

Emotional Intelligence and Modes of Conflict Management of Employees of Different Age Groups

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Received: August 28, 2022

Accepted: September 29, 2022

Online Published: October 1, 2022

doi:10.11114/smc.v10i2.5723

URL: <https://doi.org/10.11114/smc.v10i2.5723>

Abstract

Business organizations need to sustain their performance in ever increasing volatile business environment. Human Capital is the key to business success. Managing human resources requires vital knowledge and information on human behaviours. This article presents Emotional Intelligence and Conflict handling behaviour of employees of different age groups. The study was undertaken in automobile and information technology industries in Chennai to measure among the employees the impact of age on emotional intelligence and conflict management. Emotional Quotient Test (Chadha, 2006), Thomas –Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (1974) were used for collecting data and statistical tests were used for analysis. Data analysis revealed that employees above 35 years of age had emotional maturity compared with other age groups. In handling conflicts, a pattern emerging from the study was identified: employees below 25 years of age were unassertive, employees between 30 -35 years of age were collaborative and employees above 35 years of age were competing.

Keywords: employees' age, emotional intelligence, conflict management, organizational behaviour

1. Introduction

Mayer and Salovey (1997) define Emotional Intelligence as “the ability to perceive and express emotion, assimilate emotion in thought, understand and reason with emotion, and regulate emotion in the self and others”. Weisinger (1998) defines emotional intelligence as the intelligent use of emotions. Goleman (1998) describes that emotional competence is “a learned capability based on emotional intelligence that results in outstanding performance at work”. The fact that EI can be learned and EI competencies can be developed provides an opportunity for those lacking it to develop it through training and development. Heath (1976) studied on effects of occupation upon emotional maturity of professionals and business managers. He had secured psychological test data when they were in college and in their early thirties. The results confirmed that they had matured and became more psychologically healthy since college. He described that the principal determinants of such maturing were their spouses and occupations.

Chen. Y., Peng. Y., and Fang. Y. (2016) reported from their study that emotional intelligence partially mediated the relationship between age and life satisfaction, and fully mediated the relationship between age and affective well-being. Meshkant. M., and Netaj. R. (2017) found in their study results that there were no significant differences on genders in the overall score measuring emotional intelligence. However, they reported genders did tend to differ in emotional self-awareness, interpersonal relationship, self-regard and empathy in which females scored higher than males.

Schutte et al. (2001) studied the relationship between marital satisfaction and emotional intelligence. The results of the study revealed moderate positive relationship between the two variables. Bricker and Rudnick (2005) studied the variable of emotional intelligence and marital satisfaction and explored the relationship between the two. They used the Schutte Self Report Inventory (SRI) and the Marital Satisfaction Inventory to measure the variables. The study reported that EI was found to have significant positive correlation with certain aspects of marital satisfaction. Zeidner and Kaluda (2008) explored the role of EI in romantic love among the newlywed couples. They had used MSEIT scale (Mayer, Salovey & Causo, 2002) and Schutte Self Report Inventory (Schutte et al., 1998) to measure the variables. The EI measured by the both scales showed significant ‘actor factors’ but did not show ‘partner’s effect’; therefore, it only partially supports the hypothesis that EI predicts romantic love. Work –family conflict: Stanley & Burrows (2001) describe that in areas, work and family; the experiences trigger emotional reactions, which in turn influence the behaviour. In the past, work and family life were viewed as separate domains. The contemporary perspectives on work

and family recognize the dynamic interplay between these two major life roles. Type of work - family conflict: Greenhaus & Beutell (1985), define three types of work -family conflict: Time- based work- family conflict, Strain-based work family conflict, Behaviour based. Charles and Carstensen's (2010) study show that social and emotional life change with age. As physical mobility is reduced at the older age, social networks narrow. Emotions that are experienced are more or less predictable with the older people. Older people are seen to be investing more in meaningful relationships as their priorities change. One such example is the way they care for their grandchildren and the people of their age. Barnes et al. (2004) study reveal that in old age people who are engaged more in social relationships and social activities are less likely to experience declines in cognitive functioning than those who are socially disengaged. However, when there is a prolonged exposure to stress, the physiological regulation suffers.

Jordan and Troth (2002) showed that individuals with higher levels of emotional intelligence were more likely to seek collaborative solutions when confronted with conflict and prefer not to use avoidance strategies. Emmons and King (1988) found that individuals with more conflicts between their goals tended to spend more time thinking about and less time acting on it. When individuals set multiple goals to be achieved, they could experience conflict. The pursuit of one goal undermines the pursuit of another. When the organizations set too many goals to be achieved simultaneously with members having differences over the goals set for achievement could lead to generation of conflicts. According to Sing (2006) employees with high emotional competencies are able to tackle negative emotions, channelize emotions to a positive end. They also hold high self-esteem and respond to emotional stimuli tactfully. Levenson et al. (1991) argue that in fundamental ways, social and emotional functioning changes little with old age. Intense and strong emotions continue to be present even at an older age. The same way as the negative emotions affects the physiological functioning in younger age; this also affects older people and their physical health. Research studies show that personality traits remain largely stable into old age.

Roloff (1987), states that conflict occurs when there is an incompatibility or inconsistency among individual's cognitive elements. Intrapersonal conflict happens within an individual. When an individual sets multiple goals for achievement he experiences conflicts within, in terms of allotting his time, mental, emotional, physical resources, etc., adequately for each of the goals. Fagenson (1990) and Kanter (1977) have suggested that an individual's behaviour in an organizational setting may vary according to the position he or she holds in the organizational hierarchy. Studies also have found that people with high status in the organization used a competitive style where as low status individuals tended to use co-operative style (Watson, 1994). Position therefore is seen to influence the choice of conflict mode. Watson and Hoffman (1996) study had found that 42% of the manager's time is spent addressing conflict in the work place. Another study found that fortune 500 senior executives spend 20% of their time in litigation related activities (Levine, 1998). Dana, (2001) stated over 65% of performance problems result from strained relationships between employees and further identified the following eight "hidden costs" of conflict that many employers may overlook: (1) wasted time, (2) reduced quality of decisions, (3) loss of skilled employees, (4) restructuring inefficiencies, (5) lowered job motivation, (6) sabotage and theft, (7) absenteeism and (8) health costs. Lather, Jain and Shukla (2010) describe that in India, the socio-economic-cultural-religious-patriarchal, feudal and spiritual factors have major influence on the work ethics and attitudes towards conflict at work. Thomas and Kilmann (1974) argue that people are capable of using all five modes. However, they develop more skills in some modes. The frequent use of a particular mode makes one more skilled in that particular mode than the other modes. This leads one to heavily rely on some modes, while lacking the skills to adopt others modes required for the situation. With practice of particular mode, people develop a clear preference for a mode, which they readily use to handle the conflict.

The scope of the study was to measure emotional intelligence of different age groups and to identify the association between emotional intelligence and modes of conflict management. The study was also intended to identify the preferred mode of conflict management among the different age groups. The study findings can be used in organizations to match employees for the right job and at the right time. The outcome of the study would be useful to train the employees to enhance their emotional intelligence and adopt appropriate conflict handling modes to effectively manage the situations for the benefit of organizational and employee development. The knowledge from the study could be used in academics for educational purposes.

2. Research Method

The field of study was automobile and information technology industries in Chennai. Chennai is the state capital of Tamilnadu in India. The city is emerging slowly as a global hub for the automobile industry as many global auto majors have set up facilities in Chennai. Global companies and corporate like Ford, Hyundai, Ashok Leyland, Daimler, Nissan, Yamaha, Renault, BMW, Royal Enfield, Hindustan Motors, Bosch, Mahindra and Mahindra, Caterpillar, Komatsu, Mitsubishi have their operations and plants in Chennai. The city base accounts for 30 percent of India's automobile industry and 35 percent of auto components industry. Hence Chennai is now often called the 'Detroit of India'. Chennai is India's second largest exporter of Information Technology (IT) and Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) services.

The universe for the study was employees from automobile and information technology industries. The following criteria were used for the selection of the samples: employees must have more than one year of experience in the organization; they must have been permanent employees and must be willing and available at the time of data collection. Emotional Quotient Test (Chadha, 2006) was used to measure dimensions of emotional intelligence: sensitivity, emotional maturity and emotional competencies. Thomas –Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (1974) was adopted to identify the modes of conflicts: competing, accommodating, avoiding, collaborating, compromising adopted for handling conflicts. Both the instruments were given to employees to fill up. Non -Probability sampling method: purposive sampling technique was used for the data collection. The number of samples collected was 300. Various statistical tests were applied to test the hypothesis. Descriptive research design was used in the study to describe the characteristics of the respondents. The analysis and findings on Emotional Intelligence and Conflict handling behaviour of employees of different age groups are presented in this article.

3. Results

The data from emotional quotient assessments and from Thomas –Kilman instrument were analyzed using Chi-square, Anova and Friedman statistical tests. The demographic variable of Age and its impact on emotional intelligence and conflict management were analyzed to assess various dimensions of emotional intelligence and conflict handling modes. StatisticalPackage for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used for the statistical analysis of data.

Table No 1. Frequency Distribution of Age Group

Age in years	Frequency	Percent
Below 25	69	23.0
25-30	105	35.0
30- 35	67	22.3
Above 35	59	19.7
Total	300	100.0

The descriptive data analysis from Table 1 revealed that 35% of the employees were from the age group of 25 -30 years, 23% of the employees were below 25 years of age, 22.3 % of the employees were between 30 -35 years and 19.7 % of the employees were above 35 years of age. It was evident that the higher representation was from the age group of 25 -30 years.

Table No 2. Chi –Square Test for Association between Age Group and Levels of Maturity

Age Group in years	Levels of Maturity			Total	Chi- square value	P - value
	Low	Moderate	High			
Below25	10 (14.5%) [40.0%]	36 (52.2%) [21.4%]	23 (33.3%) [21.5%]	69		
25-30	6 (5.7%) [24.0%]	70 (66.7%) [41.7%]	29 (27.6%) [27.1%]	105		
30-35	6 (9.0%) [24.0%]	37 (55.2%) [22.0%]	24 (35.8%) [22.4%]	67	15.785	0.015*
Above35	3 (5.1%) [12.0%]	25 (42.4%) [14.9%]	31 (52.5%) [29.0%]	59		
Total	25	168	107	300		

Note: 1. The value within () refers to Row Percentage

2. The value within [] refers to Column Percentage

3. * Denotes significant at 5% level.

As shown in Table 2, Chi –Square Test for identifying the association between age group and levels of maturity was carried out to test Null Hypothesis 1 that ‘there will be no association between Age and emotional maturity’. The test

results pointed out that the employees of above 35 years of age were found to have higher level of maturity ($P < .05$) compared with other age groups. The Emotional intelligence theory states that emotional maturity grows along with the age.

Table No 3. Friedman Test for Significant Difference between Mean Ranks of Age Groups Towards Modes of Conflict Management

Modes of Conflict Management	Mean Ranks of Age groups			
	Below 25	25 -30	30 -35	35 and above
Competing	2.83	2.87	2.77	3.10
Collaborating	2.67	2.87	3.13	2.41
Compromising	2.93	2.88	2.93	2.91
Avoiding	3.19	3.23	3.04	3.29
Accommodating	3.38	3.15	3.13	3.30
Chi –square value	9.547	5.699	2.768	13.633
P- value	0.049*	0.223	0.597	0.009**

Friedman test (see Table 3) for identifying the significant difference between mean ranks of age groups towards modes of conflict management was carried out to test the Hypothesis 2 that ‘there will be no significant difference among age groups and modes of conflict management’. The results from Table 3 indicated that there was a significant difference ($P < .05$) between mean ranks of employees below 25 years of Age towards modes of conflict management. Based on their mean ranks it was observed that the employees mostly adopted the modes of conflict management in the following order: accommodating (3.38), avoiding (3.19), compromising (2.93), competing (2.83) and collaborating (2.67). There was also a significant difference ($P < .01$) between mean ranks of employees of above 35 years of age towards modes of conflict management. Based on their mean ranks the employees were identified to use accommodating (3.30), avoiding (3.29), and competing (3.10) more frequently than the other modes.

Table No 4. ANOVA for Significant Difference between Age Groups with respect to Preferred Mode of Conflict Management

Mode of conflict management	Age Group				F value	P- value
	Below25	25-30	30-35	Above35		
Competing	5.46 (2.64)	5.72 (2.52)	5.52 (2.55)	5.90 (2.53)	0.391	0.759
Collaborating	5.52 ^{ab} (1.79)	5.72 ^b (1.84)	6.13 ^b (1.85)	5.05 ^a (2.04)	3.668	0.013*
Compromising	5.94 (2.07)	5.89 (2.13)	6.06 (2.04)	6.07 (1.97)	0.148	0.931
Avoiding	6.39 (1.87)	6.32 (1.72)	6.10 (1.94)	6.49 (1.92)	0.508	0.677
Accommodating	6.68 (2.36)	6.34 (1.95)	6.18 (2.04)	6.49 (1.94)	0.740	0.529

Note 1: the value within bracket refer to Standard Deviation.

2. * Denotes significant at 5% level

3. Different alphabet between age group denotes significance at 5% level using Duncan Multiple Range Test (DMRT)

From Table 4, it was observed that ANOVA statistical test was done to find out the significant difference between age groups with respect to preferred mode of conflict management to test Null hypothesis 3 that ‘there will be no significant difference among Age groups towards preferred modes of conflict management’. The Duncan Multiple Range Test (DMRT) indicated that employees between the age group of 30-35 years significantly differed ($P < .05$) with employees in other age groups. The statistical analysis was evident that they preferred collaborative mode ($M = 6.13$, $SD = 1.85$) for handling conflicts compared with the other age groups of below 25 years ($M = 5.52$, $SD = 1.79$), age group of 25 – 30 years ($M = 5.72$, $SD = 1.84$) and above 35 years of age group ($M = 5.05$, $SD = 2.04$).

Table No 5. Friedman Test for Significant Difference between Mean Ranks of EI of Age Group 35 years and above towards Modes of Conflict Management

Modes of Conflict Management	Mean Ranks of EI of Age group 35 years and above		
	Moderate EI	High EI	Extremely High EI
Competing	3.75	3.09	2.97
Collaborating	2.13	2.38	2.57
Compromising	3.50	2.89	2.80
Avoiding	2.13	3.58	2.83
Accommodating	3.50	3.08	3.83
Chi –square value	4.611	12.752	6.007
<i>P</i> - value	0.330	0.013*	0.199

Note: * Denotes significant at 5 % level

As shown in Table 5, Friedman test was carried out for identifying the significant difference between mean ranks of EI of age group of 35 years and above towards modes of conflict management to test the Null Hypothesis 4 that ‘there will be no significant difference between age group of 35 years’ levels of emotional intelligence and modes of conflict management adopted’. The Friedman test results from revealed that there was a significant difference ($P < .05$) observed between mean ranks of employees of above 35 years of age with high level of emotional intelligence towards modes of conflict management. They were identified to adopt avoiding (3.58), competing (3.09) and accommodating (3.08) modes more than other modes of conflict management.

4. Discussion

The employees of above 35 years of age are found to have higher level of maturity compared with other age groups and this finding confirms with the existing studies. Recent studies in emotional intelligence shows that emotional intelligence increases with age particularly for components of understanding and regulating emotions (Tsaousis & Kazi, 2013). Carstensen et al. (2010) found that positive emotions increased from early adulthood to middle adulthood and remained stable until the age of 70 and middle 80s.

The employees between the age group of 30 -35 years preferred collaborative mode compared to other age groups. This finding can be looked at from the perspective provided by Heath (1976) who stated based on his study that higher education, occupation and marriage as principal determinants of emotional maturity. Since the employees in the above-mentioned age group have had all those emotional experiences would have achieved emotional maturity and therefore, they are able to adopt collaborative mode.

Chusmir and Mills (1989) studied men and women managers at three levels of management—supervisors/forepersons, middle-level, and top-level. The results indicated that managers at higher levels reported more competing and less accommodating than managers at lower levels. The employees from lower management have less positional power and will have to constantly report to the middle managers and occasionally to the senior managers in few cases who enjoy more power and authority. Hence, they may tend to use unassertive behaviour. Middle-level managers liaison between top management and lower management. They need to carry the communication from top management to the lower and process information, feedback, grievances from lower management to the top management. Since the role involves integration of different people’s opinion and ideas the collaborative mode could bring in more positive results. Thomas, K.W., Thomas, G.F., and Schaubhut, N. (2008) in their study found that Executives and top executives score higher than other groups in the two most assertive styles – collaborating and competing. Since the senior level managers have more positional power and also hold the ultimate responsibility of the task it may be seen that they tend to use competing mode.

The study also found employees above 35 years of age with high level of emotional intelligence to adopt avoiding (3.58), competing (3.09) and accommodating (3.08) modes more than other modes of conflict management. This finding that senior managers with high level of emotional intelligence use the competing mode in the second place; Avoiding is used as the first preferred mode and Accommodating as the third choice. In the case of employees with extremely high level of emotional intelligence, it is observed that they use Accommodating and Avoiding in the first and second place and competing as the third mode for handling conflicts. The slight movement in adopting the modes

of conflict is visible between managers with high level of emotional intelligence and employees with extremely high level of emotional intelligence. Managers with high level of emotional intelligence still rely on competing mode slightly higher than the employees with extremely high level of emotional intelligence. Employees with extremely high level of emotional intelligence use competing mode as their third preferred mode.

It is also interesting to note that middle level managers have lesser power compared to the top-level managers. They are between lower and top-level management. The movement in the adopting conflict mode is witnessed here. They move from collaborating mode to competing mode in their senior management role. It could be because the accountability and responsibility for the senior manager increases. They are held responsible for the achievement of organizational goals. That is the reason that they are also vested with more power. Coupled with the responsibility and power they adopt competing modes.

Another interesting angle from biology could be explored for explaining the shift in adopting conflict modes between middle level and the top level. Middle level managers are generally in the age group of 30 -40. They are at the prime of their health. The biological growth had matured and reached the peak level. After the age of 30 onwards the atrophy sets in and it is more visible from the age of 40 onwards. There is a decline in the physical conditions. The biological changes, pressure to perform, shortage of time or deadlines and along with the power experienced at the top level of management bring about the shift in adopting the conflict modes from collaboration to competing mode. When the conflict handling modes are looked at from the perspective of culture, a person from an achievement orientation culture tends to show the preference for competing style whereas a person from collectivist culture has an inclination to use collaborative or compromising style (Morris et al., 1998).

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