

The Impact of Employees' Conflict Management Styles on Task Conflict, Relationship Conflict and Stress in the Thai Telecommunications Sector*

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Abstract

The objectives of this study were to investigate the effects of conflict management styles utilized by employees in the telecommunications industry as they faced task conflicts, relationship conflicts, and the negative stress in the workplace as a consequence of the conflicts. Data collection came from a survey administrated to 464 the operational level employees in three of the largest telecommunications companies in Bangkok, Thailand. MANOVA, and the Structural Equation Model (SEM) were employed in the statistical analysis. The multivariate test was significant at the .001 level of significance, with results that task conflict, relationship conflict, and stress were affected by the difference in conflict management styles, Pillai's Trace = 0.253, p-value < 0.001. Results from multiple comparisons indicated that employees who had to use a dominating style and an avoiding style were caused task conflict to a higher degree compared with other styles. It also found that task conflict is highly significant and positively related to relationship conflict (coefficient = .94). Hence, this implies that employees who tended to use a dominating style and avoiding style in the face of task conflicts also tended to cause a high degree of relationship conflict. In addition, employees who used the obliging style and avoiding style in conflict situations were likely to experience a large degree of negative stress.

Keywords: conflict management styles, task conflict, relationship conflict, stress, telecommunication employees

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ผลกระทบของกระบวนการจัดการความขัดแย้ง ของพนักงานที่มีต่อความขัดแย้งด้านงาน ความขัดแย้ง ด้านความสัมพันธ์ และความเครียดในภาคอุตสาหกรรม การโทรคมนาคมของไทย*

กฤษดา เขียววัฒนสุข**

บทคัดย่อ

การศึกษานี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาผลกระทบของกระบวนการจัดการความขัดแย้งของพนักงาน ที่มีต่อความขัดแย้งด้านงาน ความขัดแย้งด้านความสัมพันธ์ และความเครียด โดยใช้แบบสอบถามเป็นเครื่องมือ ในการเก็บข้อมูลจากพนักงานในระดับปฏิบัติการจำนวน 464 คนที่ปฏิบัติงานอยู่ในบริษัทโทรคมนาคมที่ใหญ่ที่สุดในสามอันดับแรกของประเทศไทย สำหรับการวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลในการศึกษานี้ ใช้วิธีการวิเคราะห์ความแปรปรวนแบบหลายตัวแปร และการวิเคราะห์โมเดลสมการโครงสร้าง ผลจากการทดสอบเชิงพหุได้ค่านัยสำคัญที่ระดับ .001 ซึ่งสรุปได้ว่ากระบวนการจัดการความขัดแย้งของพนักงานที่แตกต่างกันมีผลต่อความขัดแย้งด้านงาน ความขัดแย้งด้านความสัมพันธ์และความเครียด (Pillai's Trace = 0.253, p-value < 0.001) และผลการทดสอบเปรียบเทียบพบว่า พนักงานที่นำกระบวนการจัดการความขัดแย้งแบบเอาชนะ และที่นำกระบวนการจัดการความขัดแย้งแบบหลีกเลี่ยงมาใช้ในการแก้ไขปัญหา ส่งผลให้เกิดความขัดแย้งด้านงานในระดับที่สูง ยังพบอีกว่าความขัดแย้งด้านงานมีความสัมพันธ์เชิงบวกในระดับสูงกับความขัดแย้งด้านความสัมพันธ์ (coefficient = .94) ดังนั้น จึงสรุปได้ว่าพนักงานที่นำกระบวนการจัดการความขัดแย้งแบบเอาชนะและแบบหลีกเลี่ยง มาใช้ในการแก้ไขปัญหาจะทำให้เกิดความขัดแย้งด้านความสัมพันธ์ในระดับที่สูงเช่นกัน นอกจากนี้ยังพบว่าพนักงานที่นำกระบวนการจัดการความขัดแย้งแบบยอมให้ และพนักงานที่นำกระบวนการจัดการความขัดแย้งแบบหลีกเลี่ยงมาใช้ในสถานการณ์ที่มีความขัดแย้งจะส่งผลให้พนักงานผู้นั้น มีความเครียดในระดับที่สูงอีกด้วย

คำสำคัญ : กระบวนการจัดการความขัดแย้ง ความขัดแย้งด้านงาน ความขัดแย้งด้านความสัมพันธ์ ความเครียด พนักงานในอุตสาหกรรมโทรคมนาคม

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Introduction

Conflict within a business organization may result in either a beneficial or detrimental depending on whether the conflict is managed in a manner that results in the organization improving its functioning or becoming dysfunctional.

When employees use inappropriate conflict management styles in the face of conflict situations reduced organizational productivity results. Moreover, employees themselves experience less job satisfaction. The impact of differential conflict management styles has pervasive effects on employee satisfaction and productivity in business organizations.

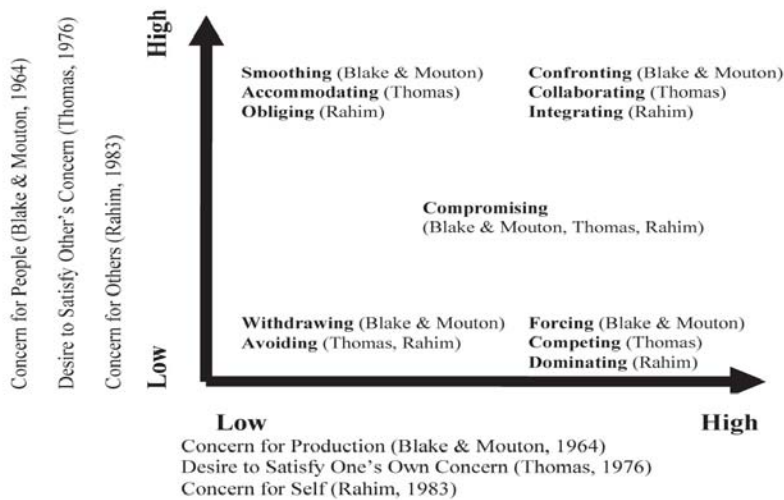
This study was inspired by the previous research of Freidman et al. (2000) who found that the various conflict management styles used by American employees often influenced the results of task and relationship conflict which, in turn, have an impact on employees experiencing distress at work. The intent of this study was to extend their research by examining all five conflict management styles including the compromising style which other studies suggest is commonly used by Asians (Ting-Toomey et al., 1991). Other studies also indicate the frequent use of the compromising style by Asians, for example: Koreans (Hong, 2005; Kim et al., 2007); Indians (Purohit & Simmer, 2006); Thais, Hong-Kong Chinese, and Vietnamese (Onishi & Bliss, 2006); Singaporean (McKenna & Richardson, 1995); etc.

Darling & Waler (2001) suggested that work conflict is a situation in which two or more

individuals operating within an organization appear to be incompatible. Conflict can be classified into functional conflict and dysfunctional conflict (Robbins & Judge, 2008). Functional conflicts (also known as constructive conflicts) are disagreements about business issues; conflicts that concern work content or business targets. These conflicts can increase the overall performance of an organization. It can enhance the way members in the organization communicate and enable the flow of new and innovative ideas. Whereas, dysfunctional conflicts (also known as destructive conflicts), are conflicts between persons which bring negative results to the organization and normally diminishes work performance (Amason, 1996; Eckstat, 2002; Robbins & Judge, 2008).

Blake and Mouton (1964), Thomas (1976), and Rahim (1983) classified organizational conflict management into five styles. These conflict management styles closely relate to the objective of negotiation achievement (Pruitt & Carnevale, 1993), but the impact of various conflict resolution styles can often run counter to expectations. Scholars accept that conflict management styles can have a circulating effect on employees' work attitudes such as conflict perception (Holt & De Vore, 2005). It is predicted that organizations will succeed if the leaders effectively manage organizational conflicts (Seybolt, Derr & Nielson, 1996).

Conflict Management Styles



Source : Holt, J. L., & DeVore, C. J. (2005). Culture, gender, organizational role, and styles of conflict resolution: A meta-analysis. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 29, p. 168

Figure 1 Conflict Management Styles derived from Dual Concern Theory And based on Blake and Mouton (1964), Thomas (1976), and Rahim (1983)

From Figure 1, it is clear that 'Dominating' or 'Competing' (bottom right), represents a low level of cooperative behavior and at the same times a high level of assertiveness. This style usually relies on the use of power position, superior authority, verbal dominance, aggression, and perseverance (Gross & Guerrero, 2000; Blake & Mouton, 1964). This behavior creates a win-lose situation which relies on the power of being in a dominating position or a better economic situation. For example, it insists on using aggression on rules and regulations for one's own benefit without considering the concerns of other employees or the company's benefit.

'Integrating' or 'Collaborating' (top right), represents a high concern for both others and for

individual satisfaction. Integrating occurs when an individual in a conflict situation attempts to fully satisfy the concerns of all parties (Hartwick & Barki, 1999). The persons who perform this behavior have a drive to win. At the same time, they are willing to resolve the conflict by cooperating in order to satisfy all parties. Consequently, integrating behavior focuses on a win-win situation.

'Compromising' represents the medium between assertive and cooperative behavior. It is in between the "concern for production" (or for self) and "concern for people" (or for others). This behavior aims to satisfy both parties, but not totally which is in line with Gross and Guerrero (2000), Compromising satisfies each individual's requirement on some particular

issues but not all; therefore, when we see the target differently and cannot collaborate to satisfy everyone's needs each party desires, compromising is the best option. In this case, both parties need to be flexible to create a more satisfying result. However, the level of satisfaction is less than using collaboration. Compromising is the face saving method for both parties where each party can say that they meet halfway.

'Avoiding' (on the bottom left) represents a low level of both cooperative and assertive behaviors which can imply problem avoidance with no intention to participate in the problem-solving process. Thomas (1976) suggested that those who apply the avoidance method tend to be careless, solitary, and would try to move away from confronting the conflict. That is in line with Wilmot and Hocker's (2001) idea that avoidance happens when one seeks to stay away from conflict situations by pretending that there is no problem. Facing such problems one seeks to go around them when being questioned (or give implied answers) or change the subject of discussion. Such problems believe that time alone can resolve the conflict, so they show little interest in individual's and other's requirements and pretend problems do not exist and even behave in a way that suggest they could care less about the issue of conflict. The minus side of this method is that it might accelerate the storm of conflict and cause the problems to be more difficult to be resolved. On the other hand, if the conflict level is not serious, this behavior may have the advantage of people

simply ignoring the conflict and eventually it may resolve itself. Avoiding has been found to be the preferable style for many Asians because it is believed to be more respectful than to argue (Ting-Toomey, 1988).

'Obliging' or 'Accommodating' (on the top left) represents a high level of cooperative behavior and a low level of assertive behavior at the same time. Those behaving this way tend to pay more attention to satisfying others and put others' concerns as top priority. Sometimes, they allow others to proceed or perform as needed even though they disagree. That is in line with Hartwick and Berki (1999) who report accommodation occurs when one sacrifices their needs to satisfy others. This situation occurs as individuals tend to defer to others' requirements, and cooperate in an attempt to minimize the conflict. Accommodation is the opposite of competition and people who behave in this manner are willing to participate in reducing interpersonal and intra-organizational conflict.

In studies on conflict management, scholars possess different views regarding conflict management styles. The first school of thought is that conflict management styles are strategies or expressions of intention to resolve conflicts that individuals choose to apply while handling situations or specific circumstances (e.g. Knapp, Putnam, & Davis, 1988; Pruitt, 1983). Therefore, conflict management styles should not be viewed as stable dispositions. In this view, Uhbuchi and Suzuki (2003) suggested that in different situations the same individual may use different conflict management styles.

In contrast, another school of thought suggests that conflict management styles are individual dispositions (e.g. Blake Blake & Muoton, 1964, Thomas 1976; Rahim, 1992), which are stabilized over time. This view believes that a conflict management style is an individual trait and at least in part dispositional (e.g. Sternberg & Dobson, 1987; Drory & Ritor, 1997; Friedman et al, 2000). According to Kenrick and Funder (1999) situation determinants would be apparent in specific or extreme situations, while dispositional determinants could be seen and realized in the long run. Bono et al. (2002) supported the conclusion that an individual's approach toward conflict is the function of one's own and one's partner's personalities. For this study, the consideration is based on the idea that conflict management styles are part of an individual's trait.

McGrath (1976) suggested that the use of different conflict management styles can cause more or less level of stress in seeking to manage or resolve the conflict. Thus, an individual's conflict management style can both directly and indirectly cause negative stress (Freidman et al., 2000). Hyde et al. (2006) also supported the idea that seeking to manage conflict in the workplace results in different levels of experienced negative stress. According to Montoro-Rodriguez and Small (2006), the conflict management style one uses can influence one's psychological morale, one's experienced occupational stress, and feeling of job satisfaction.

Objectives and Hypotheses

The objectives of this research were to investigate the effects of preferred conflict management styles utilized by employees on stress experienced; both by their own conflict management styles (direct effects) and by affecting the level of relationship conflict experienced (indirect effects). The five conflict management styles are based on an individual's strategic intentions and the manner in which he or she attempts to satisfy them by exhibiting behavior in one of two dimensions: a desire to satisfy the concerns of the other parties (Cooperativeness); or a desire to satisfy one's own concerns (Assertiveness). Following to Friedman et al. (2000), this study postulates that those who are able to assert their own interests (i.e., integrating or competing style) will experience less stress than those who tend not to assert their own interests (i.e., avoiding or obliging style). This study aimed to investigate the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1_a : Employees who tend to use the 'dominating' or 'competing' style will experience lower levels of stress.

Hypothesis 1_b : Employees who tend to use the 'integrating' or 'collaborating' style will experience lower levels of stress.

Hypothesis 1_c : Employees who tend to use 'compromising' style will experience lower levels of stress.

Hypothesis 1_d : Employees who tend to use the 'avoiding' style will experience higher levels of stress.

Hypothesis 1_e : Employees who tend to use the 'obliging' or 'accommodating' style will experience higher levels of stress.

Previous studies suggest that the positive correlation between conflict resolutions and stress is mediated by some degree of task conflict and relationship conflict (Friedman, et al., 2000; Rahim, 2002; Pearson, Ensley, & Amason, 2002; Tidd, McIntyre, & Friedman, 2004; Edmondson, & Smith, 2006; Wang, Jing, & Klossek, 2007). Individuals that favor a particular conflict management style to disputes may construct their work environments with varying degrees of conflict. A low concern for others may lead employees to experience higher levels of task conflict, while a high concern for others may lead to an opposite result. It is expected that varying levels of task conflict correlate with different styles of conflict management.

Hypothesis 2_a : Employees who tend to use the 'competing' or 'dominating' style will experience greater degrees of task conflict

Hypothesis 2_b : Employees who tend to use the 'integrating' or 'collaborating' style will experience smaller degrees of task conflict

Hypothesis 2_c : Employees who tend to use the 'compromising' style will

experience smaller degrees of task conflict

Hypothesis 2_d : Employees who tend to use the 'obliging' or 'accommodating' style will experience smaller degrees of task conflict

Hypothesis 2_e : Employees who tend to use the 'avoiding' style will experience greater degrees of task conflict

In addition, this research expects that different conflict management styles will also affect relationship conflict, but only through its impact on task conflict. According to previous studies, task conflict usually creates the relationship conflict (Jehn, 1995; Amason & Schweiger, 1997; Friedman, et al., 2000; Pearson, Ensley, & Amason, 2002), and these two types of conflict often occur together (Mooney, Holahan, & Amason, 2007; Edmondson, & Smith, 2006; Wang, Jing, & Klossek, 2007). It is expected that varying levels of relationships conflict correlate with different styles of conflict management

Hypothesis 3_a : Employees who tend to use the 'competing' or 'dominating' style will experience greater degrees of relationship conflict

Hypothesis 3_b : Employees who tend to use the 'integrating' or 'collaborating' style will experience smaller degrees of relationship conflict

Hypothesis 3_c : Employees who tend to use the 'compromising' style will

experience smaller degrees of relationship conflict

Hypothesis 3_a : Employees who tend to use the 'obliging' or 'accommodating' style will experience smaller degrees of relationship conflict

Hypothesis 3_e : Employees who tend to use the 'avoiding' style will experience greater degrees of relationship conflict

To confirm the result, this study needed to uncover indirect effects of conflict management styles on work stress via task and relationship conflict. According to the previous studies this research predicted that there is an impact on task conflict from conflict management styles, and these indirectly affect work stress through their effects on relationship conflict (Friedman et al., 2000; Medina, Munduate, Dorado, Martinez, & Guerra, 2005).

Hypothesis 4 : The effects of task conflict on stress are mediated by relationship conflict.

Methodology

The collection of primary data was based on a survey of employees from three of the largest telecommunications companies in Thailand. The first represents a Thai company, the second represents a global (western) company, and the last represents a global (Asian) company. A total of six hundred and fifty questionnaires were sent out during December,

2008 to February, 2009. The total of five hundred and sixty-four were returned for a response rate of 86.77%, but only four hundred sixty-four questionnaires were usable and account for 71.38% of the questionnaires. The research instruments are as follows:

Conflict Management Styles, the Organizational Conflict Inventory-II (Rahim, 2004) was employed to assess the employees' conflict management styles. Employees were asked to think about a situation in which they are involved in a conflict with their co-workers. This study found reliability coefficients as follows: Avoiding = .83, Compromising = .81, Dominating = .73, Integrating = .76, and Obliging = .77.

Task Conflict, the slightly modified version of Jehn's (1995) was employed. This questionnaire asked the employees to consider the amount of task-base conflict they experience with co-workers in the working place. Previous studies have found a reliability of .87 (Jehn, 1995), .78 (Simons & Peterson, 2000), .84 (Friedman et al., 2000), and .76 (De Dreu, 2006) for the scale. This study found a reliability of .83

Relationship conflict, this study employed the combination of Jehn's (1995) four-item scale and the adapted version of Cox's (1998) Organizational Conflict Scale which was modified by Friedman et al. (2000). The original version (6 items) found a reliability of .93. This study used a 5-point Likert scale anchored by 0 indicates "none", and 4 indicates "a lot" (Cronbach's α = .92).

Stress, Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-14 items) was utilized to measure the experience

of stress (Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983). A five-point response scale (0 = "Never", 4 = "Very often") was used in this questionnaire (Cronbach's $\alpha = .82$).

In order to test the hypotheses, the multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used in this research. The follow-up post-hoc test was employed to confirm an influence of differing conflict management styles on task conflict, relationship conflict, and stress. Structural Equation Model (SEM) was used for determining causal relationships between dependent variables and for finding direct and indirect effect of task conflict on stress. This study utilized SPSS version 17 and LISREL version 8.72 for statistical analysis. A 0.05 level of significance was acceptable in the statistical analysis.

Validity of Instruments

The translation of instruments from English into Thai raises questions about consistency and their appropriateness in relation to the translated instruments. To overcome these issues, this study combined several methods to validate the Thai version of the instruments as follows: First, the original versions were translated by two fluent English translators separately and then the translated versions of

the instruments were checked and revised by a qualified translator: The Translation and Interpretation Service Unit, Chalermprakiet Center of Translation and Interpretation, Faculty of Art, Chulalongkorn University. Secondly, the revised Thai version instruments were translated back into English by a bilingual translator who was unaware of the original questionnaires. In this step, there are several differences between the original and translated versions particularly, in the questions which used colloquial phrases, idiomatic expressions, and emotionally evocative terms. In addition, some of the differences are grammatical including the sentence structure. From these issues another step was required. Third, five academic experts were asked to review the instruments to examine the clarity in meaning of the question statements, as well as, general questions for refinement of the questionnaire. Next, the instrument was revised based on those three importance steps. This study also conducted a focus group interview to review the revised version of instruments. Interviewees were asked to evaluate all items to check their understanding and comment on any problems that they had. Finally, after following the above steps, the pilot test was performed to find the reliability coefficients of the instruments.

Results

Table 1 Characteristics of the Respondents separated by Conflict Management Styles

Characteristics	No. of Respondents (Percent)					Total N = 464 (100.0)
	IN n = 239 (51.5)	OB n = 29 (6.3)	DO n = 18 (3.9)	AV n = 23 (5.0)	CO n = 155 (33.4)	
Gender						
Male	107 (23.1)	12 (2.6)	12 (2.6)	4 (0.9)	56 (12.1)	191 (41.2)
Female	132 (28.4)	17 (3.7)	6 (1.3)	19 (4.1)	99 (21.3)	273 (58.8)
Age						
20 – 25 Years	24 (5.2)	3 (0.6)	1 (0.2)	1 (0.2)	11 (2.4)	40 (8.6)
26 – 30 Years	94 (20.3)	21 (4.5)	3 (0.6)	8 (1.7)	70 (15.1)	196 (42.2)
31 – 35 Years	53 (11.4)	5 (1.1)	6 (1.3)	4 (0.9)	36 (7.8)	104 (22.4)
36 – 40 Years	46 (9.9)	0 (0.0)	5 (1.1)	8 (1.7)	25 (5.4)	84 (18.0)
More than 40 years	22 (5.4)	0 (0.0)	3 (0.6)	2 (0.4)	13 (2.8)	40 (8.6)
Education Level						
Under Graduate	38 (8.2)	2 (0.5)	0 (0.0)	2 (0.4)	16 (3.4)	58 (12.5)
Graduate	172 (37.1)	27 (5.8)	15 (3.2)	19 (4.1)	120 (25.9)	353 (76.1)
Post Graduate	29 (6.3)	0 (0.0)	3 (0.6)	2 (0.4)	19 (4.1)	53 (11.4)
Working Experience						
1 – 24 Months	18 (3.9)	4 (0.9)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	18 (3.9)	40 (8.6)
25 – 60 Months	95 (20.5)	20 (4.3)	3 (0.6)	3 (0.6)	66 (14.2)	187 (40.3)
More than 60 Months	126 (27.2)	5 (1.1)	15 (3.2)	20 (4.3)	71 (15.3)	237 (51.1)
Work for Company						
A	106 (22.8)	13 (2.8)	7 (1.5)	11 (2.4)	54 (11.6)	191 (41.2)
B	79 (17.0)	4 (0.9)	6 (1.3)	6 (1.3)	46 (9.9)	141 (30.4)
C	54 (11.6)	12 (2.6)	5 (1.1)	6 (1.3)	55 (11.9)	132 (28.4)

Note: IN = Integrating, OB = Obliging, DO = Dominating, AV = Avoiding, CO = Compromising

Table 2 Average Task conflict Score, Average Relationship Conflict Score, and Average Stress Score separated by Conflict Management Styles

Conflict Management Style	No. of Respondent	Percent	Task Conflict		Relationship Conflict		Stress	
			Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation
			IN	239	51.5	1.59	.64	1.43
OB	29	6.3	1.43	.89	1.67	1.05	29.31	5.30
DO	18	3.9	2.60	.95	2.77	1.12	23.06	5.47
AV	23	5.0	2.22	.55	2.58	1.03	31.03	6.07
CO	155	33.4	1.71	.65	1.63	.80	25.45	5.36
Total	464	100	1.69	.71	1.62	.90	25.71	5.87

Table 3 KMO and Bartlett's Test

Bartlett's Test of Sphericity			
Likelihood Ratio	Approximately Chi - Square	df	Sig.
0.000	2440.140	5	.000
KMO			
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of sampling Adequacy (> .5)			.591

Table 3 shows the condition of using the MANOVA technique. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was used to check the relationship between dependent variables and found that approximately Chi - Square was 2440.140, Sig. = .000. In addition, the KMO is greater than .50. Thus, indicated that task conflict, relationship conflict, and stress are correlated.

Result from multivariate test was significant at the 0.001 level of significance, with results that Task Conflict, Relationship Conflict, and Stress were affected by the difference in conflict management styles (CMS), Pillai's Trace = 0.253, p -value < 0.001.

Testing of Hypotheses 1_a - 1_e

Results from the testing between-subjects effect found that differing conflict management styles have an influence on Stress (p -value < 0.001). The testing of homogeneity of variance; Levene statistic was .565 and Sig. = 0.688, F value was 10.386 with Sig. = .000.

Results from multiple comparisons (follow-up post-hoc test; Bonferoni Procedure) show that the obliging style has an average stress score greater than the integrating style, dominating style, and compromising style (mean difference = 4.2141, Sig. = .007, 6.2548, Sig. = .009, and 3.8587, Sig. = .023 respectively). The dominating style has an average stress score lower than the obliging style (mean difference = -6.2548, Sig. = .009), and avoiding style (mean difference = -8.2488, Sig. = .000).

The avoiding style has an average stress

score greater than the integrating style, dominating style, and compromising style (mean difference = 6.2081, Sig. = .000, 8.2488, Sig. = .000, and 5.8527, Sig. = .000).

Thus, it is concluded that hypotheses 1_a - 1_e are accepted, namely, that employees who tend to use the avoiding conflict management style and those using the obliging style experience higher level of stress.

Testing of Hypotheses 2_a - 2_e

Results from the testing between-subjects effects shows p -value < .001 and the testing of homogeneity of variance, Levene statistic shows Sig. was .000. In addition, Welch statistic was 11.132 with the .000 level of significance which indicates that average relationship conflict score of each conflict management style is different.

The multiple comparisons (Games-Howell Procedure) show that the dominating style has an average task conflict score greater than the integrating style, obliging style, and compromising style (mean difference = 1.0067, Sig. = .003, 1.1724, Sig. = .002, and 0.8865, Sig. = .010).

The avoiding style has an average task conflict score greater than the integrating style, obliging style, and compromising style (mean difference = 0.6241, Sig. = .000, 0.7898, Sig. = .003, and 0.5038, Sig. = .003).

Thus, hypotheses 2_a - 2_e are accepted. Employees who tend to use the competing or dominating conflict management style and those tending to use the avoiding style experience a greater degree of task conflict.

Testing of Hypotheses 3_a - 3_e

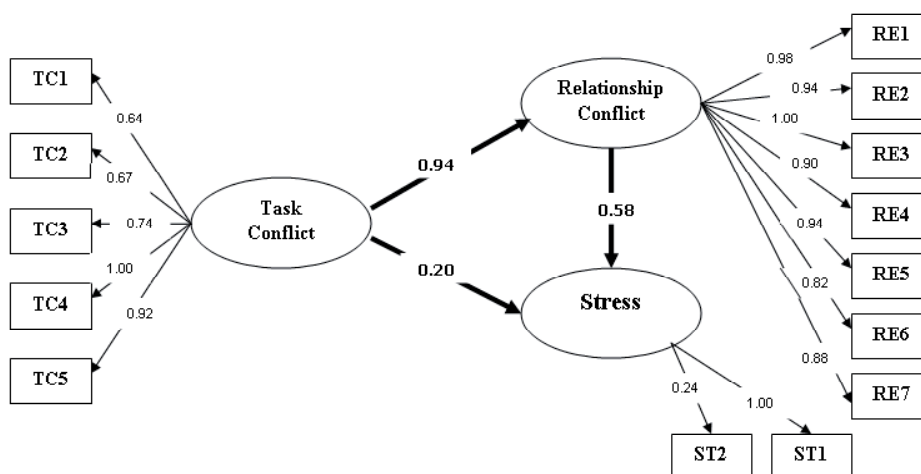
The multivariate test was significant at the .001 level of significance, Pillai's Trace = 0.191, p -value < .001. In addition, results from the testing of between-subjects effect shows p -value < .001. The testing of homogeneity of variance, Levene Statistic shows Sig. = .000. Welch statistic was 12.288, p -value < .001; it indicates that average relationship conflict score of each conflict management styles are different. Results from multiple comparisons (follow-up post-hoc test; Games-Howell Procedure) show that the integrating style has an average relationship conflict score lower than the dominating style and the avoiding style (mean difference = -1.33709, Sig. = .001 and -1.14488, Sig. = .000 respectively). The dominating style has an average relationship conflict score greater than the integrating style, obliging style, and compromising style (mean difference = 1.3371, Sig. = .001, 1.0950, Sig. = .020, and 1.1440, Sig. = .005 respectively).

The avoiding style has an average relationship conflict score greater than the integrating style, obliging style, and compromising style (mean difference = 1.1449, Sig. = .000, 0.9027, Sig. = .031, and 0.9518, Sig. = .002).

Thus, hypotheses 3_a - 3_e are accepted. Employees who tend to use the competing or dominating style and those who tend to use the avoiding style will experience a greater degree of relationship conflict.

Testing of Hypothesis 4

From Figure 2 found that, observed variables of Task Conflict have factor loading range between 0.64 - 1.00, meaning the items which were used to measure Task Conflict were satisfactory in this study. The factor loadings were as follows; 1.00 for TC4, 0.92 for TC5, 0.74 for TC3, 0.67 for TC2, and 0.64 for TC1 respectively.



Chi-Square = 72.42, df = 58,
 p -value = 0.09638, RMSEA = 0.023

Figure 2 Full Model for SEM

In addition, observed variables of Relationship Conflict have factor loading range between 0.82 - 1.00, this means the items which were used to measure Relationship Conflict were satisfactory in this research. The factor loading were as follows; 1.00 for RE3, 0.98 for RE1, 0.94

for RE2 and RE5, 0.90 for RE4, 0.88 for RE7, and 0.82 for RE6 respectively. The description and details of items for Task Conflict (TC) and Relationship Conflict (RE) are illustrated in Table 4 (next page).

Variable	Item Description	R ²
Task Conflict		
TC1	To what extent are there differences of opinions regarding the task in your work group?	0.36
TC2	How often do people in your work group disagree about the work being done?	0.36
TC3	How frequently are there disagreements about the task you are working on in this work group?	0.43
TC4	How much conflict about the work is there among your working group?	0.69
TC5	Do you realize that it has task conflict in your workgroup?	0.55
Relationship Conflict		
RE1	How much friction is present in your work group?	0.76
RE2	How much emotional conflict is there in your work group?	0.75
RE3	How much anger is present in your work group?	0.81
RE4	To what extent are personalities clashes present in your work group?	0.64
RE5	Some co-worker frequently undermines others.	0.54
RE6	Backbiting frequently occurs in your workplace.	0.42
RE7	Frequency of hostile work atmosphere in your workplace.	0.54

Table 4 Description of the Observed Variable for Task Conflict and Relationship Conflict.

Result from SEM in Figure 2 show that Task Conflict has a strong direct effect (0.94) on Relationship Conflict. Results also indicate that Relationship Conflict has an effect on experiencing negative stress (0.58). Results also suggest that there is an indirect effect (0.55) of Task Conflict on Stress which is greater than its direct effect (0.20) on stress.

In addition, the standardize RMR was .025 (< .05). The Goodness-of-fit Index (GFI) was close to 1.00 and the Adjusted Goodness-of-fit Index (AGFI) was .96 indicating the model is effective. For the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), the smaller the value, the better the model fit. This study found the RMSEA was 0.023 (less than 0.05) suggesting the good fit of the model.

Therefore, the results from SEM conclude that the effect of Task Conflict on Stress was mediated by Relationship Conflict. Thus, hypothesis 4 is accepted, namely, that the effects of task conflict are mediated by relationship conflicts.

Conclusions

Conflict within a business organization may result in either a beneficial or a detrimental outcome, depending on the manner of conflict management. By studying these varying styles, a greater understanding of conflict management styles and its effects on employees will enable leaders and employees to possibly reduce negative stress in the workplace. In order to prevent potentially future conflicts with resulting

negative impacts, it is important to understand the cause of conflict. This study shows that employees who tend to use the dominating style and the avoiding style cause task conflict to a higher degree compared with other styles. It also confirms that task conflict is highly and positively related to relationship conflict. Hence, this implies that employees who tend to use the dominating style and the avoiding style could cause relationship conflict to a high degree. In addition, employees who tend to use the obliging style and the avoiding style to handle their conflicts tend to have more stress than those using other styles.

This study increases the knowledge and comprehension regarding conflict management styles and their relationship to task conflict, relationship conflict and stress. It also extends the previous work of studied prototype, Friedman et al. (2000) by focusing on Eastern culture as well as the telecommunication industry which is seen as a dynamic business and having huge effect on global economies in the 21st century. As a result of this detailed study of conflict management styles, this paper defines new insights, resulting in a fresh view regarding this topic.

Leadership Implications

Although most employees manage conflict effectively by using the integrating and compromising conflict management styles, the challenge for management is not to ignore those who utilize other styles, particularly, those who might cause negative results. Hence, the challenge for managements and leaders is how to get involved with those with other conflict

management styles and encourage them to their full potential and to really create synergy in the teamwork. First, leaders need to be sensitive enough not to create an unwanted working environment and to promote as friendly a working environment as possible, especially when the company is in a highly competitive industry or highly dynamic work environment. At the same time, especially in Asia, Leaders and followers need to understand and promote integration strategies when they lead to improved organizational functioning.

Secondly, leaders need to apply the findings of this study in different areas, such as during the recruitment and selection process. Even though most organizations use attitude tests and interviews in their recruitment and selection for appropriate employees, these tools might not be sufficient. Those who are responsible for recruitment and the selection process need to consider individual traits regarding conflict management styles as another important characteristic and select employees with conflict management styles that are desired by the company and are in line with the corporate culture. In organizational management and task assignments, upon the realization of each employee's preferred conflict management style, it would help to indicate who would be appropriate for each task under specific situations. For example, those with the dominating style could be assigned to urgent tasks with deadlines; while routine tasks could be assigned to those with the avoiding style. In terms of monitoring and control, employees who tend to use the

avoiding style might require more monitoring and control than other types. Therefore, managers might periodically remind their employees to keep them on the desired track.

In addition, with employees who tend to use the dominating style, managers might need to train them for cooperation rather than give orders, since they like to take control of situations with the result of causing negative stress in others. Training session teaching dominating employees how to persuade others without causing negative results would be appropriate.

Limitations of the Study and Suggestions for Future Research

There are a number of limitations of this study. First, the exclusion of other main business sectors such as consumer products and energy etc. Therefore, the results certainly do not represent all business organizations in Thailand. Secondly, other factors may affect studied variables such as the difference in levels of management, different job characteristics, different routine tasks, and the employee's

attitude regarding conflict. Thirdly, as this research was conducted during 2008 - 2009, which has been a period of Asian economic recession, conflict management behavior may have been the result of an adjustment in corporate policy and strategies in order to survive through this crisis. Businesses in a highly competitive nature like the telecommunications industry need to be more adaptive to maintain their competitive edge. Therefore, it might cause changes in the working environment of subjects of this study, and might affect the variables involved in this study. Finally, the researcher does not systemically compare and contrast the results with others neither in countries in the same region nor in western countries.

Future studies should consider other important factors as mentioned in the limitations in order to fill the gaps in the conflict management literature. Further research could investigate other companies in other countries in the same region to compare and contrast with this research in order to arrive at a clearer conclusion in this field.

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