Pandemic: Linking the Big Five and Conflict Management Styles within the SMEs Context in Malaysia

Nur Lailatul Husna Mohammad Yusof, Abdul Halim Abdul Majid & Siti Norasyikin Abdul Hamid

School of Business Management, Universiti Utara Malaysia,Sintok, Kedah
Email: HusnaR84@gmail.com, ahalim@uum.edu.my, norasyikin@uum.edu.my

Abstract
Pandemic of Covid-19 outbreak has become a global disruption and affecting the global economy. As the phenomena are unprecedented, there is a lack of studies on the impact of pandemic on businesses especially among SMEs in Malaysia. Conflict and conflict management are nowadays are the focus of many organizations especially SMEs. SMEs and entrepreneurs are extremely worried on the conflict they are facing and the impact of pandemic Covid-19 on their liquidity position and business survival.Personality differences may be a major reason of conflict, as well as the perception of conflict and preference for handling that conflict. Managers' selective styles of conflict management have been affected by their unique characteristics such as personality differences. This conceptual paper aims to explore the role of personality traits in determining conflict management styles within SMEs context in Malaysia due to the pandemic situation. The Big Five factors are extroversion, openness, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and neuroticism, and the five conflict management styles are integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding, and compromising.
Keywords: SMEs, Big Five Personality Traits, Conflict Management Styles

Introduction
The beginning of the decade saw one of the most extraordinary crisis the human civilisation has ever seen. The crisis which stems from the emergence of COVID-19 in late 2019 at Wuhan in China quickly spread across the globe. The virus have now been reported in almost every country and terries in the world (World Health Organization, 2020). The response to control the spread has been equally extraordinary. Various measures were taken by countries to stem the spread of COVID-19, ranging from social restrictions to a full-fledged lockdowns (Kaplan et al., 2020). Malaysia is no exception to the full effect of the pandemic when the government of Malaysia accounced the promulgation of Movement Control Order (MCO) which is still ongoing as of February 2021 (Tang, 2020; Travel, 2021).

A crisis often result in changes of personality which greatly influence conflict management styles. Conflict is also an inevitable event within an organization and every part of social life, therefore manging it has become an important job function for managers in any organization. Previous studies estimated that the time spent by managers in dealing with conflicts at workplace has doubled from the mid 1970s until 2005 (Roberts, 2005; Thomas & Schmidt, 1976). Looking into Malaysian context, the workforce in the 21st century in the Malaysia has never been more diverse. This is especially true that people are different in many ways, especialy their personalities. Different personalities means different interpretation on people's feelings towards conflict and how they react to it. Different reactions to conflict may lead to different ways or management styles to handle the conflict. Various management styles to handle conflict will result in different outcomes from the conflict (Cheung et al., 2006).

Conflict is a pervasive aspect in both professional and social situations. It is put aptly by Landau, Landau and Landau (2001) when they say "Conflict exists in all human relationships: it always has and probably always will". Conflict occurs amony family members, friends, colleagues, superiors and subordinates, and many more. Conflict will continue to axist as long as there is human element present. Boohar (2001) stated that individuals who never experienced conflict in the workplace are "living in a dream world, blind to their surroundings or are confined to solitary confinement". Therefore, it is important to note that whenever there is interaction between people, the potential for conflict exists and it will greatly increase when those who seek a common goal were organized into groups. In many cases, a confict has negative connotation although only the most serious ones make headlines. Not all the conflicts are the same as one may have faced a more serious one while the other, less severe (Barker & Graham, 1987). The current research examined the relationship between the gender role and conflict handling styles.

Conflict management styles favored by individuals depend on factors such as personality (Ejaz et al., 2012; Anwar et al., 2012), emotional involvement, and the prevailing circumstances (Wilmot and Hocker, 2000). When choosing a conflict management style to be used in any conflict, it is suggested to use an alternative approach which recognizes that conflicts do happen without warning and such reactiveness is not preventable. Some critics argue that some individuals are not adptive enough to alternate conflict management styles due to their personalities largely dictate one style over another (Antonioni, 1998; Thomas, 1976). According to Carlson (2010), personality formation are influenced by genetics and environmental factors. Besides that, to some extent, individual personalities has been proven to be instrumental in conflict management styles (Ejaz et al., 2012; Wang, 2010), having an impact on the ways of how the employees interpret their organizational environment, and hence shaping the behaviors in light of those interpretations.

A literature review by Adler and Weiss (1998) reported that most of the organizational researchers either ignored or see personality variables in low regard. However, recent studies proved that significant relationship do exist between personality and work performance and work team effectiveness (Neuman and Wright, 1999; Wageman, 1999; Mount et al., 1998). Personality is found to be associated with quality of social interaction and social relationships people have (Connolly et al., 1987). Since social interactions take place on a daily basis and

also include conflict-based interactions, personality factors might be significant in how individuals deal with conflict.

When a conflict is dealt positively, it leads to agreement and helps to maintain relationship using change or tense phase (King, 1999: 11). Some people behave in a compassionate manner by understanding the feelings of others and responding with sympathy and kindness. Herkenhoff (2004) stated that people with emotional intelligence tend to make good friends, good partners, enhanced co-workers, and better leaders. Various types of personalities were described in various theories such as MBTI (Johnson and Johnson, 1997; Percival et al., 1992), Big Five model (Antioni, 1999, 2007) which has been found to influence the conflict handling strategies used by people in different social relations. A study by Terhune (1970) revealsed a strong relationship between conflict and personality traits exhibited by the parties in conflict situation. The same study indicates that conflict situations become tensed and touch when the conflicting parties exhibit personality attributes like dominance, authoritarianism, aggressiveness and suspicious nature. However, conflict situation can become manageable if the participants possess personality traits like trust, open mindedness and egalitarianism.

Small businesses were also subjected to conflicts and different styles of conflict management. Recent studies on conflict in small business had focused on conflict of interests and objectives (Vilaseca, 2002), team building and conflict management techniques (Filbeck and Smith, 1997), influences of work-family conflict on job satisfaction and quitting intentions among business owners (Boles et al., 1996), and conflict management strategies in small family businesses (Sorenson, 1999). However, most of the studies on conflict management in small or large firms tend to draw samples from the general population without distinguishing the influence of age groups or gender on conflict styles in their conclusions. This is because, the increasing number of women were moving into decision-making positions in organizations. The differences of gender might lead to the different styles of conflict mamnagement.

Many countries rely on small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to assist in national development. In the case of Malaysia, the country has a very clear expectation on the SMEs. SME assumes a critical role in the country's industrialization programme through the strengthening of both forward and backward industrial linkage.It has also set in place policies and programmmes to further develop and integrate domestic SMEs as the critical and strategic link to develop and strengthen the cluster formation and to increase domestic value-added. The SMEs will assume these roles by complementing the activities of large-scale industries through integration into the mainstream of the industrial development through the provision of critical parts and components as well as expanding their market internationally. As the SMEs grow, their progress will strengthen and widen the industrial base as well as enhancing export-led growth.

The working culture in Malaysia are characterized by underlying values of collectivist orientation, teamwork, cooperation, respect for seniors/elderly people and preserving face, respect for authority and hierarchy and values of harmony (Asma, 1992). Conflict is viewed as detrimental to team spirit and harmony since the Malays have traditionally lived in a cooperative and communal lifestyle. Any work for the society is done in a cooperative way in Malaysian context. By understanding the relationship between personality and conflict management styles, it may assist the managers to handle conflict more effectively and

achieve a desired outcome. However, the studies on the relationship between the five-factor personality and conflict lmanagement styles is rather limited. Furthermore, the researchers of these few studies reported inconsistent or even conflicting evidence (Antonioni, 1998; Moberg, 2001; Pepin, 2005; Whitworth, 2005). Therfore, this study intends to investigate to what extent the personality traits influence conflict mangement styles among SMEs in Malaysia.

Problem Statement
While conflict management is widely practiced by firms and other profit oriented organizations in this country, its adoption by private sector particularly in small firms context at operational level is less understood. The common issue today is that conflict management has become significant part of managers' responsibilities (Pondy, 1992; Pulhamus, 1991; Thomas & Schmidt, 1976).

Roberts (2005) estimated that "managers spend 40% to 90% of their time dealing with conflicts in one form or another." Many researchers have found increasing conflict in and among organizations (Amason, 1996; Amason et al., 1995; Jameson, 1999; Morris-Conley & Kern, 2003; Pondy, 1992; Shelton & Darling, 2004; Wall & Callister, 1995). Song et al (2006) stated "conflict management in firms appears to be more critical than ever" with different people have different conflict management styles. The way conflict management styles was adopted will affect the outcome of a conflict. There are different factors that may influence one's conflict management style; personality being one of it.

Employees experiencing too much conflict become more emotional and may lose their focus on tasks and duties and become less productive. Dysfunctional or destructive conflict can demoralize staff, decrease motivation and satisfaction, increase absenteeism and turnover, reducing collaboration and it is detrimental to organizational performance. Therefore, any conflict must be managed amicably, otherwise it may cause further problems down the road, reducing organizational productivity. Managers must be able to identify the root cause of the conflict so the can use appropriate strategies to manage or stimulate conflict.

Although studies on the relationship between personality and conflict management styles had been actively pursued before the five-factor model was available to researchers, there are only few studies on the relationship between personality based on the five-factor model and conflict management styles (Moberg, 2001). Furthermore, these studies produced inconsistent and conflicting results. For example, Pepin (2005) found that Big Five personality traits uniquely predicted individuals' conflict management styles but the other hand, Whitworth (2005) found there is no relationship between the personality factors of female registered nurses and their preferred method of dealing with conflict. Most of these researchers focused on the five coarse dimensions but not the fine personality traits – the subscales or facets that define these domains. Every fine personality traits that define each domain may have different degrees of influence on or opposite relationships with a preference for a certain conflict management style. This might be the reason or one of the reasons that contribute to the inconsistent and conflicting results. So, this research study not only focused on the relationship of the five coarse dimensions of personality but also explored the relationship of the fine facets of personality traits to the preference of conflict management styles.

Several researchers have, for decades, intended to expose the nature of the relationship between personality and conflict style (Anwar et al., 2012). Pepin (2005) stated that findings of these studies have been inconsistent, where a weak relationship between personality and style of conflict were found, while others found a strong relationship between them. Wang (2010) found a correlation between the five-factor model and conflict management styles. His study showed a positive relationship between integrating conflict style and openness to experience, but a negative relationship between integrating style and neuroticism. In addition, the obliging conflict style was positively associated with neuroticism, but negatively with extroversion. Furthermore, the avoiding conflict style was positively correlated to neuroticism, but negatively correlated to extroversion. Wang (2010) also established the existence of a positive correlation between the compromising style and agreeableness, and a negative correlation between the dominating style and agreeableness.

Another study by Ejaz et al (2012) was conducted whereby the study comprised call center representatives in Pakistan. The study reveals significant connotations among the diverse conflict handling styles and the Big Five traits whereby the results shown that both integrating and obliging conflict styles were positively correlated to openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness while the compromising and dominating conflict styles, were positively linked to openness and extroversion. In addition, the avoiding style was positively associated with neuroticism. But a separate study by Whitworth (2005) found no association between preferred conflict handling styles and personality factors among female nurses in Southern Mississippi.

The specific problem in many studies and practices in real corporate life is the lack of understanding the relationship between personality and conflict management styles. Very few research studies have actually examined the relationship between the five-factor personality and conflict management styles where some of it resulted in inconsistent or even conflicting findings (Antonioni, 1998; Pepin, 2005; Whitworth, 2005). Therefore, a better understanding of the relationship between personality and conflict management styles may help managers handle conflict in the workplace more effectively.

Gill (1992) in describing the Malaysian workforce, reported that Malaysians had a tendency to use the 'give and take approach'. Due to this, they either compromise or avoid conflicts. She posited that compromising was considered as a 'win-win' approach as it was intended to avoid embarrassment. Kabanoff (1989) stated that individuals using compromising stsyles were influenced by their positive evaluation of cooperation. Deutsch (1973); Leung (1988) and Kabanoff (1989) shared a common view that those who used such cooperative styles placed importance on relationship-maintenance aspects for future dealings. Kabanoff's (1989) study found that subjects believed that their willingness to sacrifice some of their own concern for the other person's concern was seen as being not only cooperative but as being strong as well.

In addition, Gill (1992); Abdullah (1992a); Mansor (1998); Kennedy (2002) emphasized the importance of hierarchy in a Malaysian environment. Seniority in position and age was a crucial factor to consider when dealing with conflict. This was because "authority was closely associated with seniority is still pretty much predominant in Malaysian work culture and subordinates tended to accept second place when dealing with someone senior" (Mansor,

1998). In addition, Abdullah and Gallagher (1995) reported that the focus on hierarchical differences is due to status, rank and titles which created communication barriers and did not bring about adult-to-adult communication between superiors and subordinates. Due to lack of studies on the influence of personality traits on conflict management styles among SME employees in Malaysia, this study aims to investigate the relationship between the five-factor personality and conflict management styles by surveying employees at SMEs in Malaysia.

Literature Review
A review of studies on relationships between personality described by the five factor model and conflict management styles reveals the need for this research study (Antonioni, 1998; Moberg, 2001; Pepin, 2005; Whitworth, 2005). This is mainly due to lack of studies and also there are few studies producing inconsistent and conflicting findings. For example, Pepin (2005) found that Big Five personality traits uniquely predicted individuals' conflict management styles, but a separate study by Whitworth (2005) shows no relationship exist between the personality factors of female registered nurses and their methods of dealing with conflict. Additionally, Antonioni (1998) obtained inconsistent results in his own study on the relationship between the Big Five personality factors and conflict management styles in two sets of sample groups. Furthermore, the relationship between personality and preference for conflict management styles is still not fully explored (Moberg, 2001).

Conflict management is the process of recognizing the conflict, determining its type and intensity, evaluating its effects, determining and implementing appropriate strategies which later measuring their results. Conflict management aims to maintain conflict level to the point that creates a dynamic, live and creative organization which encourages people to be innovative and productive (Mosadeghrad, 2015). Managers should encourage functional or constructive conflict and combat destructive conflict.

Organizational conflict may affect involved parties because of contradictory emotions about certain issues, limited resources, incompatible ideologies, differing values, lack of communication, and workplace practices. Such conflicts are likely to occur between individuals or groups who have their own beliefs, attitudes, and values. Jones et al (2013) define it as "the discord that arises when the goals, interests, or values of different individuals or groups are incompatible, and those individuals or groups block or thwart one another's attempts to achieve their objectives." Nevertheless, if a conflict is managed amicably, it can produce benefits to the individual as well as the organization. Otherwise, it can adversely affect organizational outcomes, including productivity, absenteeism, job commitment, and job performance (Meyer, 2004). However, managing these conflicts is not an easy process as it requires a wide range of organizational actions to be taken such as understanding each conflicting parties' positions and emotions.

Conflict Management Styles
Conflict management styles are the strategies used in response to perceived issues in social entities (Rahim et al., 2001). The most widely used framework for conflict strategy is the five-factor conflict management style model (Rahim, 1983). This approach describes conflict styles based on individual concern for self and others, combining the levels of concern for self with the levels of concern for others. There are five conflict management styles: integrating, avoiding, obliging, compromising, and dominating. These styles have gained empirical

support for effectiveness in certain circumstances (Pruitt and Rubin, 1986). Many researchers have proposed conceptual models to classify interpersonal conflict management styles (see, e.g. Blake and Mouton, 1964; Thomas, 1976), however Rahim (2017) developed a conceptualized classification which consist of two basic dimensions: concern for self and concern for others. The first dimension, concern for self, describes the degree (high or low) to which a person aims to satisfy his/her own self. The second, concern for others, describes the degree (high or low) to which a person aims to satisfy others' concerns (Rahim and Bonoma, 1979). Combining these two dimensions, Rahim (2017) conceptualized it into five conflict management styles:

Integrating
Integrating approach features high concern for both individual self and others. The approach is to reduce organizational conflicts through collaboration (Rahim, 1983). This method has been perceived as the most effective conflict management styles (MacIntosh and Stevens, 2008) which has been found to reduce both conflicts and stress.

Dominating
The dominating approach features high self-concern and low concern for others. Individuals using this style may try to get others to concede to them and raiseraise their own status (Carnevale and Isen, 1986). In prior research the dominating style was perceived to be effective but inappropriate in some situations.

Compromising
This approach features a moderate concern for both self and others. Compromising is considered the neutral ground for mutual concessions (Blake and Mouton, 1964). It is a simple and obvious decision scheme that partly satisfies competing interests only (Carnevale and Isen, 1986). Contrary to the traditional view which perceive this as a half-hearted form of problem-solving, researchers suggested that the compromising style is indeed a distinct conflict management strategy (De Dreu et al., 2001).

Avoiding
Avoiding style is characterized by low concern for self and others. Very often, avoidance as been perceived as ineffectiveness and counter productivity .This approach could also be linked to laissez-faire leadership as described in leadership model. Leaders using avoiding style to take no action which delays or prevents agreement from being reached (Carnevale and Isen, 1986).

Obliging
This style is an indirect approach to conflict management characterized by high concern for others and low self-concern. Leaders using the obliging style resolve conflicts either by yielding or reducing their own aspirations and benefits (Carnevale and Isen, 1986). This approach is not productive in resolving task conflicts, but can be helpful in reducing relationship conflicts.

Other than qualitative studies on conflict management styles such as Hathaway's (2003) case study, most quantitative studies uses survey to measure the preference of conflict management styles. Other variables in these research studies that the researchers tried to

correlate to conflict management style preference include leadership style (Garcia, 2004; Hendel, Fish, & Galon, 2005; Pauls, 2005; Stanley, 2005), gender (Blackbum, 2002; Dillard, 2005; Eidson, 2003; Eckstat, 2002; Gordon, 2008; Sirivun, 2001; Verdum, 2004), and personality including emotional intelligence (Antonioni, 1998; Jenson-Campbell & Graziano, 2005; Lee, 2003; Moberg, 2001; Pepin, 2005; Whitworth, 2005).

Personality Traits
Personal features primarily define and forecast human conduct. These personal characteristics also designate different individualities which can contribute to implocations on behavioral consequences (Liao and Lee, 2009). There are several scholars who believe that personality is fundamentally unchangeable. However, according to Boyce et al. (2013), the assumption that personality is unchangable is problematic for several reasons. One of the reason is that this belief condenses the interest in personality to practical economists and policy makers. It would not be a valuable target or specific aim for micro- or macro-level intercession. Although personality is imperatively interpreted based on individual, it might only be attracting attention when it is a phenomenon that changes. On the other hand, economists look at personality as a form of non-cognitive skill which may come with penalties for the economic decisions that people make and the outcome that they achieve. On the other hand, Almlund et al (2011) stated that the traits of personality is related to parental actions, level of education, and policy intrusions. This makes personality change a possibility throughout the lifetime.

Additionally, in the psychology field, the results on personality change have been mixed throughout the years. The traditional view in psychology is that an individual's personality is fairly permanent and enduring. But on the other hand, personality was thought to be stable especially after the age of 30 in which it has been described to be "set like plaster" (Costa and McCrae, 1988). Further studies stated that personality is "set like soft plaster" since it does change, although in a slow pace after the age of 30 (Srivastava et al., 2003). According to Robbins et al. (2008), personality traits are an accepted means for explain individual behavior. Current theoreticians approved the five central personality dimensions, repeatedly referred to as the "Big Five" or "five-factor model," composed of a few qualities used to describe individuals (Durupinar et al., 2009). The five-factor model of personality suggests that there are five factors to an individual's personality. The Big Five personality traits, also referred to with the acronym OCEAN which is: openness to experience; conscientiousness; extroversion; agreeableness; and neuroticism (Goldberg, 1993; Robbins et al., 2008).

Openness to Experience
Openness is related to imagination, non-conformity, unconventionalism, and autonomy (McCrae and Costa, 1987, 1997) which may lead to a direct and confrontational attitude towards conflict that can be constructive in conflict resolution (Tjosvold, 1998). Individuals high in openness are more likely to have a competitive social value orientation and tend to use direct approach when resolving conflicts. Due to this, it is expected that openness will be positively related to the dominating style, but negatively related to the obliging style. Moreover, openness also results in open-mindedness and reflectivity. Individuals high in openness take into consideration other people's positions and engage in greater divergent thinking to generate creative solutions (Judge et al., 2002a). Antonioni (1998) reported a positive relationship between openness to experience and integrating style, but a negative

relationship between openness to experience and avoiding styles. Moberg (2001) on other hand, reported positive relationships between openness to experience and both confrontation and compromise strategies.

Conscientiousness

Conscientiousness is related to the intellectual dimension of personality (McCrae and Costa, 1987, 1997). Individuals with high conscientiousness may be more of an achievement-oriented, a self-motivated, and task-oriented (Barrick and Mount, 1993). These individuals are likely to view tasks as group-based responsibilities and exhibit high levels of perseverance, impulse control, and determination (Moberg, 2001). Antonioni (1998) reported a positive relationship between conscientiousness and integrating style, but negative relationship with avoiding style. Moberg (2001) reported a positive relationship between conscientiousness and confrontation, but a negative relationship with non-confrontational strategy.

Extroversion

Extroversion is an interpersonal orientation in which individuals like working with people in groups, may express assertiveness and dominance, and tend to be more forceful in communicating their opinions (McCrae and Costa, 1987). High extroversion leads to high pro-social orientation, in which individuals have high concern for others while engaging in more integrating and compromising styles . For these reasons, extroversion is related to high needs for power and affiliation (Hogan and Hogan, 1996). Antonioni (1998) reported a positive relationship between extroversion and both integrating and dominating styles, but a negative relationship between extroversion and avoiding. Moberg (2001) tested these relationships and found positive relationships between extroversion, confrontation and compromise.

Agreeableness

Agreeableness is the factor that is closely related to positive affectivity and is characterized by preferences for cooperation rather than competition (McCrae and Costa, 1987). Positive affectivity will reduce contentious tactics and increase mutual benefit (Carnevale and Isen, 1986). Individuals high in agreeableness tend to show sympathy and help other people (McCrae and Costa, 1987; 1997) while Antonioni (1998) reported agreeableness was positively related to integrating and avoiding but negatively related to dominating. Moberg (2001) reported agreeableness to be positively related to compromising but negatively related to control.

Neuroticism

Neuroticism is described as emotional instability and negative affectivity (McCrae and Costa, 1987). Individuals high in neuroticism are less able to control their emotions in social interactions. Antonioni (1998) reported neuroticism having a negative relationship with dominating and a positive relationship with strong tendency to avoid conflict. Moberg (2001) found neuroticism are positively related to non-confronting (avoiding), and compromising, but negatively related to confrontation.

Extensive body of literatures have been devoted to study the effects of personality towards conflict management styles (e.g., De Dreu et al., 2001), including both situational and dispositional antecedents. Yet despite extensive research, there does not yet appear to be a clear consensus on the antecedents of conflict management styles. The widely held

contingency approach assumes that conflict management styles are the product of situational influence. Yet other research has demonstrated stable conflict management styles across situational contexts (Carnevale and Isen, 1986; De Dreu et al., 2001). For this reason, most of the current study focuses primarily on dispositional antecedents of conflict management styles, more specifically on personality.

Relationship between Personality and Conflict Management Styles in Organizations
The relationship between personality and conflict management styles in organizations, regardless of its size, is still not well understood, in which the relationship between the personality and preference of conflict management styles is narrowly studied (Bass, 1997). Although some researcher reports personality indeed uniquely predicted individuals' conflict management style (Bass, 1997), there are researchers who found no relationship between personalities and how it affected the preferred conflict management style.

Antonioni (1998) investigated the relationship between the Big Five personality factors and conflict management styles. There were two group samples in the study: one was a group of 351 undergraduate business students from a major university in the Midwest of the United States; the other was a group of 120 mid-level managers who were participating in managerial development seminars sponsored by the same university out of which sixty-eight percent of the managers were college educated and from manufacturing companies with more than 10 years of work experience. The same study discovers different findings from these two samples. The first group sample (students) indicated that extraversion, conscientiousness, and openness all have a positive relationship with integrating, but negative relationship between both extraversion and openness and avoiding as well as a positive relationship between both agreeableness and neuroticism and avoiding. On the other hand, the second group (managers) shows openness is not a significant factor, a positive relationship between agreeableness and avoiding but a negative relationship between conscientiousness and avoiding.

Although the study did not determine the effects of any of the individual characters that are used to define the Big Five personality factors, he noticed that assertiveness, one of the six facets of Extraversion, might moderate the relationship between the extraversion and the integrating style or between the extraversion and the dominating style. He recommended that further research into the results found in these two different samples is needed. In an effort to better understand the observed relations, the researcher suggested that future researcher needs to look at two distinct variables: the coarse relations between personality traits and preference of conflict handling strategies; the finer relations between the distinct subscales or facets comprising personality traits and conflict management styles.

Another study by Moberg (2001) was conducted to examine the relation of individual differences in personality to one's preferences for handling conflict in work settings. This study selected two hundred and forty nine managers and supervisors from public, governmental and private organizations. The researcher found that a preference for the non-confrontation strategy was positively related to neuroticism, but were negatively related to extraversion and conscientiousness preference. The confrontation strategy on the other hand, has negative relationship to neuroticism but were positively related to extraversion. Openness and conscientiousness preferred compromising style of managing conflict.

Compromising style also positively related to agreeableness. Furthermore, surprisingly positive to neuroticism is preference for the control strategy which was negatively related to only agreeableness (Moberg, 2001).

Whitworth (2005) conducted a quantitative study to determine the relationship between personality factors and the preferred conflict handling styles of female registered nurses from southern Mississippi. The study use the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) to measure personality factors and the Thomas-Kilmann MODE Instrument to measure conflict handling styles. The population of the study was approximately 1000 registered nurses in three southern Mississippi hospitals, out of which at least 30 female registered nurses were selected from each facility. The total sample size was, 97 from age of 20 years old to over 60. Of the sample size, sixty-eight percent of them were 41 years or older while ethnic distributions consist ofs 94.9% Caucasian, 4.1% African- American, and 1% Asian. More than 60% of them hold an associate degree and 39% have a Bachelor's degree. Ten of the respondents had managerial positions. Their work experience ranged from less than one year to more than 20 years with the median of 12. The researcher found no relationship exists between the personality factors of female registered nurses and their preferred method of dealing with conflict.

Pepin (2005) on the other hand, investigated the relationship between conflict management styles, personality traits, and coping mechanisms. The population for this study was loosely defined. According to the researcher, any individual who has more than two years of work experience should fall in the population. The researcher solicited the research participants from MBA classes, psychology undergraduate classes, and Executive and Professional Development classes in a college in Nova Scotia, Canada. If the students did not have two years of work experience, they could pass the surveys to their parents or friends. The study shows that Big Five personality traits uniquely predicted individuals' conflict management styles.

Development of Comceptual Framework
This research study falls in an interdisciplinary area between personality in psychology and conflict management in business administration and organizational leadership. Built on the advances in personality psychology, specifically trait theories and in conflict management specifically two-dimensional models, this proposed study investigated whether there was any relationship between the five-factor personality and conflict management styles; what kind of relationship it was if there was a relationship between them; and what might cause the inconsistency or even conflicting research results on the relationship between personality and conflict management styles.

Five-Factor Model of Personality
The trait theory of personality is widely recognized although one of its shortcomings is that there are too many traits of personality (Pervin, Cervone, & John, 2005). "Organizing these different traits into a coherent structure was a major concern of trait researchers during the 1980s and 1990s" (Pervin, Cervone, & John, 2005). The most fundamental problem in the trait theory of personality was the search for a scientifically compelling taxonomy of personality traits. The emerging five-factor modelof personality represents the basic dimensions of personality. The discovery of the fivefactor model of personality, known as the Big Five model,

was considered as a turning point in personality psychology as discovered by Pervin, Cervone, and John (2005). The five-factor model was derived from linguistic studies with factor analysis of large sets of terms people use to describe traits of personality. The pioneer work initiated in the mid 1920s and the early 1930s by two German psychologists, Klages and Baumgarten and influenced by Allport and Odbert (Digman, 1990). The systematic work done by Cattell in 1940s based on factor analysis led to 16 factors and eight second-order factors (Digman, 1990). The early work by Fiske (1949) and then by Norman (1963) indicated the discovery of the five-factor model of personality. Numerous subsequent studies have confirmed the findings although different researchers may not agree on the interpretations of the five factors.

The universality of the five distinguishable dimensions described in the fivefactor model has been validated by cross-cultural studies. The studies found that "At least three of the factors – and sometimes all five – are frequently found across cultures and language groups" (Pervin et al., 2005). The congruence of five-factor trait questionnaires with other questionnaires and ratings also supports the five-factor model of personality (Pervin et al., 2005).

Two-Dimensional Models of Conflict Management
In order to better understand and manage conflict, researchers have developed different conflict management theories over the years. The two-dimensional models of conflict management was studied by Blake and Mouton (1962, 1964, 1975). The researchers' two-dimensional model, the Grid have been predominantly used by various researchers to study conflict management styles. Among them, Kilmann and Thomas' (1975) twodimensional model of conflict management and Rahim's (1983) dual-concern model are the most frequently used models. These researchers also developed survey instruments to measure individuals' preference for conflict management styles.

Two Views on Preference for CMS
What determines or influences an individual's preference for a specific conflict management style? It seems there are two fundamentally different views on this question. These two views are the contingency view and the ordered response hierarchy view. Proponents of the contingency view have proposed that people select their conflict management style in handling a conflict based on the situation of the conflict episode. Callanan, Benzing, and Perri (2006) posited that the choice of conflict-handling strategy is a matter of context. These researchers believe that there are at least two reasons for individuals to actually use a conflict-handling strategy that is different from their predominant conflict management style in any given situation. The first reason is that "an individual might have an idealized perception of his or her own predominant conflict management style that is inconsistent with actual behavior". The other reason is that "contextual factors in the conflict incident dictate that a certain strategy be used" that is different from one's expected dominant style.In contrast with the contingency view, the response hierarchy view depicts: (a) individuals possess a set of ordered conflict management styles; (b) the dominant style in the hierarchy is most likely used in managing a conflict; (c) the preference for a conflict management style is determined by individual differences in personality and other individual characteristics. Other than the three key components of the response hierarchy view, there is evidence that the collaborating or integrating style is usually considered as the preferred conflict management style (McShane & Von Glinow, 2003). That said individuals should be taught and

trained to use the collaborating or integrating style whenever it is possible in dealing with a conflict.

Based on the theories above, a conceptual work was formulated (see Figure 1) in investigating whether changes in big five personality traits influence conflict management styles from the experience of small and enterprise businesses (SMEs) during COVID-19 pandemic.
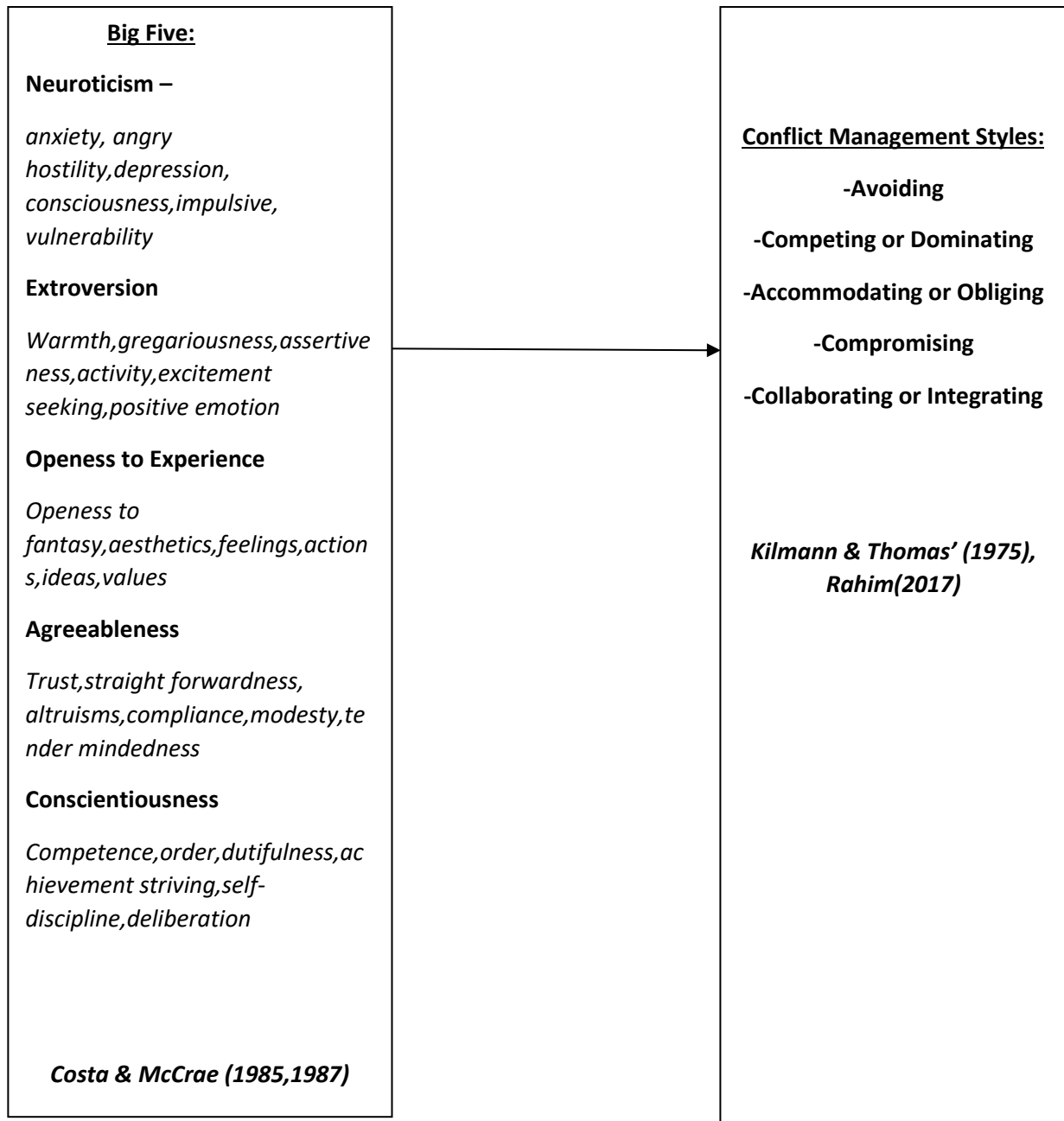

Big Five:

Neuroticism –

anxiety, angry hostility,depression, consciousness,impulsive, vulnerability

Extroversion

Warmth,gregariousness,assertiveness,activity,excitement seeking,positive emotion

Openess to Experience

Openess to fantasy,aesthetics,feelings,actions,ideas,values

Agreeableness

Trust,straight forwardness, altruisms,compliance,modesty,tender mindedness

Conscientiousness

Competence,order,dutifulness,achievement striving,self-discipline,deliberation

Costa & McCrae (1985,1987)

Conflict Management Styles:

-Avoiding

-Competing or Dominating

-Accommodating or Obliging

-Compromising

-Collaborating or Integrating

Kilmann & Thomas' (1975), Rahim(2017)

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Linking the Big Five and Conflict Management Styles within the SMEs Context in Malaysia

Discussion: The Potential Outcome of the Study

Based on discussion above, it is expected that personality will have a direct effect on conflict management styles. The five-factor model of personality has been used in leadership research and has demonstrated potential in explaining leadership effectiveness (e.g., Judge et al., 2002; Hogan and Hogan, 1996). Review of the research reveals consistent relationships between trait dimensions and the likelihood of being leaders (Hogan et al., 1994). Two of the five personality dimensions – extroversion and conscientiousness – have been consistently related to leadership effectiveness and job performance (Judge et al., 2002; Barrick and Mount, 1993, 1991). Leaders high in extroversion tends to exhibit an orientation to power and affiliation while their potential is more easily detected by followers. This results in them being rated as leaders. Conscientiousness has been related to both job competence and the likelihood of success in accomplishing tasks (Bass, 1990).

Conclusion

In conclusion, conflict management is increasingly becoming more imporatnt in the wortkplace due to increasing conflicts which consumes managers' time in dealing with conflict and also its significant impact to the organization (Roberts, 2005; Shelton & Darling, 2004; Thomas & Schmidt, 1976). Different conflict management styles can result in a different outcome, whether positive or negative. Besides that, personality may be one of the factors that influence one's preference for a specific conflict management style.

Literature review analysis shows there is a gap in research between the five-factor personality and conflict management styles. It is not only because the area is scarcely researched but also because of a few studies giving inconclusive or even conflicting results (Antonioni, 1998; Pepin, 2005; Whitworth, 2005; Moberg, 1998). Furthermore, the relationship between the five-factor personality and conflict management styles is almost unexplored (Moberg, 2001). Thus, there is a need for this area to be researched.

References

Abdullah, A., & Gallagher, E. L. (1995). Managing with cultural differences. *Malaysian Management Review, 30*(2), 1–18.

Almlund, M., Duckworth, A. L., Heckman, J. J., and Kautz, T. D. (2011), Personality psychology and economics, No. w16822, National Bureau of Economic Research.

Amason, A. C. (1996). Distinguishing the effects of functional and dysfunctional conflict on strategic decision making: Resolving a paradox for top management teams. *Academy of Management Journal, 39*, 123–148.

Amason, A. C., Thompson, K. R., Hochwarter, W. A., & Harrison, A. W. (1995). Conflict: An important dimension in successful management teams. *Organizational Dynamics, 23*, 20–35. *American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language* (4th ed.). (2007). Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Antonioni, D. (1998). Relationship between the big five personality factors and conflict management styles. *International Journal of Conflict Management,* 9(4). https://doi.org/10.1108/eb022814

Anwar, C. M. (2012). Managing conflicts through personality management. *African Journal of Business Management*, 6(10). https://doi.org/10.5897/ajbm11.2601

Asma, A. (1992). "The influence of ethnic values on managerial practices in Malaysia". Malaysian Management Review, 27(1), 3-15, 1992.

Barker, G. P., & Graham, S. (1987). Developmental study of praise and blame as attributional cues. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 79*(66).

Barrick, M. R., & Mount, M. K. (1993). Autonomy as a moderator of the relationships between the Big Five personality dimensions and job performance. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 78*(1), 111–118. https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.78.1.111.

Bass, B. (1990). *Bass & Stogdill's Handbook of Leadership: Theory, Research, and Managerial Applications*. New York :Free Press

Bass, B. M. (1997). Does the transactional–transformational leadership paradigm transcend organizational and national boundaries. *American Psychologist, 52*(2), 130.

Blackburn, H. C. (2002). Administrator gender differences in conflict management style and the relationship to school culture (Doctoral dissertation, University of Missouri-Columbia). (UMI No. 3074373).

Blake, R. R., & Mouton, J. S. (1962). *The managerial grid laboratory-seminar materials.* Austin, TX: Scientific Methods, Inc.192

Blake, R. R., & Mouton, J. S. (1964). *The managerial grid.* Houston, TX: Gulf Publishing Company.

Blake, R. R., & Mouton, J. S. (1975). An overview of the Grid®. *Training and Development Journal, 29*(5), 29-37.

Boohar, D. (2001). *Resolving conflict without punching someone out*. Fort Worth Business Press 13: 22.

Boyce, C., Wood, A., and Powdthavee, N. (2013). Is personality fixed? Personality changes as much as 'variable' economic factors and more strongly predicts changes to life satisfaction. *Social Indicators Research*, *111*(1), 287-305.

Callanan, G. A., & Perri, D. F. (2006). Teaching conflict management using a scenario-based approach. *Journal of Education for Business, 81*(3), 131-139.

Callanan, G. A., Benzing, C. D., & Perri, D. F. (2006). Choice of conflict-handling strategy: A matter of context. *The Journal of Psychology, 140*(3), 269-288.

Carnevale, P., and Isen, A. (1986). The influence of positive affect and visual access on the discovery of integrative solutions in bilateral negotiation. *Organizational Behavior & Human Decision Processes*, *37*(1), 1-13.

Cheung, S. O., Yiu, T. W. Y., & Yeung, S. (2006). A study of styles and outcomes in 193 construction dispute negotiation. *Journal of Construction Engineering & Management*, *132*(8), 805-814.

Costa, P. T., and McCrae, R. R. (1988). Personality in adulthood – a 6-year longitudinal-study of self-reports and spouse ratings on the NEO Personality-Inventory. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *54*(1), 853-863.

De Dreu, C., Evers, A., and Beersma, B. (2001). A theory-based measure of conflict management strategies in the workplace, *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 22*(6), 645-68.

Deutsch, M. (1973). The Resolution of Conflict: Constructive and Destructive Processes. *American Behavioral Scientist, 17(*2), 248–248. https://doi.org/10.1177/000276427301700206.

Digman, J. M. (1990). Personality structure: Emergence of the five-factor model. *Annual Review of Psychology, 41,* 417-440.

Dillard, M. B. (2005). Gender and conflict management styles of Texas secondary school assistant principals: A descriptive study (Doctoral dissertation, Texas A&M University-Commerce). (UMI No. 3170207)194.

Durupinar, F., Pelechano, N., Allbeck, J. M., Gudukbay, U., and Badler, N. I. (2009), How the ocean personality model affects the perception of crowds, *IEEE Computer Graphics and Applications*, *3*(1), 22-31.

Eckstat, A. G. (2002). An investigation into the relationships between psychological sex role, management experience, and preferred interpersonal conflict style/strategy in the workplace (Doctoral dissertation, Nova Southeastern University). (UMI No. 3006659).

Eidson, J. P. (2003). A gender comparison of conflict management style preferences within the space exploration industry: Assertiveness verses cooperativeness (Doctoral dissertation, Capella University). (UMI No. 3085386).

Ejaz, S. S., Iqbal, F., and Ara, A. (2012). Relationship among personality traits and conflict handling styles of call center representatives and appraisal of existing service model. *International Journal of Psychological Studies*, *4*(4), 27-36.

Filbeck, G., & Smith, L. L. (1997). Team Building and Conflict Management: Strategies for Family Businesses. *Family Business Review,* *10*(4), 339–352. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-6248.1997.00339.

Fiske, D. W. (1949). Consistency of the factorial structures of personality ratings from different sources. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 44*, 329-344.

Garcia, A. R. Sr. (2004). A study of the relationship among the constructs of transformational and transactional leadership and conflict management style (Doctoral dissertation, Our Lady of the Lake University). (UMI No. 3142996).

Gordon, P. A. (2008). Examining conflict management style preferences of practitioner faculty by gender and age (Doctoral dissertation, Northcentral University). (UMI No. 33045230195.

Hathaway, W. (2003). Conflict management and leadership in higher education: A case study of University of Michigan president Robben W. Fleming (Doctoral dissertation, Eastern Michigan University). (UMI No. 3090772).

Hendel, T., Fish, M., & Galon, V. (2005). Leadership style and choice of strategy in conflict management among Israeli nurse managers in general hospitals. *Journal of Nursing Management, 13*(2), 137-146.

Herkenhoff, L. (2004). Culturally tuned emotional intelligence: An effective change management tool? *Strategic Change, 13*(2), 73-81. doi:10.1002/jsc.666

Hogan, R., and Hogan, J. (1996), Motives, Values and Preferences Inventory Manual, Hogan Assessment System, Tulsa, OK.

Hogan, R., Curphy, G. J., & Hogan, J. (1994). What we know aboutleadership: Effectiveness and personality. American Psychologist, 49,493–504.

Hogan, R., Hogan, J., & Robert, B. W. (1996). Personality measurement and employment decisions: Questions and answers. American Psychologist, *51*, 469-477. doi:10.1037/0003 066X.51.5.469.

Johnson, G. J., & Johnson, W. R. (1997). Perceived overqualification, emotional support, and health. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 27*(21), 1906-1918. doi:10.1111/j.15591816.1997.tb01631.

Jones, G., George, J. and Belkhodja, O. (2013), Contemporary Management, McGraw Hill/Irwin, New York, NY.

Judge, T. A., Bono, J. E., Ilies, R., and Gerhardt, M. W. (2002). Personality and leadership: a qualitative and qualitative review. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *87*(4), 765-80.

Judge, T. A., Heller, D., and Mount, M. K. (2002). Five-factor model of personality and job satisfaction: a meta-analysis. *The Journal of Applied Psychology*, *87*(3), 530-541.

Kabanoff, B. (1989). Conflict Management Styles: Why Is Compromise So Favourably Viewed? *Australian Journal of Management, 14*(1), 29–48. https://doi.org/10.1177/031289628901400102.

Kaplan, J., Frias, L., & McFall-Johnsen, M. (2020). A third of the global population is under coronavirus lockdown. *Business Insider*. Retrieved from https://www.businessinsider.com/countries-on-lockdown-coronavirus-italy-2020-3.

Kilmann, R. H., & Thomas, K. W. (1975). Interpersonal conflict-handling behavior as reflections of Jungian personality dimensions. *Psychological Reports, 37*, 971–980.

Landau, B., Landau, D., & Landau, S. (2001). From Conflict to Creativity: How Resolving Workplace Disagreements Can Inspire Innovation and Productivity.

Lee, F.-M. (2003). Conflict management style and emotional intelligence of faculty and staff at a selected college in Southern Taiwan (Doctoral dissertation, The University of South Dakota). (UMI No. 3085443).

Liao, C., and Lee, C. (2009). An empirical study of employee job involvement and personality traits: the case of Taiwan. *International Journal of Economics and Management*, 3(1), 22-36.

MacIntosh, G., and Stevens, C. (2008). Personality, motives, and conflict strategies in everyday service encounters. *International Journal of Conflict Management*, *19*(2), 112-31.

McCrae, R., and Costa, P. (1987). Validation of the five-factor model of personality across instruments and observers. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, *52*(1), 81-90.

McCrae, R., and Costa, P. (1997). Personality trait structure as a human universal. *American Psychologist*, *52*(5), 509-16.

Meyer, S. (2004). Organizational response to conflict: Future conflict and work outcomes. *Social Work Research*, *28*(3). https://doi.org/10.1093/swr/28.3.183

Moberg, P. J. (1998). Predicting conflict strategy with personality traits: Incremental validity and the five-factor model. *International Journal of conflict Management, 9*(3), 258-285.

Moberg, P. J. (2001). Linking conflict strategy to the five-factor model: Theoretical and empirical foundations. *International Journal of Conflict Management*, *12*(1), 47-68.198.

Mosadeghrad, A.M. (2015), Essentials of Healthcare Organization and Management, Dibagran Tehran, Tehran (In Persian).

Mount, M. K., Barrick, M. R., & Stewart, G. L. (1998). Five-factor modelof personality and performance in jobs involving interpersonal interac-tions. Human Performance, 11, 145–165.

Netemeyer, R., Boles, J., & Mcmurrian, R. (1996). Development and Validation of Work Family and Family-Work Conflict Scales. *Journal of Applied Psychology. 81*. 400-410. 10.1037/0021-9010.81.4.400.

Neuman, G. A., & Wright, J. (1999). Team effectiveness: Beyond skills and cognitive ability. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 84*, 376-389.

Norman, W. T. (1963). Toward an adequate taxonomy of personality attributes. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 66*, 574-583.

Pauls, T. S. (2005). A study of the relationship between transformational and transactional leadership, and conflict management styles in Ohio college presidents (Doctoral dissertation, Regent University). (UMI No. 3188230).

Pepin, J. (2005). An investigation of whether coping mechanisms mediate the relationship between personality traits and conflict management style (Master's thesis, Saint Mary's University).

Pepin, J. (2005). An investigation of whether coping mechanisms mediate the relationship between personality traits and conflict management style (Master's thesis, Saint Mary's University).

Pervin, L. A., Cervine, D., & John, O. P. (2005). *Personality: Theory and research* (9th ed.). New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Pondy, L. R. (1992). Reflections on organizational conflict. Journal of Organizational Behavior, 261.

Pruitt, D., and Rubin, J. (1986), *Social Conflict: Escalation, Stalemate, Settlement,* New York: Random House,

Pulhamus, A. R. (1991). Conflict handling–A common sense approach to appraising supervisory performance. *Public Personnel Management, 20*, 485–492.

Rahim, A. (1983), A measure of styles of handling interpersonal conflict, *Academy of Management Journal, 26(*2), 368-76.

Rahim, A., Magner, N., and Antonioni, D. (2001). Do justice relationships with organization directed reactions differ across US and Bangladesh employees?. *International Journal of Conflict Management*, *12*(4), 333-49.

Rahim, M. A. (2017). Managing Conflict in Organizations. In *Managing Conflict in Organizations*. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203786482

Rahim, A., & Bonoma, T. V. (1979). Managing Organizational Conflict: A Model for Diagnosis and Intervention. *Psychological Reports*, *44*(3_suppl), 1323–1344. https://doi.org/10.2466/pr0.1979.44.3c.1323

Robbins, S. P., Judge, T. A., and Sanghi, S. (2008), Organizational Behavior, Pearson Education, NJ.

Roberts, T. (2005). Coaching managers through their conflicts. *Management Services, 49*(4), 16-18.

Shelton, C. D., & Darling, J. R. (2004). From chaos to order: Exploring new frontiers in Conflict Management. *Organization Development Journal, 22*(3), 22-41.

Sirivun, U. (2001). An Investigation of the Primary and Secondary Conflict Management Style Preferences of Men and Women in the Role of Local Managers, International Managers, and College Students in Thailand. ProQuest Information and Learning. UMI 3006659, USA.

Song, M., Dyer, B., & Thieme, R. J. (2004). Conflict management and innovation performance: An integrated contingency perspective. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, 34*(3), 341-356.

Sorenson, R. L. (1999). Conflict management strategies used in successful family businesses. *Family Business Review, 12*(2), 133-146. doi:10.1111/j.1741-6248.1999.00133.

Srivastava, S., John, O. P., Gosling, S. D., and Potter, J. (2003), Development of personality in early and middle adulthood: set like plaster or persistent change?, Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, *84*(1), 1041-1053.

Stanley, A. D. (2004). Leadership styles and conflict management styles: An exploratory study (Doctoral dissertation, Regent University). (UMI No. 3140603).

Tang, A. (2020). Malaysia announces movement control order after spike IN COVID-19 cases (updated). Retrieved February 23, 2021, from https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2020/03/16/malaysia-announces-restricted-movement-measure-after-spike-in-covid-19-cases.

Terhune, K. W. (1970). The effects of personality in cooperation and conflict. In P. Swingle (Ed.), *The structure of conflict* (pp. 193-234). New York: Academic Press.

Thomas, K. W., & Schmidt, W. H. (1976). A survey of managerial interests with respect to conflict. *Academy of Management Journal, 19*, 315–318.

Thomas, K. W. (1976). Conflict and conflict management, in Dunnette, M.D. (Ed.), *Handbook of Industrial and Organizational Psychology,* Chicago: RandMcNally, 889-935.

Travel, K. (2021). MCO 2.0 announced for 6 states In Malaysia from 13 JAN 2021: Full list of Confirmed SOP. Retrieved February 23, 2021, from https://www.klook.com/en-MY/blog/malaysia-mco-january-2021-sop/.

Vilaseca, A. (2002). The Shareholder Role in the Family Business: Conflict of Interests and Objectives Between Nonemployed Shareholders and Top Management Team. Family Business Review, *15*(320).

Wageman, R. (1999). Task design, outcome interdependence, and individual differences: Their joint effects on effort in task-performing teams (Commentary on Huguet et al., 1999). Group Dynamics: Theory, 2), 137.

Wang, X. (2010), The relationship between the five-factor personality and conflict management styles in a manufacturing setting, University of Phoenix, AZ, 271pp.

Whitworth, B. S. (2005). Is there a relationship between personality type and preferred conflict-handling styles? An exploratory study of registered nurses in southern Mississippi (Doctoral dissertation, Capella University). (UMI No. 3182604).