelligence contributes to various facets of organizational functioning, including hiring, training, coaching, competency models, succession plans, along with conflict resolution styles adopted by the employees. Research indicates that Emotional Intelligence is a potent strategic tool in achieving business goals, influencing areas such as reduced accidents, decreased grievances, and enhanced productivity. Executives, high-potential individuals, and those striving for maximum success and higher productivity are identified as key beneficiaries of Emotional Intelligence skill enhancement. There are ample benefits of enhancing Emotional Intelligence skills, ranging from career advancement and increased productivity to improved job satisfaction, effective client management, and a better work/life balance. Managers and supervisors, in particular, stand to gain significantly from honing their Emotional Intelligence skills, leading to more harmonious workplace dynamics and improved organizational outcomes.

Conflict management styles

Individuals approach conflict in diverse ways, influenced by their inherent tendencies, life experiences, and situational demands. Research on negotiation and conflict management unveils the variety of conflict-management styles and how they align with effective conflict resolution practices. Kenneth W. Thomas and Ralph H. Kilmann (1974), categorizes individuals into five distinct conflict styles:

1. **Competing:** Adopting a competing style, individuals perceive conflict resolution as win-lose scenarios. This approach focuses narrowly on claiming maximum benefits for oneself, often sacrificing long-term value and perpetuating conflict.

2. **Avoiding:** Many people prefer to avoid direct confrontation due to the discomfort associated with dealing with conflict. While an avoidant style may seem opposite to a competitive one, it can be similarly obstructive, allowing problems to escalate.

3. **Accommodating:** Negotiators who adopt an accommodating style frequently defer to others, appearing agreeable and easygoing. However, consistently putting others' needs first may lead to resentment. Learning to express their own needs and concerns is crucial for accommodating negotiators.

4. **Compromising:** The compromising conflict style involves proposing seemingly equal compromises, meeting in the middle, or making significant concessions to move forward. While it can advance the conversation, compromising often provides unsatisfying and temporary solutions without addressing the root issues.
5. **Collaborating:** Those with a collaborative conflict-resolution style strive to understand the deeper needs of other parties and express their own needs. They see value in navigating strong emotions and propose tradeoffs that benefit each side. Collaborative negotiation is often the most effective style for managing conflict and fostering long-term relationships.

Conflict Resolution

It's essential to recognize that individuals may have a predisposition toward a particular conflict style, but they can adopt different styles based on the situation. For instance, competing is useful for dividing resources after jointly creating value, accommodating may be suitable when dealing with an unhappy boss, avoiding can be wise in volatile situations, and compromising is effective for quickly resolving minor issues. Different conflict-management styles can be applied strategically depending on the phase and type of conflict in management. The role of gender in communication has been a focal point of research, particularly in the context of conflict resolution styles among male and female managers.

Conflicts are an inherent aspect of organizational societies and play a fundamental role in the political systems within organizations. Various scholars have noted the significance of conflict in organizational dynamics (Burns and Stalker, 1961; Zald and Berger, 1978; Noon and Blyton, 2002). According to Roloff (1987), organizational conflict arises when members engage in activities incompatible with those of colleagues within their network, members of other collectivities, or unaffiliated individuals using the organization's services or products. Interpersonal conflict, which is the focal point of the research, is recognized as one of the most challenging issues faced by organizational members (Phillips and Cheston, 1979). It is often cited as a source of frustration and discomfort for managers (Earnest and McCaslin, 1994). Although conflict is commonly associated with negative connotations, contemporary organizational perspectives acknowledge that not all conflicts are inherently detrimental (interactionist viewpoint). Organizations are now striving to comprehend the nuances of conflict and its functionalities, recognizing that the optimal level of conflict, neither excessive nor insufficient, is conducive for business success. Hence, research in organizational conflict and its management has gained prominence in recent times.

The relevance of the present study lies in the pervasive and troublesome nature of interpersonal conflict within organizations, particularly for managers (Putnam, 1988). Reports suggest that middle managers spend a significant portion of their time, approximately 25 percent, dealing with conflict (Meyer et al., 1997). To address dysfunctional organizational conflict, managers recommend measures such as proper planning, mediation, evaluation of conflict management strategies, and fostering partnerships with workers. The manner in which conflict is directed, either positively or negatively, can influence its nature—whether it becomes beneficial or destructive (Cetin and Hacifazlioglu, 2004).

It is crucial to recognize that mishandling interpersonal conflicts can lead to negative consequences, including bad feelings, high turnover, and costly litigation (Hirschman, 2001). Conversely, when handled appropriately, conflict can enhance innovativeness and productivity among individuals (Uline et al., 2003). Additionally, it contributes to interpersonal relationship satisfaction, creative problem-solving, the

growth of the global workforce, and domestic workplace diversity (Ting-Toomey and Oetzel, 2001, p. 3), ultimately leading to improved efficiency, creativity, and profitability (Axelrod and Johnson, 2005, p. 42). This research aims to shed light on aspects of conflict handling in the Indian context, providing valuable insights into how organizations in this setting navigate and manage interpersonal conflicts.

Emotional Intelligence and Conflict Resolution

Conflicts in the corporate world often arise from differences in perspectives, values, and opinions. Successfully handling these conflicts necessitates a high level of emotional intelligence, defined as the ability to recognize and manage one's emotions as well as those of others. Emotional intelligence plays a pivotal role in corporate conflict resolution, where conflicts are inevitable.

In the corporate context, applying emotional intelligence to conflict resolution involves several key elements. Self-awareness is crucial, requiring individuals to understand their emotions and their impact on others. By recognizing the triggers behind their emotions, those with high emotional intelligence can avoid impulsive reactions during conflicts, maintaining a calm and composed demeanor.

Empathy is another essential aspect, involving the capacity to comprehend and relate to the emotions and perspectives of others. Individuals with strong emotional intelligence can cultivate trust and alleviate tensions during conflicts by empathizing without judgment, acknowledging and validating others' feelings, and demonstrating genuine concern.

Effective communication is a vital skill in conflict resolution, encompassing clear expression of thoughts and active listening. High emotional intelligence enables individuals to communicate their thoughts and feelings respectfully and non-confrontationally. Furthermore, they can attentively listen to others, acknowledging diverse viewpoints, leading to a more profound understanding of the situation and facilitating a satisfactory resolution for all parties involved.

Conflict management, a critical step in the process, entails identifying and constructively addressing conflicts. Those with high emotional intelligence can pinpoint the root causes, discover common ground, and generate solutions beneficial to everyone. They excel in mediating and negotiating, effectively defusing tensions and de-escalating conflicts.

To sum up, emotional intelligence is indispensable for successful conflict resolution in the corporate realm. Through the application of self-awareness, empathy, effective communication, and conflict management skills, individuals can adeptly handle conflicts, cultivate stronger relationships, and contribute to a more productive work environment.

Need and Significance of the study

In today's dynamic work environments, emotional intelligence competencies and effective conflict resolution styles are critical for building positive and productive professional relationships, especially in the Information Technology (IT) industry. However, there is a lack of awareness among IT workers regarding the complex interactions between conflict resolution styles and emotional intelligence. Moreover, the possible impact of gender on these variables is still not fully investigated. This ambiguity makes it more difficult to create focused interventions and organizational procedures that support positive conflict resolution and enhance emotional intelligence in the IT sector. So, the task at hand is to clarify how emotional intelligence, gender dynamics, and conflict resolution styles relate to each other among IT professionals in order to inform evidence-based strategies for cultivating collaborative and inclusive work environments.

The research by S.M. Joseph, 2023 investigated the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and job performance in the IT industry against the backdrop of technological advancements. With a sample size of 100 IT professionals, the study employed self-assessment EI and Paterson work performance questionnaires, revealing a significant positive correlation between EI and job performance. The findings emphasized the importance of nurturing EI alongside intellectual capacities, indicating its role in enhancing decision-making, creativity, and emotional resilience within organizational settings.

The study by Pooja, & Bhatia, N. (2022) found that millennial female executives in India's IT and ITES sectors had higher emotional intelligence scores than millennial male leaders. When the emotional intelligence of male and female millennial leaders in the IT and ITES sectors was examined, the study discovered that the emotional intelligence of the female leaders was higher than that of the male leaders.

A study by Das, M., S., & Singh, V. (2022) was carried out to examine the mediating function of emotional intelligence between employee engagement and job satisfaction in order to analyze these dynamics in the Indian IT sector. Using a carefully thought-out questionnaire, information from 714 IT professionals was gathered. The association between involvement and satisfaction in the sector was found to be partially mediated by emotional intelligence.

The objective of the study done by Kundi, Y.M., & Badar, K (2021) was to look at the relationship between workplace interpersonal conflict and counterproductive work behavior (CWB) among employees, as well as how emotional intelligence may influence this relationship differently depending on the gender of the employee. The results showed that a greater propensity to participate in CWB was linked to higher levels of interpersonal conflict. Emotional intelligence, especially in women, was discovered to act as a protective barrier against this relationship, nevertheless. According to the study, developing one's emotional intelligence can help lessen the detrimental effects of interpersonal conflict at work.

The study by Singh, S.,& Rizvi, Prof. I. (2017) aimed to investigate the association between conflict management competencies and emotional intelligence among software professionals in the Indian IT industry. A sample of 500 software professionals was selected, and a structured questionnaire was used to collect the data. Statistical analysis using chi-square test and crosstabulation techniques revealed a significant positive association between emotional intelligence and conflict management competencies. This suggests that higher emotional intelligence scores were linked to higher conflict management competency scores. The findings emphasize the importance of emotional intelligence training in the workplace to enhance conflict resolution skills among software professionals.

The study by Goodwill Khokhar, & William Selvamurthy. (2016) showed that EI significantly influences a variety of CM types, such as accommodating, compromise, assertiveness, and problem-solving. One hundred male and female volunteers, ages 25 to 50, who worked in the administration and human resources division of an IT-based company participated in the study. Participants' EQI was assessed using self-rating and observer ratings on standard questionnaires, and their conflict management styles were assessed using the Rahim Organizational Level Conflict Inventory II. The study emphasized the significance that EI plays in influencing CM styles and the possible applications of quantifying it in senior management and supervisor recruitment and training.

Research on how emotional intelligence affects dispute resolution strategies, particularly in the context of the workplace in the IT industry, is limited. This is especially evident with regard to gender disparities and how they affect job performance.

Method

Statement of the problem

The study aims to explore potential gender differences in these factors and examine the association between conflict resolution styles and emotional intelligence among IT professionals. In order to establish inclusive and collaborative work environments, it is necessary to shed light on the relationships between emotional intelligence, gender, and conflict resolution styles among IT professionals.

Operational Definition

Emotional Intelligence: Emotional Intelligence is a type of intelligence that involves the ability to process emotional information and use it in reasoning and other cognitive activities, proposed by U.S. psychologists Peter Salovey (1958) and John D. Mayer (1953).

Conflict Resolution: Conflict resolution is the outcome of actions that eliminate the incompatibility of goals, interests or attitudes of the conflicting individuals. (Aureli et al., 2002, p. 326)

Objectives

- To investigate the relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Conflict Resolution Styles among IT professionals.
- To explore the gender differences in Emotional Intelligence among males and females IT professionals
- To explore the Conflict Resolution Styles among males and females IT professionals.

Hypothesis

$H_0 1$: There is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and conflict resolution style among working IT professionals.

$H_0 2$: There are no significant gender differences in emotional intelligence and conflict resolution style among males and females IT professionals.

Research Design

The present study utilized correlational research design examining the relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Conflict Resolution Styles.

Sample

The sample consists of 200 participants working in the IT department in India. Out of the 150, 75 were female IT professionals and 75 were male IT professionals. Purposive sampling method was incorporated.

Sample Distribution

Inclusion Criteria

- The age group of participants ranged from 25-35.
- The participants should be working in the IT sector in India.

Exclusion Criteria

- The participants were doing part time jobs.
- Those people who were under training period.
- Individuals who were in apprenticeship.

Tools for study

Emotional Intelligence

The Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT) is a method of measuring general Emotional Intelligence (EI), using four subscales: emotion perception, utilizing emotions, managing self- relevant emotions, and managing others' emotions. The Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test includes a 33-item self-report using a 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree) scale for responses. Each sub-test score is graded and then added together to give the total score for the participant. Schutte and her colleagues report a reliability rating of 0.90 for their emotional intelligence scale. The Emotional Intelligence score, overall, is fairly reliable for adults and adolescents; however, the utilizing emotions subscale has shown poorability (Ciarrochi, Chan & Bajgar, 2001

Conflict Resolution

Questionnaire for Conflict Resolution. Members of Jock McClellan's 1993 conflict resolution class created the survey. Getting to yes by Roger Fisher and William Ury, as well as Dudley Weeks's "The eight essential steps to conflict resolution," are the main topics of the questions. There were eight domains in this questionnaire V (View conflict as natural and positive), A (Atmosphere), C (Clarify Perceptions), N (Note Needs, not wants), P (Produce Positive Partnership Power), F (Focus on the future first, then learn from the past), O (Open up Options for Mutual Gain, D (Develop "Doables", stepping - stones to Action), M (Make Mutual-Benefit Agreements) and X (Extra Considerations).

Procedure

A total number of 200 participants took part in the study. Based on the sample, participants were selected in the age range of 25-35 individuals working in the IT department in India. Consent was taken from the participants via google form. Survey method was used and data was collected through questionnaires (The Schutte Self Report Emotional Intelligence Test and Questionnaire for Conflict Resolution) through google forms. The participants were ensured of confidentiality of the responses given.

Data Analysis

- A correlation analysis was done using the IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).
- A T-test was used to identify the gender difference using the IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

Ethical Considerations

1. Informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all participants before their involvement in the study. Participants were provided with clear explanations of the research objectives, procedures, potential risks and benefits, as well as their rights to withdraw from the study at any point without facing any consequences.

2. Confidentiality

Throughout the entirety of the study, participant confidentiality and anonymity were rigorously upheld. All data were securely stored in a password-protected file and accessed solely by authorized researchers, ensuring that participants' identities remained protected.

Results and Discussion

Table 1

Descriptive statistics for emotional intelligence and conflict resolution styles				
Variables	Mean	Median	Mode	Standard Deviation
Emotional Intelligence	83.03	80.00	76	20.53
Conflict resolution	132.89	134.00	142	16.78

This table summarizes the descriptive statistics for emotional intelligence (EI) and conflict resolution scores. The mean score for emotional intelligence was 83.03 (median = 80.00), with a standard deviation of 20.53. This suggests a normal distribution with some variability in scores. The mode, which is the most frequent score, was 76. The mean score for conflict resolution was 132.89 (median = 134.00), with a standard deviation of 16.78. There is a possibility the data might be slightly skewed towards higher scores due to the higher median compared to the mean. The mode for conflict resolution was 142.

Table 2

Pearson's Correlation Test between Emotional Intelligence and Conflict resolution						
Variables	n	M	SD	1	2	Sig.
1. Emotional Intelligence	150	83.03	20.53	-	-.42	<.001
2. Conflict Resolution	150	132.89	16.78	-.42	-	

This table shows the results of a Pearson's correlation test examining the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and conflict resolution styles among IT Employees. A statistically significant negative low correlation was found between EI and conflict resolution ($r = -.42$, n = 150, p-value < .001).

Table 3

T-test result for the genders, male and female						
	Male		Female		Sig.	t
	M	SD	M	SD		
Emotional Intelligence	82.67	19.78	83.15	21.51	.577	-.142

This table shows the results of an independent sample t-test examining gender differences in emotional intelligence (EI). There was no statistically significant difference in EI scores between males (M = 82.67, SD = 19.78) and females (M = 83.15, SD = 21.51), $t(148) = -.142$, p = .577. The results suggest that there is no significant difference in average emotional multlligence scores between males and females in this sample.

Table 4					
T-test result for the genders, male and female					
	Male		Female		Sig.	t
	M	SD	M	SD		
Conflict resolution	135.05	16.83	130.95	16.48	.736	1.504

This table shows the results of an independent sample t-test examining gender differences in conflict resolution styles. There was no statistically significant difference in conflict resolution scores between males (M = 135.05, SD = 16.83) and females (M = 130.95, SD = 16.48), $t(148) = 1.504$, $p = .736$. The results suggest that there is no significant difference in average conflict resolution scores between males and females in this sample.

This study aimed to explore the interplay between emotional intelligence (EI) and conflict resolution styles among IT professionals. The findings provide insights into these relationships and offer areas for further exploration.

Relationship Between Emotional Intelligence and Conflict Resolution

The results revealed a statistically significant negative low correlation ($r = -.42$) between emotional intelligence and conflict resolution scores. This suggests that IT professionals with higher emotional intelligence tend to have lower conflict resolution scores, partially rejecting hypothesis H01.

Previous research suggests a complex relationship between emotional intelligence and conflict resolution (Lopes et al., 2017; Matsue & Ohnishi, 2013). Some studies have found a positive correlation, suggesting that emotional intelligence is associated with more effective conflict resolution styles, such as collaboration and compromise (Lopes et al., 2017; Matsue & Ohnishi, 2013). Other studies, similar to the current findings, report a negative correlation, with emotional intelligence linked to avoiding conflict altogether (Sosik & Jung, 2014). This inconsistency highlights a potential gap in the research.

However, it's important to consider the interpretation of the conflict resolution scale. If higher scores indicate more frequent conflict, then the negative correlation aligns with expectations – emotionally intelligent individuals might be better at de-escalating situations and avoiding conflict altogether. On the other hand, if higher scores on the conflict resolution scale reflect more effective or assertive styles (e.g., collaboration), the negative correlation might be surprising.

Future studies should employ well-validated measures of both emotional intelligence and conflict resolution that capture the multidimensionality of these constructs. For instance, differentiating between various conflict resolution approaches (e.g., Atmosphere, Clarify Perceptions, Note Needs, not wants, etc) and emotional intelligence could provide a more nuanced understanding of this relationship.

Gender Differences

The study found no significant gender differences in either emotional intelligence or conflict resolution styles, supporting hypotheses H02 and H03. This suggests that on average, emotional intelligence and conflict resolution approaches are similar for male and female IT professionals in this sample.

Previous research on gender differences in emotional intelligence and conflict resolution has yielded mixed results. Some studies report modest gender differences, with women scoring higher on emotional intelligence competencies like empathy and relationship management (Carmeli & Gosling, 2000; Mayer et al., 2000). Other studies find no significant gender differences in either emotional intelligence or conflict resolution styles (Van der Rijst et al., 2011).

The current study's null finding might be due to the sample size or lack of demographic diversity. Future research with larger and more diverse samples could explore potential variations in emotional intelligence and conflict resolution styles across genders, age groups, and other demographic factors.

Conclusion

This study explored the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and conflict resolution styles among IT professionals along with the gender differences. The findings revealed a statistically significant negative correlation, suggesting that IT professionals with higher emotional intelligence tend to have lower conflict resolution scores. The study also found no significant gender differences in either emotional intelligence or conflict resolution styles. Despite limitations, this study offers some intriguing implications for the IT workplace. The potential link between emotional intelligence and conflict resolution suggests that emotionally intelligent IT professionals might be better equipped to handle disagreements constructively. This highlights the potential value of emotional intelligence training programs and incorporating emotional intelligence as a factor in selecting and promoting IT professionals. Future research should the mediating role of specific emotional intelligence components and conflict resolution styles to provide a more nuanced understanding of this relationship. By continuing to explore this relationship, organizations in the IT field can create a more positive and productive work environment for their employees.

Despite limitations, this study offers implications as well. The potential link between emotional intelligence and conflict resolution suggests that emotionally intelligent IT professionals might be better equipped to handle disagreements constructively. This highlights the potential value of emotional intelligence training programs, empowering employees to manage conflict more effectively. Furthermore, emotional intelligence could become a relevant factor in selecting and promoting IT professionals, identifying individuals who excel in both technical skills and interpersonal dynamics.

As it's a correlational study, this research design can only identify associations between variables, not causation. It cannot determine whether emotional intelligence directly influences conflict resolution styles, or vice versa. Both emotional intelligence and conflict resolution styles were measured through self-reported questionnaires. Self-reported data can be susceptible to biases, such as social desirability bias. A future longitudinal study following IT professionals over time could reveal how emotional intelligence influences the development and use of conflict resolution skills. Second, future research could examine the mediating role of specific emotional intelligence components, such as self-awareness or social awareness, in the relationship between emotional intelligence and conflict resolution styles. This would help us understand which aspects of emotional intelligence are most critical for navigating conflict situations in the IT workplace.

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