



IMPACT OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STYLES AND EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE ON JOB PERFORMANCE AMONG CONSTRUCTION EMPLOYEES IN SELANGOR AND KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA

NIK HASNINI NIK MOHAMED SAHABUDDIN @ NIK MUHAMAD

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By

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Thesis Submitted to the Graduate School of Management Universiti Putra Malaysia, in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science

March 2017

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science

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March 2017

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The purpose of the present research is to investigate the relationships between conflict management styles (CMSs) and job performance (JP). The moderating role of emotional intelligence (EI) on the relationship between predictors and job performance was also investigated. Organizations the world over today have moved through complex changes, witnessing a number of transformations, rapid revolutions, and challenges, especially within an organization's strategy, structure, practice and paradigm. Such challenges happen in Malaysia too, including in the construction industry which contributes to the Malaysian economy and infrastructure development of the country. The nature of the construction industry is vulnerable and sensitive. The employees play a crucial role in gaining competitive advantage for the industry and need to demonstrate high job performance to achieve this.

The present study used a survey design to achieve its objectives. Simple random sampling was employed in this study. A total of 200 usable questionnaires were obtained from selected construction companies in Selangor and Wilayah Persekutuan Kuala Lumpur. The Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) technique was used for data analysis.

The findings revealed that there is a significant relationship between employees CMS and JP. Therefore it is concluded that employee's conflict management styles affect their job performance. This study indicated that the construction employees seem to be employing the "positive" style of conflict management which are integrating, compromising and obliging. This is an important finding that CMS practices are found to be crucial and related to increase employees' job performance. This study also confirms that EI moderates the relationship between CMS and JP.

The presence of emotional intelligence would strengthen the relationship between CMS practices and employee job performance.

Finally, it is suggested that the organization must adopt effective CMS and to develop employees EI to improve employees JP the of the organization. Training programs on conflict management and emotional intelligence are needed to improve their job performance.



Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Master Sains

IMPAK GAYA PENGURUSAN KONFLIK DAN KECERDASAN EMOSI KE ATAS PRESTASI KERJA PEKERJA PEMBINAAN DI SELANGOR DAN KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA

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Tujuan penyelidikan ini adalah untuk mengkaji hubungan antara gaya pengurusan konflik dan prestasi kerja. Peranan kecerdasan emosi dalam hubungan antara peramal dan prestasi kerja juga disiasat. Organisasi di dunia hari ini telah melalui perubahan kompleks, menyaksikan beberapa transformasi, revolusi yang cepat dan cabaran, terutama dalam strategi, struktur, amalan dan paradigma. Cabaran sedemikian juga berlaku di Malaysia, termasuk industri pembinaan yang menyumbang kepada ekonomi Malaysia dan pembangunan infrastruktur negara. Industri pembinaan amat terdedah dan sensitif. Para pekerja memainkan peranan penting dalam memperoleh kelebihan daya saing bagi industri dan perlu menunjukkan prestasi kerja yang tinggi untuk mencapai matlamat ini.

Kajian ini menggunakan reka bentuk tinjauan untuk mencapai matlamatnya. Pensampelan rawak mudah digunakan dalam kajian ini. Sejumlah 200 borang soal selidik telah diperolehi daripada syarikat pembinaan terpilih di Selangor dan Wilayah Persekutuan Kuala Lumpur. Teknik ("SEM") digunakan untuk analisis data.

Hasil kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa terdapat hubungan yang signifikan antara gaya pengurusan konflik pekerja dan prestasi kerja. Oleh itu, dapat disimpulkan bahawa gaya pengurusan konflik pekerja memberi kesan kepada prestasi kerja mereka. Kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa pekerja pembinaan menggunakan gaya pengurusan konflik yang "positif" iaitu gaya integrasi, kompromi dan obligasi. Ini adalah satu penemuan penting bahawa amalan gaya pengurusan konflik di dapati penting dan berkaitan dengan peningkatan prestasi kerja pekerja. Kajian ini juga menegaskan bahawa telah wujud kesan kecerdasan emosi di antara hubungan gaya pengurusan

konflik dan prestasi pekerja. Kehadiran kecerdasan emosi akan memperkuat hubungan antara amalan gaya pengurusan konflik dan prestasi kerja pekerja.

Akhirnya, adalah dicadangkan bahawa organisasi perlu menggunakan gaya pengurusan konflik yang berkesan dan menerapkan pekerja dengan kecerdasan emosi bagi meningkatkan prestasi pekerjaan mereka. Program latihan mengenai pengurusan konflik dan kecerdasan emosi diperlukan untuk meningkatkan prestasi kerja mereka.



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I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on 30 March 2017 to conduct the final examination of Nik Hasnini Nik Mohamed Sahabudin @ Nik Muhamad on her thesis entitled “Impact of Conflict Management Styles and Emotional Intelligence on Job Performance among Construction Employees in Selangor and Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia” in accordance with the Universities and University College Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P. U. (A) 106] 15 March 1998. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the Master of Science.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AGFI	Adjusted Goodness-of-Fit
AVE	Average Variance Extracted
CFA	Confirmatory Factor Analysis
CFI	Comparative Fit Index
CR	Construct Reliability
EFA	Exploratory Factor Analysis
JP	Job Performance
EI	Emotional Intelligence
GFI	Goodness-of-Fit Index
GOF	Goodness-of-Fit
RMSEA	Root Mean Square Error Approximation
CMS	Conflict Management Styles
LBDQ	Leadership Behavior Descriptive Questionnaire
SEM	Structural Equation Modelling
USMEQ-I	Universiti Sains Malaysia Emotional Quotient
ROCI-II	Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory II

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Organisations the world over today have moved through complex changes, witnessing a number of transformations, rapid revolutions and challenges, especially within an organization's strategy, structure, practice and paradigm - in how business is conducted in order to help cope with the new and more challenging environment (Kyriakidou, 2001). Such challenges happen in Malaysia too, including in the construction industry. In Malaysia, construction is an important industry which contributes to the Malaysian economy and infrastructure development of the country (Olanrewaju & Abdul-Aziz, 2015). The employees play a crucial role in gaining competitive advantage for the industry and need to demonstrate high job performance to achieve this. In organisations such as the construction companies where success is dependent upon teamwork, interpersonal human relationship and manoeuvring coaction skills are crucial. Idrus, Amer and Utomo (2010), observed that the daily modus operandi of the construction industry is full of coactions and conflict. However, the nature of the construction industry is vulnerable and sensitive in that it has many layers of employees from different backgrounds which can potentially contribute to conflicts.

Some researchers observed that conflict is generally deemed detrimental to employees' job performance (De Dreu and Weingert, 2003). These employees are subjected to conflict, (conscious or unconscious) which may subsequently lead to unavoidable positive or negative consequences (Jehn, 1977; Ghaffar, 2009). Negative emotions or behaviours due to conflict, often result in reduced employee's job performance. Meyer (2004) reported that poorly managed conflict affects the degree and frequency of future conflicts and has a negative consequence on productiveness and work performance. Conflicts can cause emotional hurting and stress which may result in a decrease in job performance. The outcome of conflict depends on the way one handles social interactions, how one perceives those situations and the method with which an individual selects to abduct. Simple disagreement between team members, if unresolved, may intensify into turning away, inability to work together and verbal clashes. In worst case scenarios, it may also lead to hostility and separation from the organization. So employees need to have the skill and cognition on how to handle and manage conflict.

Notwithstanding the importance of employees' job performance and the extensive use of job performance as an outcome measured in empirical research, this study found relatively little effort has been spent on clarifying job performance and its relation with CMS. Both CMS and job performance are imperative for organisations; and successful management of workplace conflict can ascertain the strength and long term success of an organization.

Conflict is a condition where there are at least two opposing perspectives, which can lead to non-productive outcomes, or if appropriately resolved, can lead to quality final products. Even though conflict is said to have negative outcomes on employees' performance, several researchers have noted the positive consequences of conflict (De Dreu & Van Vianen, 2001). Increasing team decision options, enhancing quality of decision making, increasing creativity were found to increase job performance (Jehn, 1993 1997; Jehn & Mannix, 2001; Leung & Tjosvold, 1998; Putnam, 1998; Tjosvold & Sun, 2003; Tjosvold, 1998, 2006, 2008).

Looking on the bright side, learning to resolve conflict is an essential passage to high performance teams and profit achievements. Moradi and Honary (2011) found that conflict can have adverse effects on the performance of organisations, and create the conditions for an organization to lose many of its resources to the extent that it can even lead to the dissolution. On the other hand, conflict can result in beneficial outcomes, leading to creativity, innovation and performance of the labour force. Therefore acquiring appropriate conflict management skills is essential in order to handle conflict (Brewer, Mitchell & Weber, 2002).

Moberg (2001) defined Conflict Management Styles (CMS) as “specific behavioural patterns that individuals prefer to employ when dealing with conflict” (p.47). Conflict can be managed by the disputants themselves, by managers or by other third party (Wall and Callister, 1995). For conflicts to be managed functionally, one may employ different conflict management styles depending on the situation (Rahim, 1983; 2000).

1.2 Problem Statement

The construction industry plays an important role not only to the economic system of a country but also to its growth (Construction Industry Master Plan-CIMP, 2006-2015). A snapshot from Trading Economics (2010-2015), the Malaysian Gross Domestic Product Performance (2010-2015) shows that, the construction sector contributed MYR9,095.09 million to the economic growth, reaching an all-time high of MYR12,125.00 million in the third quarter of 2015. According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (February, 2017), the total value of construction work done in the fourth quarter of 2015 recorded a growth of 8.10 percent year-on-year basis to MYR32.60 billion, which clearly shows that this sector is one of the engines for the Malaysian economic growth. This sector complements other economic sectors through the development of infrastructures from oil and gas to highway development. For Malaysia, the construction industry can be described as a substantial driver to the economy (Malaysian - German Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Market Watch, 2012). As such it is pertinent that the Malaysian construction industry sustain its level of performance.

With regards to the construction industry, a study by Kagioglou, Cooper and Aouad (2001) noted that the construction industry has long been criticised for its employees' underperformances. The industry faces great challenges to keep a high level of employees' competitiveness and to improve employees' job performances. Employees in the construction industry work in an environment where the nature of the industry is susceptible to conflicts and discords, thus impacting their job performance. On the same note, Ogunbayo (2013), stated that conflict is inevitable in the construction industry due to the adversarial nature of the industry. Also, frequently reported in the construction press, only a few researchers have investigated conflict within the construction industry (Gorse, 2003).

Conflict seems to be synonymous within the construction industry giving the impression that the industry is prone to problems such as reduction in productivity, increase in project cost, project delays, lost of profit or damage in business relationships (Lee and Lings, 2008). Gardiner and Simmons (1992) study ascertained that conflict occurred at all stages in the construction process and thus the employees are constantly working within changing, complex and uncertain situations. This situation is often conceived as detrimental to the effective operation of workers (Leung, Thomas & Cheung 2002) where job satisfaction is reduced, motivation waning and lack of engagement (Chen, Zhao, Liu & Dash, 2012).

Brew and Cairns (2004) concur with Gardiner and Simmons to state that conflict is inevitable, so dealing with conflict is a pervasive the part of daily activities in the workplace. Many scholars hypothesised that task and relationship conflict among employees are associated with outcomes such as (dis)satisfaction and (decreased) performance. Ock and Han (2003) attest to these studies where they assert that conflicts in the construction industry worldwide have resulted in extensively high costs and a waste of precious time. For this, resolving conflict is an important agenda in construction companies. Ock and Han suggested that one aspect of success in construction projects is how well employees are able to handle conflicts. In this context, De Dreu and Weingart (2003) added that effective conflict management is required to handle conflict to achieve long term sustainability of organisations and employees' well-being. Ineffective management of conflict would be destructive and may lead to a lot of problems. Poorly managed conflicts would drain an organization, not only in footing of money but also the organization and employees' job performance.

Conflict management is an effort of how to handle conflicts in order to minimize its negative impact but at the same time optimize the positive aspect of conflict. Studies on conflict management has garnered many theories and methods on how conflicts are handled. Theorists basically diagnose the sources of conflict as either internal or external and propose intervention strategies to mitigate the conflicts (Kilmann & Thomas, 1978). Early theorists of conflict management included Blake and Mouton (1964), Khun and Poole (2000), DeChurch and Marks (2001) and Rahim (2002) among which Rahim's Conflict Management Style (CMS) has been widely used in research.

It is thus essential for the construction industry management to have adequate knowledge on the factors that can ameliorate conflict management so as to reduce the impact of conflict on the job performance of their employees. Towards this end, conflict management researchers have found factors that influence CMS and job performance such as leadership styles (Saeed, S. Almas, Anis-ul-Haq & Niaz, 2014), personality trait (Ayub, AlQurashi, Al-Yafi, & Jehn, 2017), cultural intelligence (Gonçalves, Reis, Sousa, Santos, Orgambídez-Ramos & Scott, 2016) and emotional intelligence (Shih & Susanto, 2010). Among these factors, emotional intelligence (EI) seems to be mostly researched and found to contribute greatly to job performance (Alferaih, 2017; Devonish, 2016 and Han, Kim, & Kang, 2017).

Although there are a number of studies in Malaysia with regards to EI, much of the studies focus on topics which relate to increasing employees' job performance (Ngah, Jusoff & Rahman, 2009; Sehat, 2004; Yusof, 2007), conflict management (Su Faizah, 2009), academic achievement, (Koh, 1999) -individual differences (Rahyu, 2004) and leadership (Lailawati & Faezah, 2007) but all these research were not in the construction industry.

According to Fer (2004), EI is the skill required to recognise and experience emotions, and to facilitate emotional growth and development. This particular skill and ability will assist in the development and handling of conflicts. EI is postulated to promote positive social functioning by helping individuals to detect others' emotion states, adopt others' perspectives, enhance communication and regulate behaviour (Mayer, Salovey & Caruso, 2004). People with higher EI tend to be more socially competent, have better quality relationships, and are viewed as more personally sensitive than those with lower EI (Brackett, Rivers, Shiffman, Lerner & Salovey 2006). Therefore, it can be seen that EI can improve the relationship between two constructs.

It was found that individuals with high EI were more effective in resolving conflict than individuals with low EI (Jordan & Troth, 2012). While employees with high levels of EI were able to manage conflict more constructively Schlaerth, Ensari, and Christian (2013). In another study, Zhang, Chen, and Sun (2015) found that EI is positively and significantly related to CMS (integrating, compromising and dominating) as well as performance in the construction industry in China. These studies show that EI has a role in handling conflict and would serve as an important quality for conflict prone industries such as the construction sector.

As far as research on construction workers were done, much of the studies were not conducted in Malaysia. Razak, Matthew, Zafar & Imtiaz (2010) found issues on cultural values (Chan, Leung, & Yuan, 2014) and perception of trust (Zuppa, Olbina, & Issa, 2016) as problems faced by the construction industry globally but very little research has been carried out by academics and practitioners to address the issues faced by the Malaysian construction industry.

Research on the construction workers in Malaysia on how they handle conflict needs to be done. The number of construction cases in 2015 alone was 164 cases. This was reported in the Construction Law Report 2015 by the Construction Industry Development Board (CIDB), Malaysia.

For reasons that conflict management is important in enhancing job performance and EI is found to have a significant relationship in improving job performance, it is therefore, pertinent to investigate whether EI may influence the relationship between employees' CMS and job performance among employees in the Malaysian construction industry.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the influence of emotional intelligence and conflict management styles on job performance among employees in the context of construction companies in Malaysia. Based on the preceding discussions, this study attempts to achieve three Research objectives:

- RO1: To determine the conflict management styles (integrating, obliging, compromising, dominating, avoiding) employed by employees in the construction sector in Malaysia?
- RO2: To investigate the relationship between employees' conflict management styles (integrating, obliging, compromising, dominating, avoiding) and job performance?
- RO3: To examine the role of emotional intelligence in moderating the relationship between conflict management style and employee job performance?

1.4 Significance of Study

- 1) This study will add to the existing knowledge in Malaysian studies on conflict management style practices and the moderating influence of emotional intelligence between the conflict management styles and employees' job performance, especially in the construction industry. The findings from this research can be a guide to researchers who intend to further probe the relationship between conflicts management and job performance, moderated by emotional intelligence in other context e.g. manufacturing.
- 2) The emotional intelligence measurement employed in this study was developed by local researcher in USM (Yusoff, Rahim & Esa (2010). The use of this scale assisted in the validation of the USMEQ-I in use.
- 3) Findings on the specific conflict management style (integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding, and compromising) of construction employees may assist management in managing their employees during conflict.

- 4) This study may assist human resource department in their decision to consider the need for skilled training in conflict management styles and emotional intelligence.
- 5) The results of the study will enable the managers to adjust their conflict management practices and strategies in improving and increasing job performances in the organization, in their daily practices.

1.5 Operational Definition of Terms

The following definitions are provided to ensure a common understanding of the terms used:

- a) **Conflict**
The interactive process manifested in incompatibility, disagreement, or dissonance within or between social entities (Rahim, 2001) So conflict is a situation where two entities are in disagreement which may result in a positive or negative outcome.
- b) **Conflict Management Styles**
Refers to effective strategies to minimise the dysfunctions of conflict and maximise the constructive functions of conflict in order to enhance learning and effectiveness in an organization (Rahim, 2000). This study employs Rahim's CMS approach where Rahim and Bonoma (1979) outlined five styles which are integrating, obliging, dominating, compromising and avoiding.
- c) **Emotional Intelligence**
The capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves and for managing emotions well and our relationship (Goleman, 1995). Based on Goleman's definition, EI is the ability to understand own and others' emotions and adapt that emotions to express our behaviour.
- d) **Job performance**
The total expected value to the organization of the discrete behavioural episodes that an individual carries out over a standard period of time (Motowildo, Borman & Hanser, 1983).

1.6 Scope of the Study

This study focuses on the Conflict Management Styles (CMS) and the influence of Emotional Intelligence (EI) on Job Performance (JP) among construction employees. Construction companies in Malaysia are categorized into seven groups: G1 to G7 with a total number of 67341 companies. Due to the massive number of

companies and level of 'active' status, this study focus on the most active group which is G7 which has 5337 companies spread among the 14 states in Malaysia. To accounts data time constraint in collecting data, the study will focus on G7 (active) status in Wilayah Persekutuan and Selangor. The choices of these two states were because at the time of study, both states have stated the highest registered G7 (active) contractors with the highest number of employees.

1.7 Summary

The main focus of this study is to find the relationship between conflict management styles and employees' job performance, and the influence of emotional intelligence on conflict management styles towards job performance among employees in the construction industry. The chapter provides information regarding the background of the study, the problem statement, objective, research questions, significance of the study and finally, the operational definition of terms used.

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