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RELATIONSHIP QUALITY MEDIATES THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERSONALITY TRAITS AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STYLES AT PEJABAT SETIAUSAHA KERAJAAN NEGERI PAHANG

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ABSTRACT

This research will investigate the relationship between personality traits, relationship quality, and conflict management style among employees during the pandemic at the Secretary of Pahang State Government. The purpose of this research is to determine how variables in the extended Theory of the Five-factor Model of Personality Traits and the mediating relationship quality can be tested as predictors of conflict management style. The researcher specifically expects that conflict management style would be related to extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and neuroticism, which are the five-factor model of personality traits, as well as relationship quality. The researcher also looked at how relationship quality mediated the relationship between personality traits and conflict management style. To better understand the relationship, this study developed a framework and analysed how well the model fits the data using the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) method. A total of 214 respondents from the departments and units in the Secretary's Office of Pahang State Government were selected to complete a questionnaire to provide the empirical data for the analysis. All hypotheses were supported in this research, with the presence of the mediator showing that personality traits were significantly related to conflict management style. The limitation of this research, in terms of scope, is that it focuses solely on the government sector during the pandemic.

Keywords: Conflict management style, Personality traits, Relationship quality

1. INTRODUCTION

There is evidence of actions taken by the government related to levels of psychological wellness (Qiu et al., 2020), and the novelty of this situation invites an understanding of individual differences in how people cope with the pandemic. For example, nowadays, the world has turned to remote working or work-from-home concepts due to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), an infectious disease caused by a severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) (Elengoe, 2020). When the pandemic outbreak happened back in the year 2020, the government and the policymakers took preventive steps and directive measures to sustain social movement and infection among the citizens (Alifuddin, 2021). A common action that was taken globally was the implementation of a lockdown.

Since the World Health Organization (WHO) proclaimed COVID-19 a pandemic on March 11, 2020, the cases of coronavirus have surpassed millions, which has spread quickly to more than 200

countries and territories worldwide. Countries in the Southeast Asia region are not exempt from this pandemic. It not only poses issues to public health but also affects the government sector.

The COVID-19 epidemic has caused a crisis on a grand scale, with far-reaching social, economic, and environmental consequences (Bapuji et al., 2020). For most organizations in the government sector, the effects of this pandemic in the most impacted countries are numerous and of unprecedented intensity. These uncertainties are much more challenging to handle for organizations because there has been little in-depth research on the subject, and the information provided is scant, fragmentary, and conflicting (Boiral et al., 2021).

Furthermore, the pandemic in Malaysia has created an endemic situation of uncertainty and confusion about the risks to employees, the measures and best practices that organizations should implement, stakeholder pressures, recovery plans including assistance to the most affected companies, and the possibility of new waves of contamination and

government shutdowns (Bryce et al., 2020; Isabella & Carnevale, 2020; Oehmen et al., 2020).

As a result of the government's movement restriction order requiring all employees to work from home, this became the first experience for the employees of the Secretary's Office of Pahang State Government in dealing with the pandemic. Conversely, it has impacted employees, such as pressure on the use of new technology due to a variety of circumstances, such as employees who lack skills in using the new medium due to age factors and low internet access. It will also cause conflict at an early stage while working at home. When returning to the work session in the office, even if the employee is not 100% present in the office, the employees will be more cautious and distance themselves from their colleagues. It will also cause conflict among employees when they must consider how to maintain social distancing and work layout during a pandemic.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, individual personality has influenced everyday behaviour (Cooper et al., 2019; Sherman et al., 2015) and health behaviours (Jones et al., 2017). Individual differences reflect differences in behaviour to cope with the pandemic. How individuals behave depends on their personality. Therefore, the researcher expects that conflict management style will play a role in employees' personality traits and the quality of the relationship between the employees engaged in such conflict issues during a pandemic.

There is no single conflict management style considered the most appropriate across every negotiation. It will be influenced by top management's point of view on conflict and employee personality type. According to McKibben (2017), differing conflict management styles among employees and situations may represent a suitable style selection.

Moreover, the choice of conflict management style is also impacted by many factors (Dziwinski, 2020). Miller and Poston (2020) mentioned that satisfying one's needs or interests is an important outcome in the conflict resolution process. This becomes a challenge when parties in the conflict want opposing needs or interests satisfied.

However, personality does seem to play an important role in determining conflict behaviours. According to Zhou et al. (2017), people's personalities will first have an impact on their relationship satisfaction. A good relationship is typically associated with higher levels of relationship expectation and satisfaction, as well as a longer relationship duration. According to Hannis Ansah et al. (2018), a peaceful workplace is just one of the numerous benefits of excellent employee connections, and since confrontations hinder productivity and cause discord, the energy devoted to conflict resolution could be better spent working.

Conflict management style is the degree to which group members differ regarding a particular individual conflict management style. Kilmann (2020) has identified five conflict management styles, each of

which has its consequences. These styles are collaborating, accommodating, compromising, competing, and avoiding.

The collaborating approach entails trying to work with other individuals to search for a solution that fully addresses the issue at hand, satisfying all the involved parties. It includes the identification of the underlying concerns of one's opponent and finding alternatives for meeting the interests of each party.

The accommodating style accommodates the concerns of 'others first' instead of giving one's interests top priority. This technique is appropriate when it is crucial to provide relief that is temporary from conflict or when the problem is not meaningful to one person compared to others.

The compromising style is a conflict management approach aimed at finding a solution that is mutually acceptable and expedient and partially satisfies both the involved parties.

The fourth style of conflict management is competing. Adopting a competing approach entails pushing one's opinion at the expense of others and maintaining active resistance to the action of the other person.

The forcing technique is used in situations where one needs to fight for one's rights or opinion, resisting pressure or aggression.

Avoidance is a conflict management style whereby an individual fails to adequately address a conflict but instead postpones, withdraws, or sidesteps. In most cases, individuals will tend to avoid conflict due to fear of getting involved in a dispute or they may lack confidence in their conflict management skills (Chandolia & Anastasiou, 2020; Thomas et al., 2008).

In general, personality refers to individual differences in the way he or she feels, thinks, and behaves. Thus, it is the unique combination of characteristics and qualities that makes employees unique across situations and contexts (Vedel & Poropat, 2017).

According to Abdullah et al. (2016), personality can be defined as a collection of intrinsic and extrinsic traits that may affect the behaviour of an individual. Parks-Leduc et al. (2015) indicated that personality traits are typically defined as descriptions of people in terms of relatively stable patterns of behaviour, thoughts, and emotions. Mental Help (2020) indicated that the big five major personality traits are neuroticism, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience. Neuroticism is a tendency to easily experience unpleasant emotions such as anxiety, anger, or depression. Extraversion captures the energy, urgency, and tendency to seek stimulation and the company of others. Agreeableness is a tendency to be compassionate and cooperative rather than suspicious and antagonistic towards others. Conscientiousness is a tendency to show self-discipline, act dutifully, and aim for achievement. Openness to experience is an appreciation for art, emotion, adventure, unusual ideas; imagination and curiosity.

Therefore, the researcher specifically expected that conflict management style would be related to extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and neuroticism, which are the five-factor model of personality traits, as well as relationship quality, based on the conflict management style definitions.

1.1 Statement of the Research Problem

Conflict in the work environment among employees during the pandemic can have different consequences. It became worse when the pandemic occurred, whereby employees at the Secretary's Office of Pahang State Government could not communicate with each other. Because of that, when the employees are unable to communicate well with each other, miscommunication might occur, and conflict may arise. When conflict arises, it will ruin the relationship between employees. According to Türk & Ceylan (2020) and Gulec & Alkis (2004), in this situation, the employees need to be well-versed in human behaviours in order to manage their colleagues' behaviours. Besides, it should be accepted that the conflicts that arise in the work environment among employees are part of the organisation. Thus, instead of ignoring the conflict situations, it will be useful to understand the nature of the conflicts and to determine the solution to improve the quality of relationships and reduce job stress. There is visible conflict and job stress among the employees at the Secretary's Office of Pahang State Government's well-being. Nowadays, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, employees in the Secretary of Pahang State Government face the pressures of the new norm of working from home (WFH); hence workplace conflict can be more complex because of role overload and family distractions (Noor Shamsiah Hussin, 2021). Employees will experience job stress because work gets disturbed due to the multiple roles of father, mother, husband, or wife. WFH also presents challenges from family distractions because of sudden sickness, family visitors, or being a teacher for the kids who need to do their home-based teaching and learning activities (PdPR). Moreover, the employees have been managing the psychological challenges of the changes to their working lives with the competing demands of family. Anwar et al. (2021) have proved that WFH deprives employees of their growth opportunities; the stay-at-home recommendation during the MCO hampered people from making physical contact with other family members, friends, and colleagues, which in turn may have led to feelings of isolation and depression (Tay et al., 2021). Some might feel stress and anxiety due to the situation, affecting employees at the State of Secretary of Pahang State Government.

When it comes to stress and anxiety, many employees continue to feel that they may have a significant impact on them, both physically and mentally. Based on Scott (2020), stress can affect their thinking and behaviour, making employees more likely to get into conflict situations. In turn, conflict can cause significant anxiety, which further affects

their health and well-being. It is critical to assist employees in managing conflict. The problem can be resolved swiftly, informally, and collaboratively if the top management at the State of Secretary of Pahang State Government understands the abilities that need to be developed and supports their employees with training on how to manage stress while WFH during the pandemic.

According to Noor Shamsiah Hussin (2021), employees at the State of Secretary of Pahang State Government will decide to work at risk if the workplace's support system is in good working order. Employee emotions and job performance will diminish if there is no good support structure in the workplace. A mutually respectful attitude toward one another is very important because, from the perspective of challenges throughout the MCO, they do not realise that each of their colleagues has their own challenges which will indirectly affect the attitude of employees themselves due to emotional instability.

To be able to cope with this situation or to reduce the negative effects of conflict on employees, and to turn it into a positive outcome, the employee who has a conflict with other employees or team members or the manager should utilise the right conflict management style to tackle the difficulties stated. However, it is considered that one of the reasons behind these decisions is the personality traits of the employees themselves. The way an employee chooses to use the conflict management style and personality traits determines whether they wish to sustain or damage the relationship. Based on the researcher's knowledge, there is limited research on conflict management in organizations during the pandemic because it rarely occurs in Malaysia. Therefore, the researcher has decided to conduct a study on conflict management during the pandemic at the Secretary of Pahang State Government. This research aims to bridge the gap between the relationship among personality traits, relationship quality, and conflict management style among employees during the pandemic at the Secretary of Pahang State Government. To examine the relationship, this study will come out with a framework and test how the model will fit with the data.

1.2 Research Objectives

The general objective of this research is to investigate the relationship between personality traits, relationship quality, and conflict management styles. Besides the general purpose of the research, the following are the specific objectives:

1. To identify the relationship between the five-factor model of personality traits and conflict management styles.
2. To examine the relationship between the five-factor model of personality traits and relationship quality.
3. To measure the relationship between relationship quality and conflict management styles.

4. To investigate the mediating effect of relationship quality on the five-factor model of personality traits and conflict management styles.

1.3 Research Questions

Based on the research objectives, the research questions for the objectives are:

1. Which type of five-factor personality traits will have a relationship with conflict management styles?
2. Is there any relationship between personality traits and relationship quality?
3. Is there any relationship between relationship quality and conflict management styles?
4. Does relationship quality mediate the relationship between personality traits and conflict management styles?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conflict Management Style

According to Ren and Kim (2017) and Kilmann and Thomas (1977), conflict management styles can be defined as individual patterns of behavioural predisposition that evolve individual behaviours and reactions. Raykova et al. (2020) proposed that conflict is a common feature of group activities and inherent to a wide range of interactions among team members (Jehn & Bendersky, 2018; Jehn & Mannix, 2001). Stress and anxiety to reach an agreement (Baron, 1988), power differences (Zartman & Touval, 1985), complexity of the task (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967), culture, and leadership models employed by team leaders (Kozan, 1989) all affect how conflict ought to be handled.

Conflict management refers to the strategies followed by both parties to cope with a conflicting situation. According to Rahim (2012), conflict management refers to the process of eliminating the negative aspects of conflict while escalating the positive aspects of conflict. The aim is to improve learning and group outcomes, including effectiveness or performance in an organisational setting. Thomas and Schmidt (2014) suggested five modes: avoiding, dominating, obliging, integrating, and compromising. The avoiding style neglects the conflict or denies the availability of conflict rather than finding a solution to the problem and seeks neither one's own concerns nor others. The dominating style neglects personal concerns to persuade the concerns of the opposite parties. It is a form of self-sacrificing kindness that is followed by the fulfilment of others' wishes when one would prefer not to do so.

People look for their own concerns at the cost of others' concerns by applying all suitable authority to succeed in the location and protect something that is believed to be correct in the obliging style. In the integrating style, the detection of all concerns of both parties through a solution that gratifies both parties totally is achieved because of attempts to find alternatives to satisfy the needs

of all of them. The compromising style searches for a mutually suitable clarification that satisfies both parties moderately by taking into consideration some concerns of both parties and neglecting others by exchanging concessions and finding a middle-ground position (Rani, 2018).

A summary of the work and the development of conflict management style studies shows a strong basis for researchers to continue to delve into aspects of conflict management style where such studies are still too few in developing countries such as Malaysia, as well as in the Secretary of Pahang State Government. The researcher relies on underpinning theories that support how and why, when choosing the five-factor model of personality traits, relationship quality has a relationship with conflict management style.

2.2 Theory 1: Rahim Model of Conflict Management (1983)

According to Rahim (1983), conflict is an interactive state manifested in compatibility, disagreement, or difference within or between social entities such as individuals, groups, or organisations. For the purpose of this study, Rahim's definition of conflict will be used, as he conceptualised conflict as an interactive process, which is consistent with the views of others (Baron, 1990). In order for conflict to exist, it needs to be recognised by all the parties involved in it. Rahim and Bonoma (1979) have differentiated the styles of handling interpersonal conflict along two basic dimensions: concern for self and concern for others. Concern for self, as a dimension, explains the degree (high or low) to which individuals attempt to satisfy their own concerns, whereas the second dimension, concern for others, explains the degree (high or low) to which individuals want to satisfy the concerns of others. These dimensions portray the motivational orientations of a given individual during conflict. In situations such as disagreement, chaos, disputes, and incompatibility between individuals, individuals exhibit five different behaviours that are shown in Figure 1, which constitute "Conflict Management Approaches".

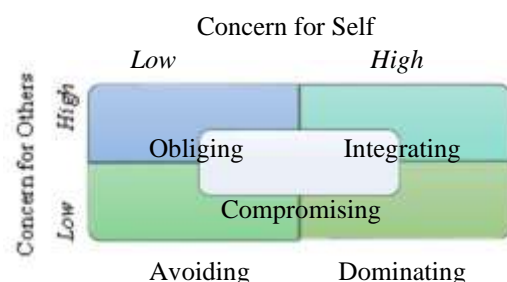


Figure 1 Conflict management approaches Rahim (1983). A measure of styles of handling interpersonal conflict

These two dimensions can be crossed to identify five styles of conflict management: integrating involves a high concern for self and for others, obliging involves a low concern for self and a high

concern for others. Meanwhile, compromising represents an intermediate concern for self and others. Dominating reflects a high concern for self and a low concern for others. Lastly, avoiding indicates a low concern for self and others.

For this study, the researcher has chosen Rahim's (1983) model of conflict management based on a two-dimensional model labelled as concern for self and concern for others. Individuals who demonstrate a high concern for self will show a strong concern to fulfil their own needs, whereas individuals who show a high concern for others demonstrate a high level of interest in fulfilling the needs of the other party (Rahim & Bonoma, 1979). It is among the most popular styles of handling conflict used in research. The researcher has studied five different approaches to handling interpersonal conflict by using the five styles of conflict management. These five different styles are those that one will use depending on the circumstances and situations faced by the management along with subordinates. Based on Antonioni (2008), some scholars have suggested a contingency approach to handling conflict, meaning that the appropriateness of using a particular style depends on the conflict situation (Rahim et al., 1992).

2.3 Personality Traits

The Big Five personality trait model is the most frequently used term for the model of personality which demonstrates five fundamental factors of personality (Dunlop et al., 2020). It combines the emotions, attitudes, and behaviour of people. Based on Simha and Parboteeah (2019), the Big Five model of personality traits is the most widely accepted model of normal range variation in personality, positing five broad dimensions to account for individual differences in human behaviour, cognition, and emotion. According to Rothermich et al. (2021) and Antonioni (1998), each of the factors is bipolar and the binaries align as follows: extraversion-introversion, agreeableness-antagonism, conscientiousness-undisciplined openness-closeness, and emotional stability-neuroticism. Personality traits are systemised from narrow and particular to broad and general traits, and the researcher indicates the existence of five primary traits or factors of personality from McCrae and Costa (1989) that are often referred to as the Five-Factor Model of Personality.

The psychological and behavioural responses to the pandemic can be influenced by several factors, including a person's characteristics and resources (Gori et al., 2021; Di Crosta et al., 2020), as evidenced by previous research that has highlighted the significant influence of personality traits on reactions to stress (Oshio et al., 2018; Bibbey et al., 2013). In this field, the Five-Factor Model of Personality by Costa and McCrae (McCrae & Costa, 1990) is one of the most frequently used, in which five dimensions (extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness) represent a coherent and basically stable set of aspects that influence the affects, thoughts, and behaviours of individuals in their different life experiences. Personality traits, therefore, can shape an individual's responses to life situations

by influencing their cognitive assessments, the emotions associated with them, and the strategies used to regulate those affective activations (Afshar et al., 2015; Costa & McCrae, 2006). The personality traits of individuals are evident in individuals having different perspectives, showing different attitudes and different behaviours, accepting a situation or event as a conflict, and deciding the strategy for managing a conflict (Erdenk & Altuntaş, 2017; Turhan et al., 2012).

An individual's personality is the composite of intellectual characteristics that make them distinct from other individuals. If someone wants to understand the behaviour of employees in the organisation, it would be helpful if one knows something about the personality of that individual. Personality is an individual's distinctive psychological and intellectual arrangements or a person's exclusive steady pattern of thinking, feeling, and acting. Personality traits hold specific components in an organisational structure and have dynamic features, which will react differently to changes in the environment (Rani, 2018). The five-factor model of personality trait is the most frequently used term for the model of personality which demonstrates five fundamental factors of personality. According to Ehrhart (2006) and Bozionelos (2004), extraversion encompasses characteristics that include sociability, affiliation, and gregariousness, as well as the extent to which individuals are assertive, dominant, and experience positive affect. Openness to experience is related to technical and imaginative creativity, contradictory philosophy, and political liberalisation. Agreeableness is the optimistic view which makes them believe that all people in society are honest and cooperative. It involves attributes such as selflessness, collaboration, and affection. Conscientiousness is a propensity to demonstrate self-regulation and perform obediently. Conscientious individuals tend to have a sense of duty, be organised, and be efficient. Neuroticism can be defined as the tendency to be concerned, suspicious, anxious, and ineffective. Due to a lack of confidence, people often have a defensive attitude, and feel fearful, and insecure.

2.4 Theory 2: McCrae and Costa's Five-Factor Model of Personality (1987)

The Five-Factor Model of Personality by McCrae and Costa (1987) represents the dominant conceptualization of personality structure in the current literature. This model posits that the five personality factors of Extraversion, Openness to Experience, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Neuroticism reside at the highest level of the personality hierarchy, as well as encompassing the entire domain of more narrow personality traits that fall at lower levels of the hierarchy. The Five-Factor Model of Personality is considered by some to be the most widely accepted model of personality structure (Ekehammar & Akrami, 2003). Therefore, this model is presumed to be a complete framework for organizing personality traits. Each of the five

dimensions represent a broad domain comprising a variety of more discrete traits, or facets.

Individuals differ in the extent to which their personality style is made up of the five personality traits such as Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness to Experience, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness. Thus, individuals' personality styles will shape their interactions in their work environment. Those who score high on the Extraversion scale will tend to be sociable and assertive and will prefer to work with other people. Those who score high on Openness to Experience will be prone to open-mindedness, active imagination, preference for variety, and independence of judgment. Individuals who score high on Agreeableness will tend to be tolerant, trusting, accepting, and will value and respect other people's beliefs and conventions more than those who score low on the same trait. Those who score high on Conscientiousness will tend to distinguish themselves by their trustworthiness and their sense of purposefulness and responsibility, as they will tend to be strong-willed, task-focused, and achievement-oriented. Finally, individuals who score high on Neuroticism tend to experience negative feelings such as embarrassment, guilt, pessimism, and low self-esteem.

2.5 Relationship Quality

Relationship quality has consistently been conceptualized as a multi-faceted, second-order construct consisting of trust and at least one more distinct relational construct (Rusdi et al., 2016; Beatson, 2008). For example, Crosby et al. (1990) consider trust and satisfaction together as the primary indicators of relationship quality, while Dwyer et al. (1987) argue that commitment is an appropriate third facet of relationship quality. This study will demonstrate that stress affects both relationship quality, such as how good people subjectively consider their relationship to be, and how employees deal with disagreement together (Lo et al., 2017). Relationship quality is, in turn, intimately related to many aspects of well-being, including psychological and physical health (Pieh et al., 2021).

There is no clear explanation of what relationship quality is. According to Purnasari & Yuliando (2015) and Morgan & Hunt (1994), there is a general agreement that satisfaction, trust, and commitment are key aspects of relationship quality. Employees must possess these aspects of relationship quality to form strong bonds with one another. In addition, the level of concern for conflict management style will show how the employee views their conflict either in a negative or positive situation and, at the same time, maintain their relationship with the other parties.

2.6 Relationship between personality traits and conflict management styles

Big Five personality trait theory introduced a robust method to study personality quantitatively. Organizational research has also realised the importance of individual differences and the effects of personality characteristics. Along with individual differences, another inevitable group process is conflict. It takes two to tangle; that is, when two persons interact, they are likely to experience disagreements and incompatibilities. Personality traits can describe who is more likely to perceive conflict and how that conflict will be managed. Organizational studies, however, are yet to reach a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between personality and conflict, although personality helps critically in determining interpersonal interactions (Barrick, 2005).

The five factors of personality have contributed to a new way of looking at personality (Peabody & Goldberg, 1989; McCrae & Costa, 1987). The five factors of personality are extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness, and neuroticism, which measure dispositional categories under which a variety of specific traits are subsumed. Digman (1990) concluded that the five factors of personality are a fundamental model for describing personality. This study intends to determine whether strong relationships exist between dispositional categories and conflict management styles (Antonioni, 2008).

As people grow and develop, they also develop preferences and strategies for dealing with the world around them. Because conflict is an unavoidable part of life, at least one of these strategies must be to manage conflict. Scholars have determined that people typically have a preferred conflict style, and according to Kaimenyi (2014), these conflict style preferences develop because of a complex mix of history and personal traits, which are nurture and nature. Although there have been many models utilised over the years to explain and describe conflict styles, the model that will be utilised in this discussion is the Rahim (1983) model. Many factors, both interpersonal and intrapersonal, are believed to affect how employees will choose to manage conflict. It has even been observed that although employees have preferred styles, they will typically vary their conflict style depending on the context of the conflict. For example, it is not unusual for employees to use one conflict style at home with their family members and another at work with their colleagues. The use of varying conflict styles during a single conflict episode has even been observed. For example, a person may begin a conflict by avoiding, then transition to dominating, and end the conflict with an integrating style. One area that has been of interest to scholars is the role of intrapersonal attributes, one of which is personality, in the choice of preferred conflict style. This discussion will explore the literature concerning personality traits and conflict management styles. Of particular interest in this discussion is the role played by personality traits in the preferred conflict management style (Patel, 2012).

Early studies on the interaction between personality traits and conflict management styles have

produced inconsistent results. However, this does not necessarily mean that conflict management style cannot be predicted by personality traits or that no relationship exists between personality and conflict management style (Antonioni, 1998). A search of multiple databases resulted in four studies investigating the associations between the Five-factor model of personality and conflict management style (Zaso et al., 2021; Ahmed et al., 2010), and four studies investigating the association between personality traits, conflict management style, and other factors (Aliakbari & Amiri, 2016; Barbuto et al., 2010). The four studies that investigated other factors still conducted analyses and produced results concerning the relationship between personality and conflict style.

Thus, the results of these studies are still relevant to this discussion. Antonioni's (1998) study, which was the most comprehensive, advanced a hypothesis concerning how almost every personality attribute would predict each conflict management style. Antonioni argued that in order to successfully utilise a specific conflict management style, one would need to possess certain personal attributes or skills. For example, Antonioni believed that a requirement to use the integrating style was that people be able to work collaboratively to find solutions and solve problems in a manner that is satisfactory to all parties involved. However, those who prefer to avoid conflict may be quiet or timid and tend to prefer to maintain harmony. They may also tend to procrastinate when dealing with conflicts and may not be open to new ideas or compromise. Similarly, those who prefer the obliging style will also wish to maintain harmony, but unlike the avoider, the obligor demonstrates a high level of concern for the other's interests. Conversely, those who prefer a dominating style show a high level of concern for their own interests and low concern for the other's interests; thus, they are more likely to be aggressive, persistent, closed-minded, and strategic. Antonioni stated that compromising, by its very nature as a blend between yielding and problem-solving, is more difficult to predict. However, he further states that some traits, such as flexibility, may play a role in preferring compromise as a conflict management strategy.

2.7 Relationship between personality traits and relationship quality

According to Rainey and Petkari (2019) and Thibaut and Kelley (2017), within every relationship, individuals try to maximize rewards such as happiness, social status, and pleasure, while minimizing costs such as anxiety, negative emotions, and conflict. Hence, in employees' relationships, individuals expect their relationships to benefit them through social support (Shapiro & Martin, 2010), increased technical skills, and individual and team success (Casper et al., 2007). However, due to the competitive nature of these relationships, such interactions may sometimes be negative (Eime et al., 2013). Importantly, such

relationships can help individuals manage stress, cultivate skill development, improve social relationships, prolong participation, and enable employees to reach their full mental and potential to enhance performance success (Jowett & Nezelek, 2012; Allen et al., 2011). This perception is derived from three distinct facets of social relationships: social support, depth, and conflict (Uchino, 2006), which have a major influence on employees' health and well-being. Social support is the perception of an interactive, interpersonal connectedness (Sarason & Sarason, 1985), and when received from peer employees, it is connected to increased self-motivation and reduced burnout (DeFreese & Smith, 2013). Relationship depth refers to the extent to which an individual perceives a relationship as important, positive, and secure, thereby enhancing the sense of cohesion in employees' peer relationships (Bosselut et al., 2012). The third facet of relationships, conflict, refers to a struggle between two individuals with opposing values, needs, beliefs, or goals (Vazou et al., 2005). Although this conflict is prominent in employee intra-group relationships, it has been largely unexplored (Carron et al., 2014).

The role and significance of close relationships in people's growth and development have been extensively discussed in social psychology (Harvey, 1987). There is substantial evidence demonstrating the effect that personality traits have on individuals' interpersonal and relational outcomes (S. X. Yang et al., 2015; B. Jackson et al., 2010). Moreover, the links between personality and close relationships have been viewed as a platform from which interpersonal behaviours and interactions occur and unfold (M. L. Cooper & Sheldon, 2002). Subsequently, personality and relationships together seem to form parts of a system that can help generate knowledge and understanding of human behaviour. The significance of considering personality and relationships as part of an integrated system is reflected in its long research tradition. Each of these five factors influences employees' thought processes, behaviours, and social relationships (Allen & Laborde, 2014).

The Five-Factor Model of personality comprises the five personality traits of extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness to experience (McCrae & Costa, 1987). Within relationship research, agreeableness has been associated with individuals whose personality is characterized by cooperation, trust, and understanding. Such individuals are more likely to perceive their relationships as supportive, satisfying, committed, and non-conflictual (Cuperman & Ickes, 2009). Correspondingly, extraversion is a personality trait characterized by sociability and gregariousness; extraverted individuals are more likely to perceive their relationships as positive, responsive, and close (Berry et al., 2000). Conscientious individuals, whose personalities are underlined by being reliable, disciplined, organized, and goal-oriented, have been found to be more satisfied and committed to their relationships (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). In contrast, neurotic individuals tend to experience negative affect; therefore, they are more likely to perceive their

relationships as stressful, conflictual, dissatisfying, and noncommittal, which can lead to potential dissolution in relationships (White et al., 2004). Lastly, openness is a characteristic of individuals who are inclined to experiment and favour creativity, innovation, and imagination. Such personality traits have been found to be associated with relationships that are conversational in nature, accommodating, close, empathic, and satisfying (Berry et al., 2000; McCrae, 1996).

2.8 Relationship between relationship quality and conflict management styles

Resolving conflict properly is an effective way of improving the relationship quality between employees (Xu & Ren, 2010). Conflict management styles are important antecedents of relationship quality among employees. Failure to manage and control conflict between the two sides will lead to a deterioration of relationship quality and further escalation of the conflict. Thus, conflict and relationship quality can form a vicious cycle due to mismanagement of conflict (Jelodar et al., 2015). Bearing this in mind, it is necessary to study the influence of different conflict management styles on relationship quality (Jelodar & Yiu, 2012). According to contingency theory, conflict must be managed effectively to ensure a positive outcome (Jehn & Bendersky, 2003). Existing research shows that the effectiveness of specific conflict management styles changes with different levels of conflict (Xie et al., 1998). This means that the extent of the positive effect of a specific conflict management style on outcome variables will vary with the level of conflict. However, the influence of conflict in organizations is complex and may be positive or negative depending on the type of conflict and the conflict management styles used (Liu & Zhai, 2011). Conflict can be divided into two categories: task conflict and relationship conflict. Task conflict includes task inconsistency and may promote the completion of goals. In contrast, relationship conflict includes emotional or personal problems, which may negatively affect the relationship between the two sides (Li et al., 2015).

This study considers relationship quality between employees, defined as the overall evaluation or perception of the state of the relationship between the two sides (Lu & Wang, 2017). According to Jelodar & Yiu (2012), conflict management styles affect relationship quality between the two sides. This study adopts the two-dimensional model of M. A. Rahim (2017), based on concern for self and concern for others. It includes five styles of conflict management: integrating, obliging, compromising, dominating, and avoiding. Top management must know the effective ways to deal with conflict in different situations. Additionally, different conflict management styles may be appropriate in different contexts. If a style can enhance the effectiveness of individuals, groups, or organizations, it can be viewed as a win-win style (M. A. Rahim, 2017). Research on interpersonal conflict in the construction industry shows that avoiding and dominating styles are

negatively related to interpersonal relationships. Obliging is sometimes positively and sometimes negatively related to interpersonal relationships. Only integrating is consistently positively related to interpersonal relationships. Moreover, compromising has no significant effect on interpersonal relationships (Burke, 1970).

The more agreeable the conflict management style, the more effective it is in resolving conflicts and maximizing relationship quality (Dechurch & Marks, 2001). Existing studies indicate that the effectiveness of each conflict management style varies depending on the level of conflict (Xie et al., 1998). Research on interpersonal conflict shows that the most effective conflict management style for interpersonal relationships is the integrating style, which is particularly effective at a high level of conflict. The compromising and avoiding styles negatively affect interpersonal relationships at a low level of conflict but have a positive effect on interpersonal relationships at a high level of conflict (Andrews & Tjosvold, 1983).

Conflict management styles will affect the relationship quality between the two parties involved in the conflict (Jelodar & Yiu, 2012). Integrating considers both others' and the self's concerns. The first step in achieving integration is to face the real problem, expose the conflict, and make everything open (Kramer & Gray, 1990). Integrating is a win-win conflict management style, which some scholars consider the most appropriate and effective style because it focuses on reducing pressure for both sides, consolidating commitment between the two parties, and improving employees' job performance and satisfaction, which benefits relationship quality. The obliging style represents high concern for others and low concern for the self, emphasizing meeting the needs of the other party at the expense of one's own needs (Rahim, 2017). This implies self-sacrifice, making concessions to others, and being loyal to others (Thammavijitdej & Horayangkura, 2016), which can also benefit relationship quality. The compromising style means giving up less than the obliging style, but it does not achieve a win-win situation (M. A. Rahim, 2017). It represents a compromise between the two parties, where both will lose some of their interests (Sunindijo & Hadikusumo, 2014). The level of agreeableness in the compromising style is just above that of the dominating style among the five conflict management styles (Dechurch & Marks, 2001). Additionally, the compromising style is associated with both functional and dysfunctional outcomes; thus, while it may not lead to further differences, it may be difficult to reduce the level of conflict (Cheung et al., 2006).

Therefore, although compromising can enable the parties to reach a middle ground, both sides will need to take a step back and sacrifice some of their own interests. Thus, compromising may not be the optimal style for resolving conflict (Shih & Susanto, 2010). The interests that the parties sacrifice may give rise to some dissatisfaction, thereby harming relationship quality. Dominating and avoiding are styles characterized by lower concern for others.

Dominating entails one party imposing its own views on the other, leading to a win-lose situation where one party wins at the expense of the other. Avoiding is also a rather negative response to conflict, ignoring the considerations of all parties (Prieto-Remón et al., 2015). The use of the avoiding style will not resolve conflict in the early stages, which is harmful to relationship quality (Xie et al., 1998). Therefore, neither of these two styles can improve relationship quality.

Based on the review of previous literature, the conceptual framework has been developed, as shown in Figure 2. Figure 2 illustrates the mediated relationship between personality traits and conflict management styles through relationship quality. The researcher adopted and adapted the framework from Ayub et al. (2017), Lu & Wang (2017), and Holland & Roisman (2008) based on the relationships among the variables. There are three types of variables that have been applied in this study: independent variable, mediating variable, and dependent variable. The researcher chose five styles of conflict management that can be related to five types of personality traits and relationship quality. The framework of this study presents the relationships between personality traits, relationship quality, and conflict management styles.

The study investigates the interaction between personality traits and conflict management styles through relationship quality.

2.9 Conceptual Framework

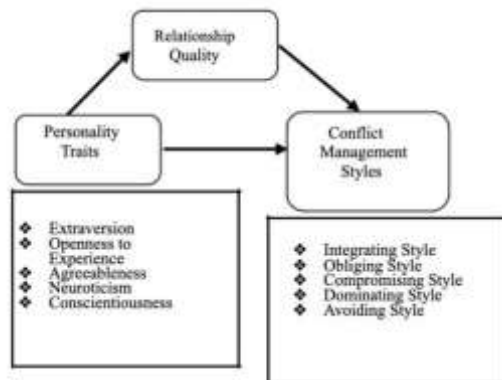


Figure 2 The conceptual framework of the mediated relationship between personality traits

2.10 Hypotheses

Based on the various studies on the relationship between the five-factor model of personality traits, relationship quality, and conflict management styles available in the literature, the following hypotheses will be formulated for the research.

H1: There is a significant relationship between the five-factor model of personality traits and conflict management styles.

H1a: The five-factor model of personality traits has a significant and positive relationship with the integrating style.

H1a1: Extraversion has a significant and positive relationship with the integrating style.

H1a2: Openness to experience has a significant and positive relationship with the integrating style.

H1a3: Agreeableness has a significant and positive relationship with the integrating style.

H1a4: Conscientiousness has a significant and positive relationship with the integrating style.

H1a5: Neuroticism has a significant and positive relationship with the integrating style.

H1b: The five-factor model of personality traits has a significant and positive relationship with the obliging style.

H1b1: Extraversion has a significant and positive relationship with the obliging style.

H1b2: Openness to experience has a significant and positive relationship with the obliging style.

H1b3: Agreeableness has a significant and positive relationship with the obliging style.

H1b4: Conscientiousness has a significant and positive relationship with the obliging style.

H1b5: Neuroticism has a significant and positive relationship with the obliging style.

H1c: The Five-factor model of personality traits has a significant and positive relationship with the dominating style.

H1c1: Extraversion has a significant and positive relationship with the dominating style.

H1c2: Openness to experience has a significant and positive relationship with the dominating style.

H1c3: Agreeableness has a significant and positive relationship with the dominating style.

H1c4: Conscientiousness has a significant and positive relationship with the dominating style.

H1c5: Neuroticism has a significant and positive relationship with the dominating style.

H1d: The five-factor model of personality traits has a significant and positive relationship with the avoiding style.

H1d1: Extraversion has a significant and positive relationship with the avoiding style.

H1d2: Openness to experience has a significant and positive relationship with the avoiding style.

H1d3: Agreeableness has a significant and positive relationship with the avoiding style.

H1d4: Conscientiousness has a significant and positive relationship with the avoiding style.

H1d5: Neuroticism has a significant and positive relationship with the avoiding style.

H1e: The five-factor model of personality traits has a significant and positive relationship with the compromising style.

H1e1: Extraversion has a significant and positive relationship with the compromising style.

H1e2: Openness to experience has a significant and positive relationship with the compromising style.

H1e3: Agreeableness has a significant and positive relationship with the compromising style.

H1e4: Conscientiousness has a significant and positive relationship with the compromising style.

H1e5: Neuroticism has a significant and positive relationship with the compromising style.

H2: There is a significant relationship between the five-factor model of personality traits and relationship quality.

H2a: Extraversion has a significant and positive relationship with relationship quality.

H2b: Openness to experience has a significant and positive relationship with relationship quality.

H2c: Agreeableness has a significant and positive relationship with relationship quality.

H2d: Conscientiousness has a significant and positive relationship with relationship quality.

H2e: Neuroticism has a significant and positive relationship with relationship quality.

H3: There is a significant relationship between relationship quality and conflict management.

H3a: There is a significant relationship of relationship quality with the integrating style.

H3b: There is a significant relationship of relationship quality with the obliging style.

H3c: There is a significant relationship of relationship quality with the dominating style.

H3d: There is a significant relationship of relationship quality with the avoiding style.

H3e: There is a significant relationship between relationship quality with the compromising style.

H4: Relationship quality will mediate the relationship between the five-factor model of personality traits and conflict management style.

H4a: Relationship quality has a mediating effect on agreeableness and conflict management styles.

H4b: Relationship quality has a mediating effect on conscientiousness and conflict management styles.

H4c: Relationship quality has a mediating effect on extraversion and conflict management styles.

H4d: Relationship quality has a mediating effect on neuroticism and conflict management styles.

H4e: Relationship quality has a mediating effect on openness to experience and conflict management styles

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The sampling frame of this study will involve selected employees from the departments and units at the State Secretariat of Pahang State Government. The list of employees' names was obtained from all departments and units, totaling over 472 employees. The respondents will be selected based on the number of employees in each department and unit. A total of 214 employees will be selected randomly as respondents. The Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) will be used to

analyze the data obtained from the questionnaire. According to Hair et al. (2013), PLS-SEM is a method of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) that allows for estimating complex cause-effect relationship models with latent variables. The researcher will use PLS-SEM to estimate complex models with many constructs, indicator variables, and structural paths without imposing distributional assumptions on the data. This method helps determine how well the model explains the target constructs of interest. The type of measurement model in Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) used in this study is a reflective measurement scale.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The responses from the respondents were entered into the software, and statistical analyses such as descriptive statistics and frequencies were measured. Furthermore, this process allows the researcher to identify any potential missing data and errors in the responses. Any missing values in the responses were removed from the data entry. PLS-SEM specifically assesses the effectiveness of the measurement model to ensure both the reliability and validity of the constructs. After the assessment of the measurement model is completed, the analysis continues with the evaluation of the structural model. The measurement model involves the assessment of the indicators, reliability, and validity. The indicators examined include the reflective measurements, as well as their reliability and validity. The structural model analyzes the results of the relationships among the latent variables or constructs. This analysis includes the coefficient of determination (R^2), path coefficients, predictive relevance (Q^2), and direct and indirect effects (mediating effects). The structural model in PLS-SEM represents the relationships among constructs.

4.1 Assessment of Measurement Model

The assessment of the measurement model focuses on measuring the relationships between indicators and latent variables using Smart PLS 3.9. Smart PLS 3.9 is utilized to assess both the measurement and structural models (Ringle et al., 2018). This statistical software evaluates the psychometric properties of the measurement model and estimates the parameters of the structural model. The purpose of the measurement model is to determine the quality of the model, ensuring it fits well with the data. Four main criteria need to be met in the reflective measurement model: internal consistency, indicator reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. The following sections present the results of all analyses to evaluate the validity and reliability of the measurement model.

Concerns the ability of the variables to provide consistent measurements, while validity measures the extent to which the variables are measuring what they are supposed to measure (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). Therefore, due to the limitations of Cronbach's alpha, this study uses

composite reliability (CR) as an alternative measure of internal consistency, as it considers the loadings of all items (David et al., 2000). A value of 0.7 is deemed acceptable; however, CR values should ideally be 0.8 or higher to indicate good internal consistency (Sarstedt et al., 2011). Table 1 shows that the CR values of each construct for this study range from 0.759 to 0.904. The CR values for all the items are: CSM (0.904), PTA (0.807), PTC (0.864), PTE (0.759), PTN (0.859), PTO (0.851), and RQ (0.949). These results indicate that the items used to represent the constructs demonstrate satisfactory internal consistency reliability.

4.1.2 Indicator Reliability

The indicator reliability of the measurement model is assessed by examining the item loadings. A measurement model is considered to have satisfactory indicator reliability when each item's loading estimate is between 0.5 and 0.7 (Hair et al., 2010). Based on the analysis, all items in the measurement model exhibited loadings exceeding 0.5, ranging from a lower bound of 0.503 to an upper bound of 0.823. Table 1 shows that all loadings for the respective items are greater than 0.5, indicating acceptable values. Thus, this indicates that all loadings are consistent in measuring what they intend to measure and are valid for use in the measurement study.

Table 1
Construct Reliability Analysis (Cronbach Alpha and Composite Reliability)

	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (CR)
CMS	0.878	0.904
PTA	0.711	0.807
PTC	0.812	0.864
PTE	0.553	0.759
PTN	0.814	0.859
PTO	0.781	0.851
RQ	0.928	0.949

4.1.1 Internal Consistency

4.1.3 Convergent Validity

Hair et al. (2010) suggested several methods to estimate convergent validity among item measures, including factor loadings, average variance extracted (AVE), and composite reliability (CR). The loadings for all items should exceed the recommended value of 0.50 or higher (Hair et al., 2017). The average variance extracted (AVE), which reflects the mean variance extracted for the items loading on a construct, was above the recommended value of 0.50 (Hair et al., 2010), indicating that more than half of the variances observed in the items were accounted for by their hypothesized factors (Liao et al., 2014). Statistically, using PLS-SEM, construct validity is established when

both convergent and discriminant validity are satisfied. The AVE for this study ranged from 0.503 to 0.823. Composite reliability, which indicates the degree to which the latent variables can be explained by the observed variables (Wong, 2013), ranged from 0.759 to 0.949, exceeding the cut-off value of 0.6 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988).

Thus, this study confirms the existence of convergent validity. Table 2 summarizes the results of the measurement model, showing that all constructs are valid measures of their respective constructs. The AVE results for CSM (0.503), PTA (0.520), PTC (0.515), PTE (0.517), PTN (0.505), PTO (0.538), and RQ (0.823) indicate that all items have an AVE score of more than 0.5, confirming that convergent validity is achieved.

Table 2
Internal Consistency, Indicator Reliability and Convergent Validity

Construct	Item	Loading	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Composite Reliability (CR)			
CMS	CMSA5	0.331	0.503	0.904			
	CMSC3	0.573					
	CMSD4	0.460					
	CMSI2	0.800					
	CMSI3	0.822					
	CMSI4	0.859					
	CMSI5	0.765					
	CMSI6	0.862					
PTA	CMSI7	0.858	0.520	0.807			
	CMSO1	0.514					
	PTA10	0.736					
	PTA2	0.490					
	PTA3	0.768					
	PTA4	0.842					
	PTC	PTC1			0.703	0.515	0.864
		PTC2			0.658		
PTC4		0.631					
PTC7		0.759					
PTC8		0.817					
PTE	PTC9	0.724	0.517	0.759			
	PTE6	0.746					
	PTE7	0.588					
PTN	PTE8	0.805	0.505	0.859			
	PTN1	0.703					
	PTN3	0.763					
	PTN5	0.798					
	PTN6	0.674					
	PTN7	0.645					
	PTN8	0.668					
	PTO	PTO			0.801	0.538	0.851
PTO		0.573					
PTO		0.650					
PTO		0.825					
PTO		0.787					
RQ	RQP1	0.899	0.823	0.949			
	RQP2	0.896					
	RQP3	0.925					
	RQP4	0.908					

4.1.4 Discriminant Validity

The discriminant validity test was conducted after the convergent validity test. This verification was administrated to evaluate whether a specific variable interpreted a certain measurement.

Henseler et al. (2015) proposed a Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT) correlation which is something more prevailing. The HTMT is defined as the mean value of item correlations across constructs relative to the mean (geometric) correlations for items measuring the same construct. The discriminant validity problem is present when the HTMT value is high. In such a setting, HTMT value above 0.90 would indicate that discriminant validity does not exist.

By referring to table 4.8, it has shown the highest validity.

Table 3
Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio Correlation Result (HTMT)

	CMS	PTA	PTC	PTE	PTN
Conflict Management Styles					
Personality Traits Agreeableness	0.475				
Personality Traits Conscientiousness	0.600	0.463			
Personality Traits Extraversion	0.219	0.296	0.422		
Personality Traits Neuroticism	0.191	0.148	0.180	0.193	
Personality Traits Openness to Experience	0.446	0.792	0.489	0.341	0.205
Relationship Quality	0.453	0.401	0.490	0.314	0.265

The value of HTMT is 0.475. Based on table 3 shows that the HTMT values for all items are less than 0.90 which suggests that discriminant validity has been established. Assessment of Collinearity In PLS, the assessment of collinearity can be confirmed through the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF). VIF is a tool to measure how much variance is being inflated (Daoud, 2018). If the value of VIF is found to be less than 5, the multicollinearity issues are not a problem (Hair et al., 2012). Based on Table 4, the Inner VIF values for all independent variables are less than 5, which indicates that multicollinearity is not an issue for this study. Thus, path coefficient assessment can proceed.

4.2 Assessment of Structural Model

Once the construct has been confirmed to be reliable and proceed. Hair et al. (2012) have suggested that the bootstrapping method of re-sampling techniques must be carried out before an experience was conducted to check the result of the hypothesis throughout the research and determination of its significance structural model or hypotheses testing will be shown in the following section. There are five steps to evaluate the structural model in PLS-SEM which are assessment significance and relevance of the structural model, assessment of coefficient of determination known as R², and assessment of effect size known as (f²).

Table 4

Literal Collinearity Assessment Result	
Construc t	RQ (Inner VIF)
PT Agreeableness	1.598
PT Conscientiousness	1.365
PT Extraversion	1.114
PT Neuroticism	1.070
PT Openness to Experience	1.637

4.2.2 Assessment of Coefficient of Determination (R²)

R-square statistics explain the variance in the endogenous variable that is accounted for by the exogenous variables. In simpler terms, it reflects how much change in the dependent variable can be attributed to one or more independent variables. Based on Table 5, the R-square value for this study is 0.176, indicating that a total of 17.6% of the variance in the dependent variable (Conflict Management Styles) is explained. Additionally, the R-square value of 0.329 indicates that a total of 32.9% of the variance in the mediating variable (Relationship Quality) is explained. Falk & Miller (1992) recommended that R² should be equal to or greater than 0.10 for the variance explained of a particular endogenous construct to be considered adequate. Cohen (1998) suggested R² values for endogenous latent variables as follows: 0.26 (substantial), 0.13 (moderate), and 0.02 (weak).

Table 5
Coefficient of Determination (R²) Result

	R Square	R Square Adjusted
CMS	0.176	0.173
RQ	0.329	0.313

4.2.3 Assessment of Effect Size (f²)

The difference in the R² value was further utilized for calculating the effect size (f²), which indicates the impact of an exogenous latent variable on an endogenous variable. Effect size is assessed to determine the strength of the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. Cohen (1992) suggested that an effect size value of 0.02 is considered small, 0.15 as medium, and 0.35 as large. The effect size (f²) for this study is 0.3442, which can be concluded as medium according to Cohen (1992).

4.3 Hypothesis testing

Table 6 and Table 7 present the results of the hypotheses for direct and indirect relationships. The results show that H1a, H1b, H1c, H1d, and H1e demonstrate a strong relationship between personality traits and conflict management styles in the hypothesised direction ($\beta=0.030$, $p<0.028$; $\beta=0.034$, $p<0.004$; $\beta=0.027$, $p<0.022$; $\beta=0.028$, $p<0.000$;

$\beta=0.034$, $p<0.039$). Meanwhile, H2a, H2b, H2c, H2d, and H2e also have a strong relationship between relationship quality and conflict management styles in the hypothesis direction ($\beta=0.066$, $p<0.015$; $\beta=0.066$, $p<0.000$; $\beta=0.058$, $p<0.012$; $\beta=0.049$, $p<0.000$; $\beta=0.074$, $p<0.024$). H3 has a significant relationship between relationship quality and conflict management styles and in the hypothesized direction ($\beta=0.059$, $p<0.000$). Therefore, hypotheses H1, H2, and H3 are supported.

Table 6

Hypothesis Result Hypothesis 1

H	Relationship	Path Coefficient	t-value	p-value	Decision
H1a	PTA → CMS	0.030	2.200	0.028	Supported
H1b	PTC → CMS	0.034	2.866	0.004	Supported
H1c	PTE → CMS	0.027	2.292	0.022	Supported
H1d	PTN → CMS	0.028	4.114	0.000	Supported
H1e	PTO → CMS	0.034	2.066	0.039	Supported

Table 7

Hypothesis Result Hypothesis 2 and Hypothesis 3

H	Relationship	Path Coefficient	t-value	p-value	Decision
H2a	PTA → RQ	0.066	2.422	0.015	Supported
H2b	PTC → RQ	0.066	3.492	0.000	Supported
H2c	PTE → RQ	0.058	2.505	0.012	Supported
H2d	PTN → RQ	0.049	5.497	0.000	Supported
H2e	PTO → RQ	0.074	2.262	0.024	Supported
H3	RQ → CMS	0.059	7.136	0.000	Supported

4.4 Mediation Analysis

Mediation analysis was conducted to evaluate the mediating role of Relationship Quality (RQ) in the connection between Personality Traits (PT) and Conflict Management Styles (CMS). This section discusses the mediation analysis used to test hypotheses H1, H2, H3, H4, and H5. Preacher and Hayes (2008) define mediation analysis as a method for hypothesizing how or through what means the predictor (X) influences the outcome (Y) via a mediator (M). In this context, the study aimed to determine whether relationship quality mediates the relationship between personality traits and conflict management styles. Following recommendations from previous research suggesting the use of the bootstrapping method to assess mediation effects (Preacher & Hayes, 2004), this study employed the bootstrapping analysis method outlined by Preacher and Hayes (2008). The five mediation hypotheses are formulated as follows:

H4a: Relationship quality has a mediating effect on agreeableness and conflict management styles. H4b: Relationship quality has a mediating effect on conscientiousness and conflict management styles.

H4c: Relationship quality has a mediating effect on extraversion and conflict management styles. H4d: Relationship quality has a mediating effect on neuroticism and conflict management styles.

H4e: Relationship quality has a mediating effect on openness to experience and conflict management styles.

4.4.1 Result from the Bootstrapping Analysis

Since the predictor comprises two variables, which are personality traits and conflict management styles, the bootstrapping analysis is done separately for each predictor. The data is analysed on mediation by implementing the Preacher & Hayes (2008) script in Smart PLS version 3.0. The results and interpretation of the bootstrapping analysis are provided as follows:

Table 8

The results and interpretation of bootstrapping analysis

	PT>RQ	RQ>CMS	PT>CMS	H
H4a	$\beta=0.159$, $t=2.422$, $p < 0.01$	$\beta=0.420$, $t=7.136$, $p < 0.000$	$\beta=0.067$, $t=2.200$, $p < 0.01$	$\beta=$ 0.003, CI= 0.010 to 0.130
H4b	$\beta=0.232$, $t=3.492$, $p < 0.000$	$\beta=0.420$, $t=7.136$, $p < 0.000$	$\beta=0.067$, $t=2.866$, $p < 0.01$	$\beta=$ 0.000, CI= 0.039 to 0.172
H4c	$\beta=0.146$, $t=2.505$, $p < 0.01$	$\beta=0.420$, $t=7.136$, $p < 0.000$	$\beta=0.061$, $t=2.292$, $p < 0.01$	$\beta=$ 0.003, CI= 0.007 to 0.113
H4d	$\beta=-0.271$, $t=5.497$, $p < 0.000$	$\beta=0.420$, $t=7.136$, $p < 0.000$	$\beta=-0.114$, $t=4.114$, $p < 0.000$	$\beta=$ -0.007, CI= -0.0164 to - 0.061
H4e	$\beta=0.168$, $t=2.262$, $p < 0.01$	$\beta=0.420$, $t=7.136$, $p < 0.000$	$\beta=0.070$, $t=2.066$, $p < 0.01$	$\beta=$ 0.005, CI= 0.005 to 0.139

4.4.2 Result of the Hypothesis (Hypothesis 4)

The purpose of this research is to determine how variables in the extended Theory of the Five-factor of Personality Traits and the mediating relationship quality can be tested as a predictor of the conflict management style. Table 18 summarizes the result of the hypothesized relationship in this study.

Accordingly, hypotheses H4a, H4b, H4c, H4d, and H4e were supported in this study with the presence of the mediator showing that personality traits were significantly related to Conflict Management Style.

Table 9
Summary of hypothesized relationship

H	Hypotheses	Result	Decision
H4a	Relationship quality has a mediating effect on agreeableness and conflict management styles.	Positively Significant	Supported
H4b	Relationship quality has a mediating effect on conscientiousness and conflict management styles.	Positively Significant	Supported
H4c	Relationship quality has a mediating effect on extraversion and conflict management styles.	Positively Significant	Supported
H4d	Relationship quality has a mediating effect on neuroticism and conflict management styles.	Positively Significant	Supported
H4e	Relationship quality has a mediating effect on openness to experience and conflict management styles.	Positively Significant	Supported

5. DISCUSSION

The underlying theory used to explain the theoretical framework and research hypotheses was derived from two different resources. Firstly, the Five-factor of personality traits by McCrae and Costa. The second is the theory from the Rahim Model of conflict management style. This section summarized the research objectives and research questions, as well as provided justification based on the findings, as follows:

Research Objective 1: To identify the relationship between the five-factor model of personality traits and conflict management styles.

Which type of the five-factor personality traits have a relationship with conflict management styles?

This research has examined the relationship between five-factor of personality traits and conflict management styles. The result from the total effect showed that the relationship between five-factor of personality traits and conflict management styles: Agreeableness ($\beta=0.030$, $t=2.200$, $p<0.028$), conscientiousness ($\beta=0.034$, $t=2.866$, $p<0.040$), extraversion ($\beta=0.027$, $t=2.292$, $p<0.022$), neuroticism

($\beta=0.028$, $t=4.114$, $p<0.000$), and openness to experience ($\beta=0.034$, $t=2.066$, $p<0.039$) respectively, describes that there is a significant relationship between variables.

Research Objective 2: To examine the relationship between the five-factor model of personality traits and relationship quality.

Is there any relationship between personality traits and relationship quality?

In this research, the relationship between the five-factor model of personality traits and relationship quality is determined to be tested. The result shows that the relationship between the five-factor model of personality traits and relationship quality are Agreeableness ($\beta=0.066$, $t=2.422$, $p<0.015$), conscientiousness ($\beta=0.066$, $t=3.492$, $p<0.000$), extraversion ($\beta=0.058$, $t=2.505$, $p<0.012$), neuroticism ($\beta=0.049$, $t=5.497$, $p<0.000$), and openness to experience ($\beta=0.074$, $t=2.262$, $p<0.024$). All five factors in the model of personality traits show a significant relationship with relationship quality in this study. The findings expected that personality traits would predict changes in subsequent relationship quality (Malouff et al., 2010). It has been hypothesized that lower neuroticism and higher extraversion, agreeableness, openness to experience, and conscientiousness would predict decreases in conflict and positive changes in relationship quality.

Research Objective 3: To measure the relationship between relationship quality and conflict management styles.

Is there any relationship between relationship quality and conflict management styles?

The relationship between the mediator and the outcome was revealed to have a positive significance with conflict management styles in this study. Based on a two-tailed analysis, results for the relationship quality to conflict management styles are shown ($\beta=0.420$, $t=7.136$, $p<0.000$). The correlation analysis was used to determine the strength of the relationship between the two variables based on Cronbach's alpha results: conflict management styles, $r=0.878$, and relationship quality, $r=0.928$. It indicates that there is a very strong positive relationship between relationship quality and conflict management styles. This result supports previous studies that investigated the same variables (Ataee, 2020). Based on the result of the R-square value for this study, 0.176 indicates that a total of 17.6% of the variance in the dependent variable can be explained by Conflict Management Styles, and 0.329 indicates that a total of 32.9% of the variance in the mediating variable is explained by Relationship Quality. The result of R^2 should be equal to or greater than 0.10 for the variance to be explained by a particular endogenous construct to be deemed adequate for this study.

Research Objective 4: To investigate the mediating effect of relationship quality on five-factor model of personality traits and conflict management styles.

Does relationship quality mediate the relationship between personality traits and conflict management styles?

The bootstrapping method of mediation analysis by Preacher & Hayes (2008) was employed to test the mediating effect of relationship quality in determining the relationship between the five factors of personality and conflict management styles. H1, H2, H3, H4, and H5 predicted the mediating role of relationship quality, which is explained by path c' ($c'=c+ab$). The result from the analysis confirms the mediating role of relationship quality, which includes positive and negative relationships in the relationship between the five factors of personality traits and conflict management styles. Results from the analysis discovered that path a, path b, and path c for the five factors of personality traits and conflict management styles showed a positive significant relationship. Hence, the bootstrapping bias-corrected confidence interval estimates were thoroughly observed.

Since zero falls outside the interval with agreeableness ($\beta=0.003$, $CI=0.010$ to 0.130), conscientiousness ($\beta=0.000$, $CI=0.039$ to 0.172), extraversion ($\beta=0.003$, $CI=0.007$ to 0.113), neuroticism ($\beta=-0.007$, $CI=-0.0164$ to -0.061), openness to experience ($\beta=0.005$, $CI=0.005$ to 0.139), and conflict management styles, the mediating roles of relationship quality in the relationship between the five factors of personality traits and conflict management styles can be assumed (Preacher & Hayes). Moreover, the direct effect – path c' also shows a significant result for agreeableness ($\beta=0.067$, $t=2.200$, $p < 0.01$), conscientiousness ($\beta=0.097$, $t=2.866$, $p < 0.01$), extraversion ($\beta=0.067$, $t=2.292$, $p < 0.01$), neuroticism ($\beta=-0.114$, $t=-4.114$, $p < 0.000$), and openness to experience ($\beta=0.070$, $t=2.066$, $p < 0.01$), which suggests that relationship quality has partially mediated the relationship between the five factors of personality traits and conflict management styles (Preacher & Hayes, 2008).

The findings of the mediation analysis performed in this study are supported by previous studies (Karen Jehn et al., 2017), indicating that relationship quality has a mediating effect on the relationship between personality traits and conflict management styles. Pertaining to the results from the mediation analysis, and the supporting literature from the previous studies, it is concluded that H4a, H4b, H4c, H4d, and H4e are supported in this study.

6. CONCLUSION

The current research used conflict management latent change scores to investigate the relationship between changes in relationship quality and personality traits among employees at the Secretary of Pahang State Government during the pandemic. The findings indicated changes in neuroticism, agreeableness, and extraversion. These results illustrate that personality in an emerging employee's life is not fixed. This research's findings suggest that life transitions, such as

pandemic transitions, present internal conditions associated with personality development. The findings revealed that not all personality traits were related to all relationship quality and conflict management styles. This is consistent not only with previous research in this area but also with personality traits and conflict management style theory.

Furthermore, the research has shown that maturity may have an impact on the five-factor model of personality among employees during the pandemic at the Secretary of Pahang State Government. As people age, they tend to become less extroverted, less neurotic, and less open to experience. Men and women have different biological roles. Gender differences in personality traits are often characterised in terms of which gender has higher scores on those traits. In this research, agreeableness comprises traits relating to altruism, such as empathy and kindness. This means that women, on average, are more nurturing, tender-minded, and altruistic more often and to a greater extent than men. However, such a finding does not preclude the fact that men may also experience nurturing, tender-minded, and altruistic states, and that some men may even score higher in these traits than some women. Therefore, from the researcher's perspective, these differences will impact how employees manage their personality traits and the quality of their relationships.

The research has important theoretical, managerial, and methodological implications for future researchers, educators, and policymakers. It also discusses the study's limitations and makes recommendations for future research. Meanwhile, the study's findings point to relationship quality as a mediating variable in the relationship between personality traits and conflict management styles among employees at the Pahang State Government's Secretary during the pandemic. Due to the immense pressures of the COVID-19 outbreak on the Secretary of Pahang State Government, issues such as employee behaviour and relationships are frequently overlooked. Working remotely during the pandemic causes management to miss warning signs of interpersonal conflict or to avoid it entirely.

When conflict is managed proactively and effectively, organisations can adapt and manage it in a way that improves employee well-being and engagement during the pandemic while maintaining the quality of their relationships.

As with all empirical research, this study is not without limitations, as it did not completely cover every aspect that has ever been discussed about conflict management styles, personality traits, and relationship quality. The findings of this research provided some unique insights into how conflicts are managed in organisations and the buffering effect that personality traits have in promoting good relationship quality in the workplace.

Another limitation is the cross-sectional survey design employed to measure the impact of conflict management on employee behaviour and relationships in the workplace during the pandemic. The situation revealed in the research may be different on another occasion. Therefore, future studies could turn this research into a continuous tracking (longitudinal)

study to better understand the changes in how conflict management styles influence personality traits and relationship quality among employees over time.

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Surat kami : 700-KPK (PRP.UP.1/20/1)

Tarikh : 20 Januari 2023

Prof. Madya Dr. Nur Hisham Ibrahim
Rektor
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Cawangan Perak



Tuan,

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2. Adalah dimaklumkan bahawa pihak kami ingin memohon kelulusan tuan untuk mengimbas (*digitize*) dan memuat naik semua jenis penerbitan di bawah UiTM Cawangan Perak melalui Repositori Institusi UiTM, PTAR.

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Kelulusan daripada pihak tuan dalam perkara ini amat dihargai.

Sekian, terima kasih.

“BERKHIDMAT UNTUK NEGARA”

Saya yang menjalankan amanah,

Setuju.

27.1.2023

SITI BASRIYAH SHAIK BAHARUDIN
Timbalan Ketua Pustakawan

PROF. MADYA DR. NUR HISHAM IBRAHIM
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