

## Relationship between Emotional Intelligence Factors and Conflict Management of Leaders in Frozen Food Factories in Thailand

ความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างความฉลาดทางอารมณ์และการจัดการความขัดแย้งของหัวหน้างานในโรงงานอาหารแช่แข็งในประเทศไทย

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### Abstract

This study aims to investigate the relationship between emotional intelligence factors and conflict management of leaders in frozen food factories in Thailand. Statistical population includes all leaders and managers of frozen food factories in Thailand (n=400). Using Yamane's formula (1976) and simple random sampling method, the sample size of 200 (including 107 male and 93 female) was achieved. To gather data, a researcher-made questionnaire was utilized for measuring emotional intelligence and interpersonal conflicts. To measure the validity of questionnaire, a test was conducted on a group of 30 target samples whose results confirmed the validity of it. Calculated alpha coefficient of this questionnaire was 0.70. The statistics used for data analysis and hypotheses testing included frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, and Simple correlation coefficient. The results indicated a significance and positive correlation between emotional intelligence factors including self-awareness, self-regulation, internal motivation, empathy, and social skills and interpersonal conflict management ( $p \leq 0.05$ ).

**Keywords:** Emotional intelligence, Interpersonal conflict management, Leaders

### บทคัดย่อ

การศึกษานี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างความฉลาดทางอารมณ์และการจัดการความขัดแย้งในโรงงานอาหารแช่แข็งในประเทศไทย กลุ่มประชากรที่ศึกษา คือ หัวหน้างาน และ ผู้จัดการในโรงงานอาหารแช่แข็งจำนวน 400 คน โดยใช้ Yamane's formula (1976) และวิธีเลือก ตัวอย่างสุ่มแบบง่ายจะได้กลุ่มประชากรจำนวน 200 คน (ประกอบด้วยชาย 107 คน และหญิง 93 คน) ใน การศึกษาครั้นนี้ได้มีการทดสอบความเที่ยงตรงกับกลุ่มประชากรตัวอย่างจำนวน 30 ชุด โดยใช้แบบ สอนถามที่มีความน่าเชื่อถือที่ระดับ 0.70 ในการเก็บข้อมูลจากกลุ่มตัวอย่าง โดยสถิติที่ใช้ในการวิเคราะห์ และทดสอบสมมติฐาน ได้แก่ ความถี่ ร้อย

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ละ ค่าเฉลี่ย ค่าเบี่ยงเบนมาตรฐาน และ Simple correlation coefficient จากการสำรวจและวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลจะแสดงถึงความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างความฉลาดทางอารมณ์และ การจัดการความขัดแย้งของหัวหน้างานในองค์กร ผลการศึกษาพบว่าปัจจัยด้านความฉลาดทางอารมณ์ การรู้จักตน การกำกับตัวเอง แรงจูงใจ การเห็นอกเห็นใจ และทักษะทางสังคม มีความสัมพันธ์ต่อการจัดการ ความขัดแย้งของหัวหน้างานภายในองค์กรอย่างมีนัยสำคัญทางสถิติ ( $p \leq 0.05$ )

**คำสำคัญ:** ความฉลาดทางอารมณ์ การจัดการความขัดแย้ง หัวหน้างาน

## Introduction

Nowadays, our everyday life is full of changes and disorders. However, people can still manage and deal with problems very well and also able to adapt to changes wisely for quality in the society. The ability of dealing with problems, conflict and adaptation to every situation is Emotion Quotient (EQ). EQ is the ability to understand and sense others' feeling and oneself and manage emotions effectively into the way that helps creating peace and success (Gibbs, 1995).

A leader is one of the important factors for a successful organization because a leader has directly responsibility to plan and manage personnel in an organization to achieve its goals (George, 2000). Besides, the basic required attribute of the leaders in this era is emotional intelligence. Many leaders are not able to create good relations with their staff. Despite having good technical knowledge, they cannot lead the organization to achieve its goals (Meenoi and Karnjanamaneesatien, 2011). Researchers show that leaders with high emotional intelligence can deal with organizational conflicts, group weakness, or blurry mutual understandings (Cooper and Sawaf, 1998). Such leaders can gain more awareness towards conflicts and recognize them more accurate and faster. It can be stated that an influential leader is the person who can control his/her emotional power in order to improve his/her followers' satisfaction and morale. This affects to organizational effectiveness because of employee's cooperate to fulfill organizations' goals. An influential leader should concern the relationships between employees and customers, not technologies and materials (Nordstrom, 2010). Accordingly, many organizations are starting to pay their attentions to EQ development for their leaders (Gondal and Husain, 2013).

Since organizational conflicts are closely correlated with emotions, it is essential to conduct a research to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence factors and conflict management of leaders. The target respondents were leaders or managers who work in frozen food factories in Thailand.

### Purpose of the Research

- 1) To study the relationship between emotional intelligence factors and conflict management of leaders or managers.
- 2) To study the effect of emotional intelligence factors on conflict management of leaders or managers.

### Conceptual Framework

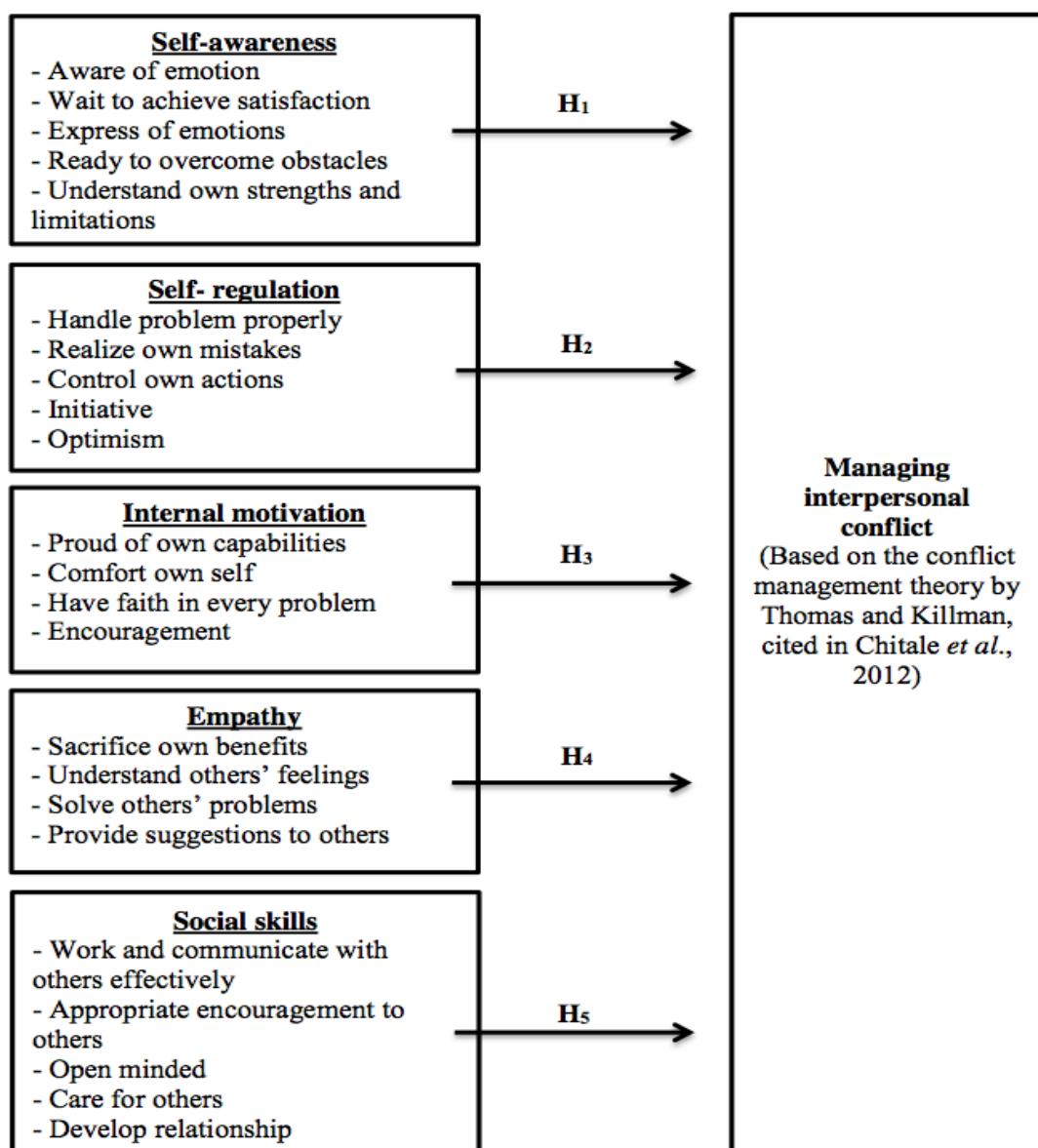


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

Source: Adopted from Goleman, 1999 & Thomas and Kilman, 2007

## Research Variables

- 1) An independent variable was emotional intelligence factors, which consist of self-awareness, self-regulation, internal motivation, empathy, and social skills.
- 2) A dependent variable was the methods to deal with interpersonal conflict, which consist of avoidance, competition, yield, compromise, and collaboration.

## Literature Reviews

### Theory of Emotional Intelligence

The emotional intelligence (EI) paradigm contains several theories. Each theory has difference in the basic definition of EI, but each one also attempts to explain the skills, abilities, and traits associated with social and emotional intelligence. Each of these theories measures EI differently. Although theoretical viewpoints exist regarding EI vary, but they tend to be more complementary than contradictory (Ciarrochi *et al.*, 2000). The theory of Goleman (1999) will be discussed and used in this research.

Goleman's theory of EI is the most recent to recognize. He describes EI as self-control, perseverance, and motivation. This theory also suggests EI is a person's potential for developing and mastering the skills of self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, and relationship management. Goleman (1999) presented the emotional competence framework with the five following components;

- a) Self-awareness is the ability to be aware, control, and adjust of a person's emotions.
- b) Self-regulation is the ability to control and handle emotional problems.
- c) Internal motivation is the ability to control and motivate oneself in order to achieve the one's own goals.
- d) Empathy is the ability to manage relationships and understand others' emotions and viewpoints.

Emotions are an in-born feature of every person. We cannot avoid emotions but we can control them properly (Goleman, 1995). Emotional intelligence is important for organizational success and peace. Goleman (1999) suggested that a leader with high emotional intelligence could creatively cope with his/her and other persons' emotions and then provide benefits from him/herself to others. In a study of "The relationship between the effect of emotional intelligence of managers on job satisfaction of the staff", Banihashemian and Moazen (2011) found a positive and significant correlation between emotional intelligence of managers and job satisfaction of the staff. Empathy, motivation and self-awareness are the

attributes of emotional intelligence that increase self-esteem, motivation, and job satisfaction of the staff.

## 2. Theory of Conflict Management

Early organizational theorists such as Marx (1967), Taylor (1911), and Weber (1947) viewed conflicts as something that organizations must avoid. They believed organizations were a close system and that conflicts were a reflection of an unachieved goal. They proposed conflict could negatively impact organization's efficiency and it should be avoided. Follett (1924) and Deutsch (1973) changed the knowledge of conflicts in the workplace. They both agreed conflicts could be useful and constructive. Conflicts should not be viewed as weakness in an organization. If conflicts are handled appropriately, it can enhance productivity in an organization. Conflicts can also be destructive if it left unmanaged. The appropriate way of dealing with conflicts in an organization is called conflict management (Brewer *et al.*, 2002).

Thomas and Kilman (2007) classified conflict behavior into two components, which are assertiveness and cooperativeness. Assertiveness was a behavior that satisfies one's own matter, and cooperativeness was a behavior that satisfies others' concerns. Thomas and Kilman (2007) suggested the conflict management methods, which can be used to handle conflicts as follows;

- a) Integrating is a method to solve the conflicts with win-win condition since parties emphasize on their goals and relationships.
- b) Obligating is a method to force other people to accept their duties with lose-win condition.
- c) Avoiding is a method to avoid problems that lead to conflicts and people who may cause conflicts
- d) Dominating is a method to reduce conflicts by maintaining relationships. This method will be used if relationships are important than other issues.
- e) Compromising is a method to share some benefits to parties but other benefits may be unintentionally lost. This method can quickly solve conflicts and maintain relationships.

## Research Methods

The statistical population of the research included all 400 leaders and managers of top three frozen food factories in Thailand (Lhbank, 2014). The sample size included 200 leaders and managers by using simple random sampling method based on Yamane's formula

(1976), which provided a formula to calculate sample size with 95% confidence level where  $\epsilon=0.05$ .

Measurement tool included two sections in a questionnaire: 1) The questionnaire of Goleman (1999) adopted 5-point Likert scale (strongly disagree – strongly agree), measuring the five dimensions including self-awareness (5 questions), self-regulation (5 questions), internal motivation (4 questions), empathy (4 questions) and social skills (5 questions); and 2) the questionnaire of interpersonal conflict management comprises 20 questions. It also adopted 5-point Likert scale (strongly disagree – strongly agree). To identify validity and reliability, the questionnaire was tested with 30 leaders and managers. The 30 leaders and managers were randomly selected from study population. The test showed alpha coefficient as 0.70. Its validity was confirmed by the experts of frozen food industry.

To describe variables, descriptive statistics including means, percentages, and standard deviation were used. To analyze data, Simple correlation coefficient was used. The researcher identified the interpretation of five rating scales designed by Best (1977) as follows: 4.21 – 5.00 = Strongly agree, 2.41 – 4.20 = Agree, 2.61 – 3.40 = Neutral, 1.81 – 2.60 = Disagree, and 1.00 – 1.80 = Strongly disagree.

## Results and Discussions

**Table 1** Measurement level of agreement of emotional intelligence factors toward interpersonal conflict management

Variables	Mean	SD	Level of Agreement
Self-awareness	3.62	1.15	Agree
Self-regulation	3.54	0.97	Agree
Internal motivation	3.32	0.84	Neutral
Empathy	3.75	0.94	Agree
Social Skills	3.60	0.81	Agree
Interpersonal conflict management	3.62	0.77	Agree

As shown in Table 1, the result revealed the measurement level of agreement according to the separate of five levels following Likert scale. Regarding the results of table 1 showed that scores of the elements of the questionnaires have normal distribution.

**Table 2** Simple correlation coefficients of emotional intelligence factors and interpersonal conflict management

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	Correlation Coefficient	Sig
Interpersonal Conflict Management	Self-awareness	0.382	0.000*
	Self-regulation	0.291	0.001*
	Internal motivation	0.252	0.009*
	Empathy	0.293	0.003*
	Social skills	0.370	0.000*

\*Significant at or lower than 0.05 level

Based on Table 2, the correlation between self-awareness, self-regulation, internal motivation, empathy, and social skills and interpersonal conflict management is significant and positive ( $p>0.05$ ).

The results showed that self-awareness could be a factor that affects interpersonal conflict management. A leader with this ability can understand his/her strengths and limitations. When obstacles arise, the leader with this ability will be ready to face obstacles because he/she is always determined to overcome obstacles. The leader with self-awareness can understand complicated problems and being open minded to creatively consider other persons' opinions and feedbacks to handle conflicts in an organization effectively.

The results showed that self-regulation could be a factor that affects interpersonal conflict management. A leader with this ability can control emotions well and handle emotional problems well. Eventually, a leader with this ability will find a useful solution to solve conflicts in an organization.

The results showed that internal motivation could be a factor that affects interpersonal conflict management. A leader with this ability can control and motivate oneself to achieve his/her goals. A leader with motivation has high creativity to solve conflicts in an organization.

The results showed that empathy could be a factor that affects interpersonal conflict management. A leader with empathy can build relationships with other persons who have different backgrounds and cultures. A leader with this ability can recognize and understand other persons' emotions and viewpoints. This ability enables the leader to lead others to find a mutual solution as a moderator who considers the others' feelings.

The results showed that social skills could be a factor that affects interpersonal conflict management. A leader with this ability can build relationship and communicate with

others appropriately. A leader with social skills can develop relationships, understand situations, and creatively express opinions to solve problems and conflicts in an organization.

## Conclusion

This study was an attempt to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence factors and interpersonal conflict management of leaders in frozen food factories in Thailand. In an agreement with the findings of hypotheses implying positive correlation between emotional intelligence factors and interpersonal conflict management, Lunenburg (2011) showed that increasing emotional intelligence enhances the ability to manage conflicts in a workplace. The results of this study agree with the study of Akbar and Laya (2014), finding a positive correlation between emotional intelligence and interpersonal conflict.

## Limitations of the study

- 1) This study conducted only one industrial, which is not all of the business sectors. Therefore, the results of this study cannot be used for develop the strategy for other business.
- 2) The number of sample size was small compared to the number of frozen food companies in Thailand.
- 3) The researcher conducted the questionnaire with self-reported. As a result, the respondents could answer the questions inaccurately in order to present themselves in the best possible light.

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