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Conflict management and emotional intelligence

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Conflict Management and Emotional Intelligence

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March 2009
DECLARATION

I certify that the substance of this Thesis has not been already submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree or degrees. I certify that to the best of my knowledge any help received in preparing this work, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this Thesis.

[Signature]

Leung Yu Fai
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Leung Yu Fai
Abstract

The objectives of this research are to investigate the reasons for conflicts in the customer service industry, to examine strategies for conflict management which can be used to help resolve these conflicts, to examine the relationship of these strategies with the concept of emotional intelligence, and to improve the quality of customer service provisions in the customer service industry.

The theoretical basis of this study includes reference to the following:

- Attribution Theory (Heider, 1958)
- Factors of interpersonal attraction and distraction (Deutsch, 1994)
- Temperament Theory (McKenna & David, 1997)
- Contingency Theory (Burnett, 1998)
- The influence of environmental factors (Daniels & Walker, 2001)
- Theory of Self-control (Walsh, 2002)
- Theory of Causation (Berstene, 2004).

In the area of conflict management, Wall (1995) focuses on the concern for self and for others in five major forms of behaviour: avoiding, dominating, obliging, compromising and integrating. Reuven Bar-On (1997) analyses a person’s ability and potential to recognise and regulate conflicts.

The relationship between emotional intelligence and conflict formation is said to be affected by factors including attitude (Eugenio, 2003), perception (Berstene, 2004), personality (Ambe, 2004) and past rivalry (Fazzi, 2001). The determinants of the relationship between
emotional intelligence and conflict management strategy have been identified as (1) communication and interpersonal relationships (Esin, 1986), (2) concern for self (Frak, 2005), (3) concern for others (Gourley, 2005) and (4) transformation and reinterpretation of the conflict situation (Kane, 2004).

Grounded Theory has been adopted in this research (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Qualitative interviews were used to collect data on conflict formation and management strategy. Tests to measure the emotional intelligence quotient (also called the emotional quotient) of participants were also conducted and demographic data of the participants was gathered.

Customer service staff are suggested to identify the real needs of customers through the use of the concepts of emotional intelligence and conflict formation. Customer service staff should apply the appropriate conflict management strategy with due regard to the impact of emotional intelligence so as to resolve conflicts or be aware of situations of potential conflict.

There are three factors that can contribute to preventing or minimising conflict: (1) high staff emotional intelligence, (2) staff concern for others and (3) customer concern for others. This study suggests that as long as at least two of these factors are present concurrently, conflicts can be avoided or resolved soon after their formation.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background to the research

Human society has experienced great improvement in living standards as a result of advancement in information technology for the past few decades. The effects of information technology in transforming communication, research and development have all combined to intensify competition in the business environment. The improved standard of living in many countries has provided a higher quality of life for their citizens, but mainly in the satisfaction of their material needs. What has been lacking is attention to the human side of needs and people-oriented approaches to fulfil those needs.

The more urbanised communities are, the more competition is magnified as people are more materially oriented. The profits of businesses are expected to improve every year and this leads to endless competition. Competition affects human emotions and peoples' behaviour in their daily activities, both in the family and the commercial domains. (Berstene, 2004) According to a study sponsored by the US Departments of Labor and Health and Human Services (2001), relentless competition is one of the major causes of the escalating rates of depression and addiction among professionals. Alcoholism is three times higher for professionals than it is for the general population. In fact, the opposing motives of cooperation and competition are among the areas that have the greatest potential for serious conflict. But people generally see competition as the driving force of success, and play down the importance of cooperation which is equally important as the interconnectedness of the global community deepens. ‘Our society emphasises competition and success. Competition begins in early childhood among siblings, continues through school, and culminates in business and professional rivalry. At the same time, we
are urged to help others.’ (Smith, 2006)

For most industries, success is measured by the tangible business results of revenues, costs and profits. These results tend to be more easily measured as they are very task-oriented. (Folger, et. al, 1997) However, the situation in the services industry is quite the opposite. To market their services and better enhance their businesses, service providers need to emphasise intangible elements such as customer focus, respect for employees, professional standards and societal care. Nevertheless, corporate social responsibility is something which is receiving more and more attention from all sorts of enterprises.

The customer service industry involves the application of principles of organisational behaviour and psychology. Knowledge of organisational behaviour principles can help to identify the behavioural patterns of the industry personnel and the industry’s general clients. A knowledge of psychology can assist in understanding the nature of behavioural patterns in business activities (Folger, et. al, 1997). Behaviourism in psychology strives to explain human behaviour in terms of cause-and-effect relationships (or stimulus-response in behaviourist terminology).

Since modern economies strongly emphasise material wealth, many people seek to gain such wealth in order to improve their standard of living and quality of life. Thus, competition for material wealth can produce a lot of conflicts in human interactions ((Folger, et. al, 1997).

**Emotional intelligence defined**

Some people can handle conflict in a tactful and sensible way (Iain, 2005). Bar-On hypothesises that these individuals are, in general, more successful in meeting environmental demands and pressures, which often is an indication of one’s potential to
succeed in life. Some scholars apply the concept of emotional intelligence quotient (or emotional quotient) to quantify people’s ability to manage emotion (Bar-On, 1997; Geher, 2004; Schutte & Malouff, 1999). According to Bar-On, emotional intelligence has two parts: (i) the intrapersonal – the understanding and management of emotion within oneself; and (ii) the interpersonal – the empathy for the others and the maintenance of interpersonal relationships. This personality trait requires the awareness of how others feel (i.e. empathy), the identification with one’s social group and cooperation with others (i.e. social responsibility) and the establishment of mutually satisfying relationships with others.

The concept of emotional intelligence involves the management of emotion within oneself (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). It also emphasises the importance of recognising one’s interdependence with other people.

A similar study concludes that the study of emotional intelligence can give us an insight into what kind of personality traits enable positive relationships (McKenna & David, 1997).

**Conflict formation and management**

Conflict formation in daily activities is a complex issue. Therefore, successful conflict resolution requires many complex skills and techniques. Successful conflict resolution can only be achieved by listening to and meeting the needs of all parties so that each party is substantially satisfied with the outcome. Blake and Mouton (1964) had a major influence on the direction taken in the study of interpersonal conflict. They identified the issues of concern for self and concern for others as being essential to the understanding of conflict formation and their resolution.

Furthermore, the science or art of conflict management in business activities involves
flexibility and accuracy of understanding human reactions. Conflict management may be seen as a systematic mechanism for handling different situations. Moreover, the understanding of conflict and its resolution can help people improve their relationships (Miller & Rollnick, 1991), especially in the customer service industry.

1.2 Research issues and contributions

There are many determinants of conflict formation, including intellectual intelligence, emotional intelligence, personality, attitude, communal trust, and value judgement. However, the determinants can have complex interrelationships, which affect and induce conflict. Conflict arises between people or groups, due to their differences in attitudes, beliefs, values or needs (Hoban, 2005).

The choice of conflict management strategies depends on the complex relationships of the determinants of the conflict and other factors related to human and inherent structural variables. From the observation of our daily activities it can be seen that the emotional aspects of a situation and the mode of stress management not only induce the conflict, but also affect the conflict management strategy deployed and the manner in which it is deployed. Thomas (1976) identifies five types of conflict management strategies: avoiding, dominating, obliging, compromising and integrating. Hence the understanding of conflict formation can help prevent conflicts and avoid further conflicts. Moreover, the identification of the determinants of conflict can demonstrate the importance of emotional intelligence. After the verification of conflict formation and the effect of emotional intelligence, conflict management strategies can be developed according to the scale and type of conflict situation in different situation.
Conflicts may be induced by the change of human emotion and resulting in deterioration of interpersonal relationships. As there are several kinds of conflict management strategy such as avoiding, dominating, obliging, compromising and integrating, the emotional intelligence of those involved can affect the adoption of different strategies in the process of decision making.

In customer service industry, there are no rigid and quantifiable criteria to evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of customer service. The human contacts involved in the delivery of customer service are complex, dynamic interactions between the customer and the customer service staff. So, it is hard to assess accurately the state of the interpersonal relationship between the customer and the customer service staff. At the least, the dynamic behaviour of both customer and customer service staff will change from time to time and this affects the business relationships particularly those involving loose or infrequent business contact.

Business results are the major indication of success in the customer service industry. Knowledge of how to improve or sustain those results is the key to operating a customer service business. The analysis of the critical operations of the customer service business not only gives an insight for the operator of how to run the business but also helps the duty customer service staff to develop useful techniques and skills to work better during the delivery process. Satisfaction will ease away the stress (Schofield, 1998). Less conflict between customer and staff means less customer complaints.

This dissertation combines insights from the fields of organisational behaviour and psychology so as to increase our understanding of conflict management strategy in order to improve the conflict management responses to different situations. That is, in order to
improve customer service the customer service staff need to have a better understanding of conflicts and emotional intelligence.

Conflicts not only cause a deterioration in service quality but also induce customer dissatisfaction. Property management customer service staff can improve service provisions through the appropriate application of conflict management strategies and the amount of emotional intelligence applied to the situation. When conflict does arise, the staff should pay attention to resolve the conflict with systematic analysis and thorough recognition of the conflict situation and its relationship with emotion intelligence. Moreover, such an approach serves to make business people aware of the importance of emotional intelligence and of preventing conflict formation through the application of conflict management strategies.

It is hoped that this study can demonstrate conflict resolution with an understanding of emotional intelligence as a way to improve the customer service industry and to assist in building up a harmonious environment for our society.

1.3 Justification for the research

There is no simple or straightforward technique or skill to handle conflicts. In the customer service industry, the nature of the tasks involved and the interpersonal relationships between customers and customer service staff can both cause conflicts. Both the tasks and the state of the interpersonal relationships induce conflict in a complex way. Just as having a good business management and operation system such as Total Quality Management System, Balanced Score Cards, International Standards for Organisations, or some other management certification and award system can improve performance, a good conflict
management system can reduce conflicts. Moreover, good interpersonal relationships skills can improve the relationships between the customers and the customer service staff. In some cases, there is a trust between them. So, both a business system and good interpersonal relationships could induce or prevent the outbreak of conflict to a great extent. In this connection, the understanding of categorisation of tasks and of task formation may shed light on conflict formation and the application of appropriate management strategies to deal with them (Rahim, 1986).

As every person has his own emotions, and the study of emotional intelligence not only helps to smooth the operation of the customer service industry but also motivates the concerning parties to be alert to the improvement of the emotional feelings in their daily lives. Emotional change not only can encourage people to strive for their goals and objectives in their lives, in some way it can also provoke bad temper in daily activities and damage happy lives. Thus, the awareness of emotional change and the ability to affect or control emotions in critical or stressful situations is a significant aspect of our business environments and of society as a whole (Mayer and Salovery, 1995).

The purpose of the study of the relationship between emotional intelligence and conflict formation is to identify the determinants of conflicts and to provide the necessary improvements in our business behaviour, especially in the customer service industry. Business behaviour can affect company profits, and the emotional wellbeing of customers and customer service staff. A good state of equilibrium among the customer service staff enables them to work happily with the customers and enables the customer services company to earn a profit in a harmonious environment. Otherwise, business competition would dominate our business lives and affect our emotions endlessly.
In today’s business world, there is no clear and direct method to formulate conflict management strategies. The emotional quotient is a good means of helping to understand customer and staff behaviour. The measurement of emotional intelligence using the emotional intelligence quotient and its sub-scale in personal competence and social competence with respect to the ability and potential for recognition and regulation of conflict could be applied in business behaviour (Bar-On, 1997). Hence a recognition of the importance of the concept of emotional intelligence and its application can help develop a useful and effective management strategy to deal with different emotional states of concerning parties during service delivery. In the delivery of customer services, different management strategies should be applied in different situations. For example, a low profile strategy may be applied in the case of some aggravated people and a high profile strategy may be applied when dealing with some cooperative people. The study of the relationship between emotional intelligence and conflict management strategies can generate the insight needed to formulate appropriate management strategies for different situations through the adoption of different styles of avoiding, dominating, obliging, compromising and integrating in order to achieve a resolution.

Since the study of emotional intelligence and conflict management involves the fields of psychology and organisational behaviour, it can provide a dual perspective to the issue of conflicts. As there is a relationship between emotional quotient and conflict management, this study provides the tools for to prevent the outbreak of conflict and the means to resolve conflicts.

1.4 Research method

Grounded theory has been adopted in this study. The grounded theory paradigm is applied
to build theory from the ground up based on data obtained in interviews about the issue of conflict formation and management strategy, measures of the emotional quotients of participants and demographic data of the participants. Grounded theory provides a suitable approach as there is no pre-set theory and important concepts and findings are drawn from the data by the application of research tools of categories, codes and coding (Barker et al., 2006).

The application of emotional quotient in the application of conflict management strategy shall be studied and analysed. Although there may be more than one factor affecting the adoption of conflict management strategies, emotional quotients can provide some insight for the selection of the relevant strategy, which is regarded as a heuristic method rather than an optimum method. The optimum method shall be developed through the examination of all determinants of conflict formation, emotion and non-emotion factors, and conflict management strategy matching to different situation, etc.

Interactions between customers and staff are dynamic and complex. And such complexity makes it difficult to identify their details. For the customer service industry, satisfying customer requests is the core of service provisions. The customer service staff cannot control the customer and can only play the accommodating role in the provision of services. All they can do is to control their own attitude. Therefore, when there is dispute or conflict over the service provision, the customer service staff can only adopt a flexible approach to providing the services in order to resolve the conflict.

Customer service staff are the main subject of investigation in this research. Their emotional quotient and their conflict management skills are examined, whereas in the case of customers, their conflict management behaviour is examined but not their emotional
quotient. Indirectly, customer reactions can also be obtained through direct observation and through feedback from the staff. Both parties can affect the interaction and the mechanism of the interactive change of the human behaviour can be investigated by in-depth analysis of each party. When there is smooth provision of customer service and no outbreak of conflict, the customer service can be judged to be up to service standards. The choice of whether to analyse both parties or just one party all depends on cost and effort. If the analysis of only one party does not work, the investigation must be carried out of both parties in series or simultaneous analysis may be needed later. Hence, the approach depends on whether the analysis of one side can provide the required findings or not. Triangulation of the data could validate the research findings later.

After the identification of the study target, the study content shall be highlighted in details. The determinants of conflict formation, the emotional quotient of customer service staff and conflict management strategies are the main topics for this dissertation. There can be more than one determinant of conflict formation, some of which are related to emotional intelligence and some of which are not. This dissertation shall concentrate the emotional factors only and identify the major non-emotional related factors in a concise and precise way. For example, environmental factors and personality are non-emotional factors but may invoke conflict at some time.

In order to carry on with the study, the emotional quotient of customer service staff must be tested and measured. Since emotional intelligence is a key study area of this dissertation, it shall be analysed for its connection to the recognition of conflict formation and its influence on the selection of conflict management strategies under different situations. Moreover, emotional intelligence shall be analysed in details in relation to the individual’s relationship to their own emotions, and their ability to control their emotions in relation in interpersonal
relationships. In this way, the scale of emotional quotient test shall include the measurement of both intrapersonal and interpersonal aspects. The Bar-On scale of emotional quotient and its sub-scale in personal competence and social competence with respect to ability and potential for recognition and regulation of conflict will serve this purpose.

1.5 Outline of the dissertation

The areas covered by this thesis are outlined in Chapter One.

The literature review in Chapter 2 discusses the critical determinants of conflict formation, the significance of emotional intelligence and conflict management strategies. Critical theories in the fields of psychology and organisational behaviour will help to formulate the research hypotheses and theoretical framework for the dissertation. The relationship between emotional intelligence and conflict formation, and the relationship between emotional intelligence and conflict management strategies are studied. The framework will serve as the basis for the methodology of this dissertation.

Chapter 3 discusses the method of analysis used to study the issues of conflict formation, emotional intelligence and conflict management strategies. The research paradigm and analytical method will be formulated. The procedures adopted are in accordance with the timeframe of the dissertation including the data collection, data description and analysis, findings and its applications.

Ethical factors are one of the considerations in this dissertation. The researcher needs to be constantly considering ethical issues and they need to be carefully handled throughout the
research. The data collection and description shall be conducted in a manner which does not harm anyone involved, including the interviewees and the companies or organisations they work for. The selection of the study method is discussed in details and Grounded Theory is explained in details.

In Chapter 4 the collected data is summarised and analysed. Subjects’ characteristics and main issues will be revealed, and studied in details. This Chapter also scrutinises the patterns of data for each study issue. As qualitative methods are being used in this study the analysis presented is a detailed qualitative analysis which uses relevant coding methods. Finally, the findings are presented so as to provide the basis for the conclusions and implications discussed in the final chapter.

The final chapter presents the research findings. It summarises the relationships between the emotional quotients of people in the service industry, the formation of conflict, conflict management and the adoption of conflict management strategies with an emphasis on the emotional aspects of these issues. The effects of emotional intelligence on conflict formation and conflict management strategy are discussed. The implications of the theories and of research papers discussed in previous chapters will also be finalised and verified in details. Limitations of this research shall be identified and highlighted. Finally, the implications of the findings and further research suggestions are discussed at the end of this final chapter.

1.6 Definitions of Terms

The theme of this dissertation is emotional intelligence and conflict management. Hence the concept of conflict, types of conflict, conflict management strategies, and emotional
intelligence must be defined. The following definitions are the meanings of the concepts as used in this study. Each concept has different meanings when used by different scholars:

1. **Conflict**

Conflicts have been defined by various scholars in their various spectrums of studies. They are further divided into (i) affective conflicts and (ii) cognitive conflicts.

Thomas (2005) defines conflict as a natural disagreement resulting from individuals or groups that differed in attitudes, beliefs, values or needs. They can also originate from past rivalries and personality differences.

Stephen (1978) defines conflict as any kind of opposition or antagonistic interaction between two or more parties.

Rahim (1986), argues that affective conflict occurs when two or more interacting social entities become aware that their feeling and emotions are incompatible, which is also known as relationship conflict. He suggests that cognitive conflict occurs when two or more interacting social entities become aware that their thought processes or perceptions are incongruent, which is also known as task conflict. Cognitive conflict between decision-makers is the awareness of inconsistent inferences drawn from identical information. In its extreme form, two parties’ inferences from the same data are logical contradictions of one another (Rahim, 1986).

Guetzkow and Gyr (1954) identify affective conflict as conflict in interpersonal relationships, i.e. relationship-related conflict. Jehn (1994) classifies conflict as being either task conflict or emotional conflict. Cognitive conflict is task conflict or task-related conflict. Affective
conflict is emotional conflict or emotionally-related conflict.

Jehn (1997) studies the apparent distinction between task and relationship in different aspects of organisational life. Leadership theories and group functions contribute different predictions about the effect of different types of conflict on group outcomes. That is, conflict arises from the nature of the task and from the interpersonal relationships between the parties concerned.

Jehn (1997) suggests that affective conflict is relationship-related conflict while cognitive conflict is task-related conflict. Amason (1996) classifies conflict as being either cognitive or affective.

Involving party means the self, which is the customer service staff, of the conflict situation and opposing party means the customer of conflict situation. Concerning party/parties means both the involving party and the opposing party.

2. Conflict management strategies

Brett (1984), Brown (1992), and Lewicki et al. (1992) focus on studying conflict resolution and conflict resolution strategies. Conflict management strategies have primarily been defined based on assertiveness and cooperation. In the definition of the conflict management strategies, assertiveness means a concern for self and cooperation means a concern for others.

There are five conflict management strategies for dealing with these two concerns (Thomas, 1976) and they are presented in the following diagram.
Table 1  Conflict management strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High concern for self</th>
<th>Dominating</th>
<th>Integrating</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low concern for self</td>
<td>Compromising</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Avoiding</td>
<td>Obliging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low concern for others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High concern for others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Thomas, 1976

As shown in the diagram, an integrating management strategy involves a high concern for self and high concern for others. A compromising management strategy involves a medium concern for self and medium concern for others. A dominating management strategy involves a high concern for self but low concern for others. An obliging management strategy involves a high concern for others and a low concern for self. An avoiding management style involves a low concern for self and a low concern for others. These five management styles have different characteristics and applications. Concern for self is assessed according to the degree of assertiveness motivated by interest in one’s personal values, opinions and perceptions, whereas concern for others is explained as the degree of cooperativeness and consideration for others’ interests, values, opinions and perceptions. (Thomas, 1976)

3. Emotional quotient

Emotional intelligence, its measurement as emotional quotient, is about perceived emotions, about accessing and generating emotions so as to assist thought, to understand and reflect emotions (Bar-On, 1997). It is the capacity to perceive, express, understand, use, and
manage emotions, in oneself and other people (Mayer & Salovey, 1995). Emotional intelligence quotient is a measure of emotional intelligence. Emotional quotient is an abbreviation of “emotional intelligence quotient”. The emotional quotient can be further divided into different scales, which will be elaborated in the following chapter.

1.7 Delimitations of scope and key assumptions

One of the limitations of this study is that different people may have different views on what the term ‘conflict’ means. They may also have different views on the magnitude and nature of a particular conflict. The differing perceptions of a conflict held by customers and customer service staff may induce different interpretations. In order address this limitation, only the views of the customer service staff are sought regarding conflict formation.

Conflict formation is complex and dynamic. It may involve change on the part of both parties in their attitude and personality, and so the study of one side can only yield partial information on conflict formation. The complex and dynamic relationships involved in conflict formation may be covered by another study so as to recognise and identify all the determinants of conflict formation.

The assessment of emotional quotient in this research is limited to the customer service staff. This is an acknowledgement of the importance of their own emotional intelligence in handling conflicts. The study of the emotional intelligence of customers is not included in this dissertation. That means that this study is one-sided and conflict formation is only viewed from the perspective of the service staff without any investigation of the customers’ perceptions. This is because input from customers is not available and if the service staff fully acknowledge their own emotional intelligence and act accordingly, the emotional
quotient of the customer would have no effect on the conflict formation.

The improvement of customer service is achieved through the control of the quality of services provided by customer service staff but also depends to a lesser extent on the viewpoint of the customers. The customer service staff can only control and improve their own attitudes conflict management. Hence, the choice of conflict management strategies depends on the perspective of the customer service staff but in general does not involve the consideration of both parties.

Also, it is important to acknowledge here that conflict management strategies may include skills and techniques. However, for the purpose of this dissertation, focus will be mainly on the strategies of integrating, compromising, dominating, obliging and avoiding.

The skills of negotiation, mediation, arbitration, reinterpretation, the dynamic choice of management strategies and skills are not considered in this dissertation. Moreover, the conflicts studied are limited to affective and cognitive conflicts only. The application of conflict management strategies applied to other types of conflicts may be inapplicable and inappropriate.

Finally, there are numerous types of customer services in Hong Kong, and this dissertation has selected property management as the target of study. Therefore, the application of the findings will need to be adjusted according to the specific nature of the industry involved.

1.8 Conclusion

In customer services industries, conflict is inevitable and unavoidable. Therefore, immense
time and effort are expended by customer service staff to resolving and overcoming such conflicts. The objective of this dissertation is to identify the determinants of conflict formation in order to have a better understanding of the conflict formation process.

The study of the process of conflict formation, emotional intelligence and conflict management strategies belong to the disciplines of organisational behaviour and psychology. However, this study is focused on customer service staff and the study method is to record the customer service staffs’ observation of the customers’ reactions and feedback. It is a one-sided study. The choice of a qualitative approach is discussed in the chapter on methodology.

The study of conflict formation aims to develop a better match of conflict management strategies with different situations. As an inappropriate selection of conflict management strategy may aggravate a conflict, the choice of the right strategy is important. Knowledge and skill in the selection of the appropriate conflict management strategy can resolve the conflict and improve the interpersonal relationships between customers and customer service staff. In some cases, good use of conflict management strategies can build up trust between customers and service staff and significantly improve customer service.

Change of emotions usually increase one’s energy level in a particular situation and could enhance the reaching for his/her goals and objectives. But it also has a negative impact in the aspect of interpersonal relationship. This study tries to identify the importance of emotional intelligence in conflict formation and conflict management strategies so that the positive aspects of such effects are achieved while the negative ones are avoided. The relationship between emotional intelligence and conflict formation, and the relationship between emotional intelligence and conflict management strategies are the main focus of
This dissertation.

There are two main types of conflict: relationship conflict and task conflict (Jehn, 1997), sometimes alternatively known as affective and cognitive conflicts. Other types of conflict are beyond the scope of this dissertation. Further study may be needed to develop the application of conflict management strategies to other types of conflict.

The nature of conflicts are different for different people, different industries and the environments in which they arise. Therefore conflict management and solutions discussed in this dissertation are only applicable in some cases and not generally applicable to all situations. The delimitations of scope and key assumptions of this study need to be considered when applying its findings to different industries and different situations.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will review literature on the parent theories and classification models relating to: i) views of conflict, (ii) conflict formation, (iii) conflict management strategies and methods and (iv) emotional intelligence.

Conflicts have been viewed somewhat differently at different times in the literature. The views of conflicts are different in different situations. Different scholars’ theories about conflict formation, and the critical factors in conflict formation, will be discussed here. Conflict management strategies, whether they are motivated by a concern for self or a concern for others include avoiding, domination, obliging, obliging and integrating. Hence, conflict management methods will include the application of the various management strategies involving negotiation, consultation and communication, education and public relations, reinterpretation, mediation and arbitration.

The concept of emotional quotient is studied and defined in terms of personal and social competence in the recognition and regulation of emotion.

Research theory and related research issues are discussed. The objectives of the research are to identify whether there is any relationship between emotional quotient and conflict formation, and whether there is any relationship between emotional quotient and conflict management strategies. The determinants of the
relationships involved in conflict situations will also be identified and analysed.

After the clarification and elaboration of the concepts and their related theories, the determinants of conflict formation and the related research issues will be reviewed, including the formation of analytical and theoretical frameworks concerning the relationship between conflict and emotional quotient.

In a study named ‘Conflict management in the high stress environment of the operating room’, Pinosky (2003) concludes that conflict is inevitable, especially in highly stressed environments. Therefore, he believes, professional organisations and employers have a responsibility to recognise that people approach conflict differently and should provide opportunities for multidisciplinary audiences to learn and develop conflict management skills and thereby change their interpersonal environments. Therefore, it is important to identify effective conflict management strategies for conflict resolution.

Utit Sirivun (2001), in a paper investigating the primary and secondary conflict management style preferences of managers and college students in Thailand, finds that the primary conflict management style is integrating, while the secondary styles are either obliging or compromising conflict management. This research finds no differences between Thai men and women in their choice of conflict management style, or between the choices of managers and students conflict management. The implication here is that the most frequently used styles – integrating, obliging and compromising – might be the most effective management styles for resolving conflicts.
Anne (2003) finds that a cognitive appeal generates the same degree of attitude change as an emotional appeal. When the attitude to be changed was cognition-based, or an emotional appeal generated more attitude change than a cognitive appeal, the attitude to be changed is said to be emotion-based. It is suggested that both emotion and cognition are independent factors in attitude change. Therefore, the previous belief that emotional-cognitive matching effects are a recurrent phenomenon arising from persuasion has been disproved by researchers and experts. Although emotion and cognition do exist, it is unknown whether they actually operate simultaneously in conflict management and persuasion.

In his study on emotional intelligence and its relationship with sales success Chipain (2003) finds that emotional intelligence is strongly correlated to sales success. However, does a high emotional quotient necessarily mean good conflict management and therefore in success in business activity conflict management?

In her investigation of the emotional competencies of leaders, Joni King Brooks (2002) suggests that emotional competencies such as empathy, adaptability, self-control, emotional self-awareness, the ability to develop good connections with others, and so forth, contribute significantly to leader effectiveness. The study assessed managers in a financial organisation who were deemed most effective according to their performance ratings. These managers exhibited higher emotional intelligence competencies than managers with lower performance ratings. This implies that emotional intelligence is one of the factors crucial to successfully handling performance related or difficult tasks.
In her research into the antecedents of conflict, Mooney (2000) suggests that successful conflict management during strategic decision making was related to behavioural integration. She argues that business colleagues have an effect on the conflict management during the process of information exchange, collaborative behaviour and joint decision making.

There has been no research studying the relationship between emotional intelligence and conflict management in property management or any other customer services industries in Hong Kong, although there are studies in related fields under different situations. Hence, this research is the pioneer in studying these two issues in the customer service industry.

2.2 Parent theories and classification models

2.2.1 Views of conflicts

Thomas (2005) defines a conflict as a disagreement in opinions between people or groups, due to differences in attitudes, beliefs, values or needs. In the business world, differences in such characteristics as work experience, personality, peer group, environment, and situation, all lead to differences in personal attitudes, beliefs, values or needs. Consequently, there is no practical or non-exhaustive definition of conflict at all. Conflict exists whenever there are differences in thinking patterns.

Literally, no two people are identical. Every person is different in thinking and behaviour. Even if they attempt to imitate of others thinking and behaviour,
people still think and behave individually and differently. The reactions of people to different situations introduce the further likelihood of difference. As every person behaves and thinks differently, conflicts happen for all to varying extents.

**Traditionalist perspective**

In the traditional management view, conflict is regarded as destructive and is eliminated or resolved only at high levels of management. This was the situation until the 1940s (Stephen, 1978). This perspective held that a concerning party will take action whenever there are disagreements of any magnitude. This is because the concerning parties are reluctant to endure any level or kind of conflict.

But in our daily activities, whether we seek to solve conflict or not may be affected by personal traits, other parties or other factors. Moreover, since different people have different attitudes towards the same matter, it is quite normal for them to have different reactions to the same situation. In addition, a culture of fierce competition or an atmosphere of peaceful enjoyment will certainly generate different attitudes in people towards how conflicts should be handled.

The traditional view is easily comprehended and accepted. As the view prevailed for several decades, the general public commonly holds this view of conflicts. They treat conflict as uncomfortable and a destructive factor in daily activities and functions. They avoid or prevent the occurrence of conflict, and view conflict as disgusting or the evil side of their lives or the business world.

Therefore, in the business world, conflicts are greatly reduced by the establishment of rules and policies. Business management systems such as International
Standards for Organisations, Six Sigma System, have working procedure well defined between customer and customer service staff so as to reduce the grey area in service provision.

Behaviourist perspective
During 1940s and early 1950s, some scholars such as Stephen (1978) started interpreting conflicts using a behavioural approach. From the point of view of the behaviourist, conflict is unavoidable and inevitable. As people have different behaviours and perspectives on daily issues, whether on business or family matters, any kind of conflict thus cannot be avoided or prevented. It happens from time to time and it is not wise to put too much effort into avoiding or preventing the outbreak of conflict. They regard conflict as natural and part of our lives. Hence the ways to handle conflict, rather than avoidance of conflict, should be the main concern for improvement of our lives.

According to behaviourists, there is no need to resolve every conflict. The magnitude or type of conflict may determine whether the conflict should be dealt with or not. Different people have different levels of tolerance for conflict. If the magnitude of the conflict is within this level, the conflict shall be tolerated. The concerning parties shall endure minor conflicts or unimportant issues so as to face the reality of life and save their attention for better development of other more critical aspects of their daily activities.

Tolerance for conflict varies from person to person and will depend on his/her attitude, personality, perceptions and needs. The behaviourists recognise that a reasonable level of conflict is natural. Different people only act and behave
according to their different endurance levels. But how to determine a person’s endurance level depends on a personal value judgement or mode of behaviour. Focusing on large or critical conflicts enables the concerning parties to resolve the conflict in a better and more effective way. In addition, the direction of the conflict-related behaviour will be clear and easy to identify.

Serious and significant conflicts will still be destructive and so resolution is needed. People must develop conflict management strategies in order to avoid or prevent any conflict which exceeds their endurance level. Otherwise, the consequences of the deterioration of conflicts can ruin lives.

Behaviourists view minor conflicts within the participants’ tolerance level as reasonable and negligible, and serious and significant conflicts as negative. Therefore, philosophers and practitioners not only developed conflict management strategies but also found ways to change major conflicts into minor ones and critical conflicts into irrelevant ones. This approach provides one possibility of resolving conflict by reducing its intensity so that it is within the endurance levels of those involved. This can be done by action or justification inside the mindset of the concerning party.

**Interactionist perspective**

In the Conflict-survival model, conflict is interpreted as an interactive relationship between peoples and society. Conflict can induce changes for adaptation and so the adaptation can result in survival (Stephen, 1974). Furthermore, conflict resolution is not only for senior managers. The lower the level at which resolution is achieved, the more amicable the results will be.
The interactionists’ interpretation of conflict is totally different from that of traditionalists and behaviourists. To interactionists, conflict can be regarded as either dysfunctional or functional. The magnitude and type of conflict determines the interpretation (i.e. the need for resolution or stimulation) by interactionists.

Conflict is a part of our lives and a natural phenomenon of business organisations. Conflict is regarded as natural and inevitable. The nature of the conflict depends on the parties involved understand and perceive the situation (Iain, 2005). This perspective regards a certain level of conflict as being necessary to stimulate change in existing arrangements in family or business relationships. There is no need to react to the occurrence of some level of conflict. A low level of conflict not only will not harm daily operations but will help to create smooth functioning by promoting a better understanding of the existing issues.

However, if there is a critical or major conflict it should be resolved so as to reduce the differences in opinion, and enable the interests, perceptions or needs of the concerning parties to be addressed. The undesired level of conflict in major
conflicts is harmful and dysfunctional. This perspective holds that the level of conflict should be decreased in magnitude or in importance.

Conversely, if the actual level of conflict is below the desired level of conflict, interactionists suggest that the conflict should be stimulated so that it reaches to the desired level. Since conflict is a sign of disagreement or difference in some particular issues, conflicts that are too mild cannot act as a signal in the concerned issue. That is, the communication or understanding is not enough to bring about an adjustment to the business or family issue. Sufficient conflict at the desired level can inspire creativity in handling the issue which is the subject of the conflict (Erik, 1999). So, conflict can be positive in work environments (Evans, 1992). This explains why some people resolve conflict but others in the same situation stimulate conflict.

However, the endurance level for conflict is different for different people. The difference in the mindsets of people can change the interpretation of the importance or magnitude of conflict, and may be even ignored regardless of how conflict is defined by scholars.

To conclude, in their assessment of the disadvantages of conflict, there is no difference between the perspectives of traditionalists, behaviourists and interactionists. The following section on conflict management strategies will describe how they are applied and adopted to tackle undesired conflicts.

2.2.2 Conflict formation
Conflict means difference, and the difference can be a difference of interests, understanding, values, style or opinion. Hence conflict is created by any difference of interests, understanding, values, style, opinions, or a mix of two or more of such differences between two or more parties. The following discussion will first focus on an objectivist approach so as to categorise the determinants of conflict. Then a subjectivist approach which focuses on the perceived incompatibility of goals will be discussed.

A subjectivist approach is applied when the perceived incompatibility is crucial to a company’s vision and mission, as distinct from the dynamic concerns over numerous objectives which evolve and change from time to time. Moreover, the perceived incompatibility is the essence of the business conflict analysis in a competitive business environment and the strategies used in such situations can be applied in similar situations with different concerns. The detection of a misallocation of resources, of the poor operation of a management system, or of an unacceptable level of incompatibility can help an observer to predict the subsequent steps in the conflict.

**Attribution theory**

Attribution theory suggests that the outcome of an action depends upon a combination of effective personal force and effective environmental force (Heider, 1958). The theory aims to identify the critical qualities of people and the environment in ordinary business operations. Martinko (1995) divides the theory into the achievement motivation model (Weiner, 1986) and the learned helplessness model (Martinko & Gardner, 1982). The achievement motivation model focuses on the effect of one’s reaction in the particular situation of
individual success and failure (Martinko & Gardner, 1982). Conversely, the learned helplessness model focuses on passive reactions to failure and the expectation that there is no chance of success, as an explanation of poor performance (Martinko, 1995).

Two models suggest that the failure of an organisation is mainly caused by staff attitudes. Heider (1958) concludes that attribution theory is based on attributing situational causes to particular events, the personal impact on the causes of the event, and the ability, effort and desire to deal with such events. On the other hand, different expectations of the results will induce different staff behaviours. Conflict is due to both personal factors such as personality and the surrounding environment (Robertson, 1995). Both models associate the relationship between the result and the cause.

Therefore, attribution theory explains the possibility of conflict as being due to these factors and implies the idea of causality (Kelley, 1967). The variations in the allocation of causality between the environment and an individual can be related to experiences, future expectations and behaviour (Weiner, 1972). But in details, the factor of behaviour is comprised of the behaviour and reactions of the concerning parties. In the customer service industry, staff behaviour will directly affect customer reactions. So, the staff attitude not only affects their own behaviour but also customer behaviour. Consequently, one factor can trigger the consequence of a cycle of future conflict.

Attribution theory also states that conflict will have three patterns. The cause of conflict can be static or dynamic. The controllability of the cause of conflict can
be under an organisation’s control or beyond its control. The locus of control refers to whether the cause of conflict is internal or external (Wilson et al, 1993). All these patterns imply that conflict will be dynamic, beyond control and external. In this way, Sillars (1980) summarises the implication of the theory to that interpersonal relations take two directions. The first direction is that attribution influences individual evaluative reactions, and the second is that attribution creates expectations of future events. The significance of the theory is that staff behaviour or expectations can help to resolve conflict or prevent further conflict and will therefore contribute to the success or failure of an organisation.

**Interpersonal attraction and distraction**

A conflict scholar (Deutsch, 1994) interprets conflict as being the reaction of the opposing party to the behaviour of the involving party. Involving party means the self, which is the customer service staff, of the conflict situation and opposing party means the customer of conflict situation. Thus, conflicts arise from the differences between action and reaction. Byrne (1971) proposes that people tend to like those who have similar attitudes to their own and dislike those who hold dissimilar ones. Deutsch (1992) finds that interpersonal attraction produces less conflict and dislike produces more conflict. Boardman and Horowitz (1994) suggest that similarities in beliefs, attitudes, and values are usually conducive to reducing conflicts but discrepancies in beliefs, attitudes, and values lead to increased conflicts.

Similarity and dissimilarity can be used to explain interpersonal attraction and distraction (Esin, 2001). A similarity of personal interests and personality will easily provide common issues for communication and build up the foundation of
interpersonal relationships. Through communication, understanding and recognition of the perspectives of the other party are usually shared and gradually respected. Minor differences between two parties will then be eliminated and the chance of conflict will be decreased. The sharing of points of view in particular issues will even encourage support from the other party. In this way, interpersonal attraction can eliminate the possibility of conflict and smooth any existing conflict. Therefore it can be concluded that communication promotes the ability to detect any potential for conflict which can then be easily resolved in its early stages.

Conversely, a dissimilarity of personal interests and personalities makes it difficult to identify common issues for communication and to build up the foundation for an interpersonal relationship. A lack of communication can intensify the misunderstanding of perspectives of the concerning parties. The standpoint of a party may be completely neutral but if this is not communicated properly, this can become a barrier to the resolution of conflicts in their initial stages. Assumptions about the others behaviour can trigger conflict, worsen a situation and create mutual distrust.

The reason behind interpersonal attraction and dislike may only be mistaken perceptions of behaviour as observed by the other people. Once a bad opinion is formed, it easily develops into stereotyping other people’s behaviour. People generally assume their own interpretations and value judgements are right and accurate, and they develop the desire to convince others to have the same interpretation. When the other party is recognised as a member or an associate of a group with congruent views, they are accepted. This phenomenon of closed
thinking aggravates the interpersonal attraction and repulsion.

**Temperament theory**

Some scholars (John & David, 1997) have applied Temperament Theory to understanding conflict. Modern temperament theory has identified four primary types of characters: the Artisan, the Guardian, the Idealist and the Rational (David, 1987). In the model of temperament theory, the Artisan is identified as having the need to act on impulse and make an impact; the Guardian is identified as having the need to belong and be secure; the Idealist is identified as having the need to pursue ‘authentic’ being; and the Rational is identified as having the need to know, and then control nature. All the needs are interpreted as firm needs of the specific type of people (David, 1987).

The model can be used to illustrate the conflict and tension that results from the collision of different core values arising from contrasting temperaments. The Artisan follows instructions from others like a child whereas the Guardian forces other people to conform to their opinions. The Idealist and the Rational interpret their opinions and interests as being important. The Idealist prefers the perfect and reliable in decision-making and behaviour whereas the Rational prefers the rational and sensible in decision-making and behaviour.

During interpersonal contact, different types of people will stick to their core values and develop different value judgements. In this way, different temperaments will develop different ways of life and behaviour. If the personality and temperament last for long periods or even for a lifetime, and are not changed under ordinary situations, conflicts will develop out of such differences. The conflict happens
between or among different types of people and cannot be resolved in an easy way. So, people with similar patterns of thinking encounter less conflict with the same type of people.

Thus the understanding and recognition of the temperament of people will help to identify the causes of conflict and provides a rationale for interpretations of the causes of conflicts. In the customer service industry, the staff have the chance to meet and communicate with the four types of people. If the staff cannot understand the personal differences and identify the characteristic and core values of customers and act accordingly, conflict will happen easily and communication between the staff and customer is hindered and will become ineffective.

**Contingency theory**

In the commercial world, business organisations have their own nature, culture and management system. A rigid structure can result in undesired bureaucracy or red tape in the operation of the business. In extreme situations such as conflicts or crises, a business organisation shall take three factors to tackle the difficult issue, namely, the time pressure, control of the different levels of threat, and response of the option constraints (Burnett, 1998). These three factors come with major critical decisive ability, strong analytical power and large accuracy of information.

In contingency theory, the effectiveness of an organisation is not related to the qualities of an ideal profile but rather is directly related to the combination of an organisation's profile and the environmental conditions in which it operates (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967). Moreover, the external environment will influence organisational outcomes by imposing constraints and any required adjustments are
the price for its survival (Hatch, 1997). The contingency theory emphasises the organisation should have its organisational design based around individual capacities. The organisation needs to apply different leadership styles to be effective in a range of situations, and needs to tailor-make tasks according to individual needs (Gray & Starke, 1984).

The key point of the contingency theory is its flexibility to solve problems. There is no straightforward method to solve an organisational problem and manage an organisation’s image based on the available resources. During a conflict, the upper management needs to be flexible in solving the problem in order to satisfy the public (Heba, 2004). That in order to be able to resolve conflict, the organisation has to be flexible, in the approach taken by senior management and frontline staff. If the decision-making authority is in the hands of the senior management, the executive needs to be flexible in its response to the issue. Similarly, if the duty customer service staff encounter conflict, they should be flexible in the way they react to the issue.

But what makes flexibility a crucial factor during conflict situation? Lawrence (1993) suggests that flexibility is the tool needed to help an organisation to adjust quickly to its environment through the action of ‘all to all communication’. Flexibility can be improved through restructuring communication patterns and activities, flattening organisational hierarchies and decentralising (Stohl, 1995). In particular, the level of communication in any organisation is based on the uncertainty level, an organisation’s objectives, an organisation’s size, and environmental change (Galbraith, 1977).
Heba (2004) suggests that flexibility in contingency theory implies motivating the organisation to be more flexible at times of a conflict and to have alternative plans and strategies to be able to face it. It follows that inflexibility will induce conflict and so the aim is to communicate well, taking into consideration all environment factors including customers.

**Environmental factor**

Eric (2004) argues that environmental factors have a great influence on conflict as so many stakeholders have conflicting interests in today’s changing world. Daniels and Walker (2001) associate environmental effect with the formation of disputes and conflicts; and view such disputes as long running and deep-rooted conflicts. Environmental factors are the summation of outside uncontrollable dynamic uncertainties. Since and environmental factor can be any factor in the environment which outside the control of the individual, they are complex and need further detailed study to identify what type of environmental factors are critical in certain situations. Not all outside factors are related to conflicts and the identification of relevant factors is necessary.

Consequently, environmental factors contribute to conflict formation and will vary depending on the situation. The uncertainty about how environmental factors influence a situation in also due to the influence of behaviour that is controllable by oneself. Hence the focus of the study on the degree of self-control shown, temperament, and interpersonal attraction or friction will influence resolution strategies. The uncertainty regarding the influence of environmental factors will be critical or irrelevant depending on the situation. This means that for interpretations of the effects of environment in certain conflicts, judgements will
need to be made about whether their influence is significant or not.

**Theory of Self-control**

Conflict is defined as any serious disagreement in interests, understanding, values, style or opinion. Serious conflicts are those in which the difference provokes offensive action or behaviour.

In the 20th century, many behavioural scientists argued that environmental factors controlled human behaviour. For these scientists, environment is the only factor needed to interpret human behaviour (Walsh, 2002). In early studies of human behaviour, human nature is viewed as a collection of vague predispositions and as the indeterminate material out of which social factors shape behaviour (Durkheim, 1962). In effect, social influences determine human behaviour but predispositions can be ignored as predispositions are a flexible function and are not the determining factors of human behaviour.

However, theory of Self-control holds that human nature consists of selfish impulses whose satisfaction often entails offending others (Wiebe, 2004). The theory has identified the human emotional systems and cognitive biases as fundamental tendencies connected to prosocial and self-directed behaviours. This implies the possibility of causing offence or creating conflict. The meaning of self-control is complex and dependent on the factors of self-regulation, prosociality and self-direction. Prosociality will result in the formation of social bonds and involves social reciprocity whereas self-direction tends to cause people to act in their own long-term self-interest without external sanctions. The theory has described the different roles of prosocial and self-directed behaviours in
connection to conflict.

When people display self-directed behaviour aimed at satisfying selfish desires, they induce conflict in the process of trying to attain immediate fulfilment (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). This desire for fulfilment certainly disregards the welfare of others. In order to resolve conflicts, learning self-control can involve developing an understanding of, and concern about, the long-term effects of one’s actions (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990).

In the subsequent studies of human behaviour and criminology, environmental influences were assumed to be the only factors affecting human behaviour and were used to explain the possibility and formation of conflict. But theory of Self-control implies that conflict arises in the event of an imbalance between self-direction and prosocial considerations. Moreover, the occurrence of conflict will be induced by instant selfish desire taking precedence over other interests. However, human beings have the potential to exhibit self-control as self-regulation, self-direction, and social consideration (Hirschi and Gottfredson, 2000). Consequently, the cultivation of the inherent ability or potential for self-control can relieve strong self-centred impulses and help resolve conflicts.

*Theories of causation and the Social Exchange Theory*

There are many conflicts in human activities in business life and family life. Minor conflicts can be neglected but major ones will impair ordinary functioning. In spite of some conflicts being major and significant, conflicts may be needed to stimulate change (Berstene, 2004) and only undesirable conflicts should be resolved. Well-trained business managers and knowledgeable people can resolve
most undesirable conflicts. Nevertheless, there may still be some conflicts which need for further attention if they are to be resolved.

In business conflicts, there are numerous complex factors that trigger their outbreak. Scholars (Folger, et al, 1997) have categorised some significant explanations for what causes conflicts: psychic energy, the existence of a win-lose climate, Social Exchange theory, ineffective human relations, different perceptions and interpretations, social confrontation, reciprocity and different roles and expectations.

For some observers, the human mind is viewed as a reservoir of psychic energy that drives human behaviour and provides the basis for conflict (Blackard and Gibson, 2002). Human behaviour involves some functional and some dysfunctional activities which affect the individual and society. However, the influence of psychic energy on the human mind can have many interpretations and they are beyond the scope of this dissertation.

In business contexts, people will rationally strive to acquire better resources. Once the situation brings on a win-lose relationship between the concerning parties, conflict will likely happen until a state of equilibrium has been attained.

Similarly, the Social Exchange Theory (Folger, et al, 1997) suggests that business people will evaluate the potential rewards and costs in a business situation. Conflict will arise when costs exceed rewards according to their evaluation, for example in the relationship of supervisor and employee. Thus, the unfavourable party will feel unjustly treated and conflict develops.
Obviously, ineffective human relationships hinder communication and induce misunderstandings. Personality and communication skills can have a significant influence on the effectiveness of human communication and interpersonal relationships. Positive human relationships give rise to communal trust that can resolve and prevent conflict.

People interpret and perceive the same situations from different perspectives. There are many reasons that lead to the existence of different points of view about the same situations. They include educational background, career, culture, beliefs, interests, and value judgements.

Social confrontation occurs when a person signals to the other that his or her behaviour is violating a rule or expectation that governs the relationship (Folger, et al, 1997). For example, when customer service staff argue that the service they are providing is in compliance with company policy, the customers’ complaint will cause conflict, whether or not the staff behaviour complies with company policy.

Reciprocity exists when a person responds in kind to another party’s behaviour (Folger, et al, 1997). The human reaction to the initial action or behaviour of the concerning party will have different patterns. If a positive behaviour induces a positive reaction and feedback, no conflict occurs. On the other hand, negative behaviour triggers negative reaction and feedback and conflict results.

Different roles and expectations may be the origins of conflict which can last for a long time. If the polarisation and differences between certain individuals cannot
be relieved or diffused through effective communication and mutually accepted patterns of behaviour, conflict is triggered and can develop into intense situations if not resolved in a timely manner.

In summing up, over the 40 years’ development of a range of theories between 1958 and 2004 scholars could only identify the factors which cause conflicts. No definitive relationship has been identified with a common factor. Could emotional intelligence be the missing link?

2.2.3 Conflict management strategies and methods

Conflict management strategies of five styles

Blake and Mouton (1964) were pioneers in the study of the interpersonal conflict and placed an emphasis on concern for self and concern for others. Concern for self is explained as the degree of assertiveness an individual shows in acting in their own interests, values, opinions and perceptions whereas concern for others is explained as the magnitude of cooperativeness involved in acting to protect the interests, values, opinions and perceptions of the other party. The two dimensions are further developed into five styles (Thomas, 1976) and they are presented in the following diagram.
Table 1  Conflict management strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High concern for self</th>
<th>Low concern for others</th>
<th>Low concern for others</th>
<th>High concern for others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dominating</td>
<td>Integrating</td>
<td>Compromising</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoiding</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obliging</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source:  Thomas, 1976

Since the five styles have their own characteristics and applications (Wall, 1995), each style is elaborated into detail below:

*The avoiding style*

The avoiding style is characterised by a low concern for self and a low concern for others. It is seen as a lose-lose approach. Low concern for self means that the individual takes no action to protect his/her own interests, values, opinions and perceptions. The avoiding style involves escaping after the occurrence of conflict but not the prevention of conflict. Escape is regarded as not resulting in any improvement to the situation and does nothing to improve the situation causing the conflict.

The avoiding management style contributes to the prevention of further conflict but does not help resolve the existing one. The existing conflict still happens and has a negative effect to the concerning parties. Avoidance just delays the consequences of the conflict in the short term. The avoiding style may not resolve or prevent future conflict because both parties just avoid the real cause of
the present conflict and so the causes of conflict persist. The avoiding style delays the issue and provides time for those involved to consider a better management style to resolve the conflict. So, if the delay is good and constructive, it is appropriate for the situation. For example, when the concerning parties are emotionally aroused, the avoiding style can prevent the instant deterioration of conflict.

In the avoiding style, the low concern for others means low consideration of others’ welfare and hence a low chance or no chance for customer satisfaction in the customer service industry. Since customers usually have a certain level of expectation of service provision, a low concern for others will probably mean that the customers will be disappointed. It is rare for the customer to expect no service in a conflict situation. A low concern for others on the part of the customer service staff means a poor understanding of the customers’ needs, and then poor interpersonal relationships. Poor interpersonal relationships will result in ineffective communication between the concerning parties and possibly different perceptions of the same conflict issue.

As a result, the avoiding style can be regarded as a delaying tactic rather than a means of conflict resolution. The advantage of delaying the issue is to prevent a deterioration of the situation as no other appropriate conflict style can be applied correctly for the time being. The other advantage of the delay is that it enables the person who is avoiding to listen well and thereby identify the needs of the other party and this can help in planning the subsequent conflict management strategy. The disadvantage is loss of the opportunity for connection and effective communication. Therefore, it is not recommended that the avoiding style be
applied without thorough consideration. Its lose-lose aspect will imply no conflict resolution and a loss of chance to improve the situation for both parties involved in the conflict.

*The dominating style*

The dominating style is characterised by a high concern for self but a low concern for others. Self interest dominates this conflict management strategy and there is little concern for cooperation with others. The self-interested, dominating style of conflict management can enable of party to protect their interests, values, opinions and perceptions in the short run. However, the lack of consideration for others will result in an imbalance of interests in the long run. In the customer service industry, a low concern for customers’ welfare will result in customer dissatisfaction and further complaints or conflicts. Hence, the dominating conflict style cannot resolve conflict either in the short term or the long term.

The dominating style should not be applied as a general strategy. Since conflict management styles must balance the interests of both sides, the dominating style can only be used in the case of a high power situation. For example, when a company is a famous brand name in the industry, the customer will accept the policy and practice of the company and will be satisfied with the company staff to a greater extent. Famous companies have greater power in their industry and so by association the service provision staff may wield similar power. In such situations, the powerful side can apply a dominating style and the balance of interests can still be achieved.

In temperament theory, the guardian-type people are identified as having the need
to own and be secure. They like to force other people to conform to their ways of thinking; they have the tendency to apply a dominating conflict management style. Guardian-type people have strong personalities and will always apply a dominating conflict management strategy. Typically, they are not aware of the disadvantages of having a low concern for others. They recognize their own needs as being equivalent in importance to the need for others. The misinterpretation of the needs of others will induce faulty decisions among those who use this conflict management style.

Moreover, the uncooperative behaviour which characterises the dominating conflict management style implies a win-lose approach. The non-cooperation induces confrontation and easily triggers further conflict. Hence, the high concern for self and the low concern for others will result in high payoff for others and low payoff for self. As the dominating conflict management style does not encourage substantial communication, it will result in biased judgments conflict management in conflict situations. Consequently, when applying the dominating style during conflict resolution, a staff member can increase their power as an imposing superior who holds more power due to their position in the organisation.

**The obliging style**

The obliging style of conflict management is characterised by a high concern for others and a low concern for self. The style involves compromise and cooperation with others and a lack of assertiveness about the individual's own interests. It is a lose-win approach to conflict management. It involves capitulation to accommodate the needs of others. Certainly, when the opposing party has great power, it is unwise to fight against it. The obliging style involves one party
sacrificing their interests, values, opinions and perceptions in the short run in order to relieve the tense atmosphere of conflict situations, and probably results in long-term gain as better long-term interpersonal relationship.

Therefore when the interests, values, opinions and perceptions of one party are not important or relevant in conflict situations, the obliging style can resolve the conflict. In the customer service industry, to serve and satisfy the customer is usually an important policy of the company. In some cases, customer satisfaction is the sole vision and mission of the company, as customer satisfaction will result in a larger market share and higher profits. The obliging style requires the ability to understand and recognise the interests, values, opinions and perceptions of the opposing party. So, high communication and analysing skills must be employed to use this conflict management strategy.

It is worth mentioning that, as customer expectations have been increasing in past decades, the obliging style may trigger continuously increasing and even unreasonable demands in quality and quantity. Hence, the obliging style should not be applied unchecked. Otherwise, a side effect of excessive demands from the opposing party may occur in the long run. Because this approach involves a low concern for self, the concerning party experiences a sense of low or no self-recognition. This brings about a state of imbalance of interests between the two parties. In the customer service industry, if the duty staff maintain a state of low or no self-recognition for a long time, they will face a low morale situation which will have to be addressed by their seniors.

In consequence, the obliging style can serve the opposing party well but this also
induces an imbalance of interests and the obliging party cannot bring an appropriate opinion and perspective to conflict management activities. The accommodation of customer needs in conflict management strategy can be regarded as a kind of customer service itself. However, this state of imbalance of interests may result in a high turnover of customer service staff and in turn result in a deterioration of service quality in the long run.

The compromising style

The compromising style of conflict management means medium concern for self and medium concern for others. This style involves equal concern for self and others, and it is regarded as a win-win approach. However, this win-win method only results in the partial satisfaction of both parties. It balances the interests, values, opinion and perceptions of the two parties. The compromising style aims at bringing about a compromise between the concerning party and the opposing party; hence negotiation skills are important during conflict management activities.

The compromising style is a reasonable strategy which balances the interests of two sides both in the short run and in the long run. Either party would prefer to have their interests satisfied at the expense of other party. The compromising style can relieve the harmful effects on either party. Since the costs and benefits resulting from conflicts shall be evaluated from time to time, the balancing of expected outcomes and opportunity costs resulting from decision-making during conflict management can be assessed.

In the commercial world, everyone strives to satisfy their own interests by whatever means available, especially through competition. The compromising
style is a skill which involves distributing resources in a mutually acceptable way. Compromise not only resolves the conflict but also identifies the critical needs of both parties. The scarce resources in the physical world cannot satisfy the unlimited needs of every party. Therefore the compromise style is a signal for the parties to identify their real needs and satisfy them. Compromise is a good way to balance self-interest with the consideration of other’s needs.

In the customer service industry, it is recommended that a compromising style be applied when the issue causing the conflict is not important and critical to either party. It is a heuristic and fast way to resolve the conflict and eliminate the harmful effects both in the short and long run. Through negotiation and by adopting compromising activities during conflict, an understanding of the perspective of the other party will be improved on both sides. This is a good way to prevent further conflicts.

The integrating style

The integrating style of conflict management is characterised by a high concern for self and a high concern for others. It is a win-win approach to resolving conflicts. Since collaboration is needed to satisfy and accommodate the interests, values, opinions and perceptions of both parties, high problem solving skills are required to identify common needs. The satisfaction of the needs of both sides can improve the interpersonal relationships and foster the development of mutual trust. The integrating style can resolve the immediate conflict and significantly reduce the incidence of further conflict.

However, the integrating style calls for good problem solving techniques, good
analytical skills, and sound decision-making from the customer service staff. The staff need to have learned and developed innovative ability during previous conflicts. Successful use of this technique can be promoted through staff training and the selection of staff with the keen insight needed to analyse problems which arise during conflicts. But how to develop the potential of staff for keen insight is the crucial factor in conflict resolution. The staff must clearly identify the real needs of both parties and satisfy those needs without major side effects or unexpected outcomes. In order to achieve this, the application of strategies must be undertaken in a systematic and appropriate way.

In the customer service industry, the integrating style can be time-consuming and needs to be applied flexibly in different situations. There is no straightforward method to come up with collaboration in complex conflict situations. Customer service staff must analyse the available information and be fully in touch with the dynamics of the conflict. An understanding of the range of possible outcomes and their related effects on both parties is required. Hence, using this style is a complicated and sophisticated process. The staff must not only verify all the information about factors which are within their control but also allow for the potential impact of uncontrollable factors on the conflict situation.

The results of using the integrating style are positive as the strategy can achieve a balance of the interests of both sides and significantly improve the situation. So amongst the five conflict management strategies, the integrating style is the most successful one. The integrating style should be adopted for important and critical conflict issues. The parties firstly must understand the conflict situation but not be distracted by unnecessary and irrelevant issues. The parties need to be
flexible and adjust or eliminate the unsolved issues, and develop an accurate and
detailed analysis of the critical factors during conflict resolution so as to protect the
interests of both parties.

**Conflict management methods**
The application of any of the five conflict management styles, or strategies as
described by Thomas, involves certain methods.

As described in the previous sections, conflict management styles include avoiding,
obliging, dominating, compromising and integration. The six methods and actions
of negotiation, consultation and communication, education and public relations,
and reinterpretation will be considered in a detailed way. In addition to these
more common methods, some less common methods of mediation and arbitration
will also be discussed.

**Method 1 - Negotiation**
Negotiation is a skill in the process of conflict settlement (Negotiation Journal,
2003). Negotiation is the process of achieving understanding and mutual
agreement in situations where differences arise between two or more parties
(Dhanesh, 1988). The significance of understanding different perspectives is that
it changes the difference into a difference in roles or positions only. That is, the
understanding of the difference involves recognising that the difference is due to
the different roles played by the participants rather than the different
interpretations of the two parties.

Secondly, negotiation provides the opportunity to identify the need and clarify the
resources of the parties. Through negotiation, the needs and resources of the involved parties can be clarified and so the realistic goals of the parties may emerge. This helps in resolving the conflict by specifying and expanding the resources. It is the way to settle the conflict through the redistribution of resources through the adjustment of the type and magnitude of resources. The purpose of the negotiation is to handle the conflict in multiple perspectives in order to converge the differences through the development of common goals involving a better recognition of the situations of both parties (Negotiation Journal, 2003).

In particular, conflict can be arisen through oversimplification and stereotyping (Twemlow and Sacco, 2003). Such misjudgement is due to mistaken perceptions of the other’s personality and intentions. The process of negotiation needs an equivalence or equality of power (Zuckerman, 2001). Otherwise, the negotiation may not be effective. For the customer service industry, customer service staff may not recognise the needs of the customer right from the start. Misunderstandings may be caused by oversimplifying customer requests and stereotyped perceptions of the customer. The misunderstanding causes a gap between service provision and service expectation. Hence, negotiation can clarify the difference. Both parties can resolve or settle the conflict in the light of mutual awareness. Furthermore, negotiation can provide the opportunity of mutual agreement in settling conflict.

Negotiation is the starting point of the mutual commitment to resolve the conflict. During the negotiation, the involved parties cultivate the sense of working together and bear the responsibility of resolving the conflict. Negotiation tends to
minimise the gap of service expectation and service provision, and encourages both parties to take responsibility for conflict settlement. In the compromising style of conflict management, negotiation is the common technique and skill used to balance the interest of both parties.

Methods 2 and 3 – Consultation and communication

Consultation is a technique and skill which enables the identification of the needs of the opposing party. During the conflict situation, the identification of the needs and interests of the opposing party can help to resolve the conflict. The action of consultation arises out of a concern for others, which is the tool to understand the opposing party and results in the sharing of the perspectives of both parties.

By the same logic, communication can have the same characteristics of recognition of the needs of opposing parties but the communication has the sense of equal status in presenting the viewpoint during the conflict rather than serving of just one party at the expense of the opposing party.

Consultation and communication are good ways to gather and deliver information through the flow of message in direct reaction and feedback mechanisms. Both parties can expand the knowledge base and discover realistic goals and directions. In the customer service industry, identification of customer needs is important. Consultation and communication aim to better understand the real needs of customers and the services needed to satisfy them. The customer service staff then tailor-make the service provision to the needs of the customer and resolve the conflict through the observation and understanding of the conflict situation.
Consultation and communication usually produce longer-lasting effects in the prevention of future conflicts.

In face-to-face communication nonverbal clues and verbal messages are conveyed simultaneously (Koltutsky, 2004). The verbal message is the transmission of the apparent needs and factual information between the involving party and the opposing party. However, the hidden need and information can only be conveyed through nonverbal clues like facial and body language. Facial expressions and body language can show the agreement and disagreement in a tactful way. However, nonverbal clues require careful and serious observation from both parties. Effective communication in conflict resolution is very important (Richardson, 1991). In the customer service industry, the customer service staff can be trained in communication skills and techniques to gather more in-depth information from customers.

Hence, if customer service staff can gather more accurate information through communication (Joelle, 2005), then conflict will be resolved more effectively and efficiently. The staff, when they are properly trained or have adequate experience, can readily identify the true and accurate information, and recognise the intentions and motives of customers. So, the staff respond to customers in an appropriate way and handle the conflict intelligently instead of just repeating their own opinions. This results in the lessening of the gap between service expectation and service provision. In consequence, communication can be applied with consultation so as to enhance the understanding and recognition between the involving party and opposing party. In the customer service industry, good communication is a must to resolve conflicts.
Methods 4 and 5 – Education and public relations

Education and public relations are both corrective and proactive methods to conflict resolution. Educating the customer can change attitudes, beliefs, and patterns of behaviour of opposing parties during conflict resolution (Koltutsky, 2004). However, education is a time-consuming strategy in conflict management. In the customer service industry, very important customers may have many demands and enquiries. When the customer service staff cannot serve the customers in an appropriate way, conflict results. Education is a suitable method to change attitudes, beliefs, and patterns of behaviour of customers in the long run. Naturally, the form of education needs to be very soft and tactful.

Education in conflict management means conveying the right perception of the conflict issue rather than the forceful message based on biased attitudes. The message can be supported with company system and policies. Written materials like company documents and promotion newsletters can reinforce the power of staff education. The education enables the opposing party to understand the operation and common practice of the customer service industry so as to reduce the chance of excessive demands on customer service provisions in the long run. Hence, education can promote the reasonableness of the service level and decrease the chance of conflict formation.

Public relations means building up good relationships with the customers, especially the important ones. Public relations is time-consuming and needs a large effort from the concerning parties, including the customer service staff and their companies. In conflict resolution, the involving party needs to be patient
and gracious, and needs to follow the issue attentively (Hayes, 2002). Interpersonal relationships are improved through a series of interaction activities. The involving party needs to identify appropriate resources and effort to be in touch with the opposing party from time to time. This helps to resolve conflicts with better communication and identify the potential conflict in advance.

Public relations can offer the likelihood of better understanding and improve the endurance levels of the opposing parties in conflict situations. Public relations also improves the interpersonal relationship through word of mouth. It is a kind of positive communication and image building. Third parties known to the customer can affect the perspective of the opposing party in a positive or negative manner. If good public relations can be built up, the overall image of the customer service staff and their companies would be enhanced. So, education and public relations not only resolve conflict but also prevent conflict from happening.

**Method 6 – Reinterpretation**

Reinterpretation is a change of situation by whatever means. Conflict resolution can be achieved through the reinterpretation of the conflict issue (Bowen, 2004). The involving parties can change their own mindset and provide more flexibility in realising the conflict issue. Conflict is just the different interpretations of a particular issue by the involving party and opposing party. If both parties stick to their respective perspectives or perceptions in the particular issue without change, the conflict will only get worse. Reinterpretation can inspire either party to alter their perspective or perception so as to induce a change of the conflict situation and provide a buffer to either party to handle the conflict in a new way.
When conflict arises and cannot be settled within a reasonable time, change is needed in the situation or human factors. For change in the situation, a redistribution of resources or a revision of the service provision system can help in smoothing the conflict situation. On the human side, customer service staff can change their own attitudes and in turn change the customer’s attitude so as to reinterpret the conflict problem. If there are no conflicts, reinterpretation may still improve the existing situation or interpersonal relationship. But for unresolved conflict, reinterpretation is necessary if the conflict is to be resolved. So, reinterpretation of the conflict situation shall be applied. If the customer is not inclined to reinterpret the conflict situation, the staff can initiate or inspire the customer to reinterpret the service provision.

In the importance of reinterpretation lies in the flexibility to tailor-make a better interpretation for conflict resolution. The re-interpreting process should be in stages: the understanding and recognition of the situation, the identification of goal and objective for insight and then action and execution for transforming the conflict into new circumstances that are mutually agreed. The reinterpretation can be regarded as tackling the problem from the very beginning without any preconditions regarding such things as resource arrangement. The emphasis on flexibility will inspire the involving party to identify all possible and realistic conflict management strategies.

In addition, the aim of the reinterpretation is to achieve multiple equilibriums. Conflict may be a mix of differences, which cannot be mutually agreed in a short time. Reinterpretation can enhance the possibility of repositioning the new
equilibrium through the consideration of different concerns. Hence re-interpretation will be very useful in the conflict management compromising and integrating management styles. Certainly, re-interpretation requires much effort in assessing the situation and implementation of the newly found concepts and ideas in the particular conflict issue. During the identification of new concepts, new information may be needed for the concept to have the power to convince all stakeholders. So, re-interpretation involves a mix of the application of concepts and action.

Methods 7 and 8 – Mediation and arbitration

These methods are formal and are usually time-consuming and costly. They are used only when the cost and benefits justify their employment as in the case of major commercial disputes.

However, though rarely used in the customer service industry, they are nevertheless the only effective methods in some situations.

Mediation can be applied in conflict resolution for reaching sustainable agreement (Susan, 2003). Mediation uses a mediator to reach a mutual and sustainable agreement through the assumption of specified tasks and the procedure of communication between the concerning parties. However, the introduction of a third party as a mediator implies additional resources. The expansion of resources may not be necessary conflict management. When the ordinary conflict management strategies of avoiding, dominating, obliging, compromising and integrating contribute little or nothing towards resolving conflict, the expansion of resources, including the introduction of a third party, may be
considered. Otherwise, the introduction of mediation right from the beginning of a dispute is a waste of resources.

The assumption of a neutral role of mediator as a third party may be hard to apply in the customer service industry. The customer service industry can deploy more human resources to resolve conflict but it is not common and easy to recruit or invite a neutral third party to judge or promote a fair and reasonable agreement to the concerning parties. The claim of neutrality or the introduction of a mediator may not convince the customer. Moreover, if the frequency of conflict is high in the customer service industry, the frequent use of mediation would be expensive. Therefore, mediation should normally not be applied in the common issues frequently found in the customer service industry.

The procedure of mediation always involves several rounds of meetings with the concerning parties and the mediator must be trained for the recognition and application of the mediation procedures. The technical skill needed may require an experienced and analytical person to follow the mediation procedure, which is a complicated process. Moreover, the series of procedures in mediation will impact on the daily operation of the customer service industry. The rare application of mediation in the field of customer service industry also implies that there is no widespread acceptance of mediation in ordinary service conflict cases.

Similarly, arbitration also involves a neutral third party to arbitrate the conflict. The disadvantages of extra resources, the requirement of mutually agreed authorisation of the arbitrator together make arbitration a rare occurrence in the customer service industry. Complicated procedures and the need for a qualified
arbitrator will make arbitration not practical in conflict management in the customer service industry. In addition, the cost of hiring an arbitrator may be even higher than that of paying a mediator; it is impossible to consider arbitration as a common method in any conflict management strategy.

2.2.4 Emotional intelligence

Emotional intelligence is a person’s ability to manage human relationships and their own emotions in their relationships with others. Emotional quotient is used to refer to any measurement of that ability.

In 1978, when Daniel Goleman outlined relationship management, he evaluated a person’s emotional intelligence by assessing his/her ability to inspire, influence, and develop others while managing conflicts. More simply, it’s the essence of conflict management.

By 1995, Goleman further identified the significance and application of emotional intelligence quotient as being more important than the intelligence quotient; the present complicated economy has made it very difficult to have a clear insight into oneself and other people.

By 1997, following the development of the Summary Scale of Emotional Quotient, Bar-On introduced the fifteen sub-scales of emotional quotient as a more reliable measure of emotional intelligence. According to Bar-On, emotional quotient measures a person’s ability to recognise and regulate their own personal competence and social competence.
Table 3: Categorisation of emotional quotient

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Self</th>
<th>Other</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal Competence</td>
<td>Social Competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognition</td>
<td>Self Awareness</td>
<td>Social Awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regulation</td>
<td>Self Management</td>
<td>Relationship Management</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Bar-On, 1997

He further classified the 15 sub-scales into **5 major categories**:-

1. The General Mood Scale quantifies the general condition of the emotional intelligence of a particular person. The general mood includes the feelings of optimism and happiness.

2. The Intrapersonal Scale quantifies the self recognition, or self awareness, of one’s personal emotions.

3. The Interpersonal Scale quantifies a person’s social awareness of emotions.

4. The Stress Management Scale quantifies the regulation of self-emotions.

5. The Adaptability Scale quantifies a person’s social relationship management.

The 15 sub-scales (or Factorial Components) of Bar-On’s Concept of Emotional
Intelligence (Bar-On, 1997) are listed as below:

1. **Optimism** — the ability to look at the brighter side of life and to maintain a positive attitude, even in the face of adversity
2. **Happiness** — the ability to feel satisfied with one’s life, to enjoy self and others, and to have fun
3. **Self-Regard** — the ability to respect and accept oneself as basically well
4. **Emotional Self-Awareness** — the ability to recognise one’s feelings
5. **Assertiveness** — the ability to express feelings, beliefs, and thoughts, and defend one’s rights in a non-destructive manner
6. **Independence** — the ability to be self-directed and self-controlled in one’s thinking and actions and to be free of emotional dependency
7. **Self-Actualisation** — the ability to realise one’s potential capacities
8. **Empathy** — the ability to be aware of, to understand, and to appreciate the feelings of others
9. **Social Responsibility** — the ability to demonstrate oneself as a cooperative, contributing, and constructive member of one’s social group
10. **Interpersonal Relationship** — the ability to establish and maintain mutually satisfying relationships that are characterised by intimacy and by giving and receiving affection
11. **Stress Endurance** — the ability to withstand adverse events and stressful situations without ‘falling apart’ by actively and positively coping with stress
12. **Impulse Control** — the ability to resist or delay an impulse, drive, or temptation to act
13. **Reality Testing** — the ability to assess the correspondence between what is experienced and what objectively exists
14. **Flexibility** – the ability to adjust one’s emotions, thoughts, and behaviour to changing situations and conditions

15. **Problem Solving** – the ability to identify and define problems as well as to generate and implement potentially effective solutions.

**Measurement and application**

In comparison with the major current emotional quotient assessment tools, namely, the Emotional Competence Inventory by Richard E. Boyatzis and Fabio Sala, and the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test by Marc A. Brackett and Peter Salovery, the Bar-On scale is more widely applied and accepted as it is able to demonstrate high validity (Glenn, 2004).

The validity of the measurement of emotional intelligence is important (Schutte and Malouff, 1999). As emotional quotient is a scale to measure the fifteen different abilities in emotion, the measurement itself must be able to quantify the fifteen different abilities within the summary scale rather than provide a summary scale only. The summary scale and sub-scales of emotional quotient are for comparison and reference to a particular person, as the human reaction against different issues will change along with the dynamic situation. The quantification of the emotional intelligence makes it easier for an assessment of attitudes and emotions and for an evaluation of the relationship with conflict formation and its impact on conflict resolution.

The measurement of the emotional quotients of different persons in a particular situation can be a sign of their different reactions and attitudes. This is particularly true when analysing a specific issue like conflict formation and conflict
management strategy. The emotional quotient will also be an indicator of the ability to apply multiple perspectives through the recognition and regulation of emotions. That might also enable the recognition of the logic of difficult situations and acceptance of the differences arising from conflicts. Acceptance will trigger endurance and perseverance. Therefore more open mindedness induces new ways of conflict resolution, which are more likely to be agreed to by concerning parties.

The application of sub-scales in the measurement of emotional intelligence can help investigate the exact type of recognition or regulation power in emotions. It assists in identifying the reason and assessment of possible conditions of interpersonal behaviour and reactions. As the sub-scales of the fifteen items of emotion have interactive relationships, the general scale can be used to simplify the sophisticated emotional states if necessary. The measurement of emotional intelligence using the Bar-On scale, therefore, provides a total of sixteen quantitative coefficients for the analysis in this paper.

The five major categories that make up the 15 sub-scales are discussed below. In their quantification, they are measured in a scale which has high scores on one end and low scores on the opposite end.

**General mood**
The general mood includes optimism and happiness – from the level of very optimistic and happy, to the level of very pessimistic and unhappy.

**Optimism**
For optimism, optimistic feeling will affect a person’s perception and interpretation of conflict issues to a great extent. Positive thinking, which is induced by optimistic feelings, promotes not only better interpersonal trust but also leads to more possible solutions. This is because optimism triggers openness to other perspectives. It will exclude negative concerns, perceptions and interpretations while substantiating the heuristic and realistic elements, which will help convince the opposing party. In fact, negative thinking in different perspectives will usually be replaced by positive thinking in the conscious minds of optimistic people. Thus the involving party and the opposing party gradually develop a common trust and start to be flexible in improving the conflict situation. The opposing party will usually be affected through their interactions and this will result in the gradual improvement of the conflict situation.

Positive thinking will also stimulate the accurate interpretation of conflict issues. Optimism can reduce misunderstandings and encourage either involving party, or the opposing party, to face the reality. So, the precision of the interpretations of conflict issues encourages rational decision-making and avoids unreasonable behaviour, which always induces and triggers conflict. In the customer service industry, optimism encourages the customer service staff to wear smiles and ignore negative feelings even in an adverse environment. At worst, the conflict situation will not deteriorate and the staff can have more time to identify suitable conflict management strategies.

**Happiness**

Happiness in general mood can affect a person’s emotions significantly. Happiness can stimulate more energy and avoid biased thinking. Happiness
prevents the showing of offensive and defensive behaviour in interactive communication and sharing of information. Without these to aggravate the situation, the customer service personnel are able to communicate better with the opposing party in the mutual desire to find out methods to resolve the conflict situation. Accordingly, both parties will then be able to concentrate on conveying messages and information rather than organising attacking or negative assessment of opinions.

Moreover, happiness is contagious and it triggers interpersonal responses in the desired direction for resolving conflicts. Happiness is also likely to promote consensus and trust. Both parties will take the other party as a virtual associate of self and project their common interest and purpose at all times. In particular, happiness smooths the conflict issue and sometimes even builds up long-term harmony. With harmony for the long term, conflicts are automatically reduced.

**Intrapersonal scale**

The intrapersonal scale measures the self-recognition power in awareness. The scale can be further divided into self-regard, emotional self-awareness, assertiveness, independence, and self-actualisation.

**Self-regard**

Self-regard is a measurement of the ability for self-awareness, which an individual’s ability to be aware of the condition of their own conscious mind and behaviour in different situations. The significance of self-regard is that it provides the basis for self-understanding and self-alertness. Hence, when the self thinks or feels there is a need for self-adjustment in some way, the self controls or manages the
behaviour accordingly. Self-awareness will directly or indirectly affect behaviour, thinking and perception in the conscious mind and sometimes even subconsciously. Self-regard helps reduce the individual’s misunderstanding of their own part in a situation thus helps avoid misinterpretation of the individual’s behaviour by others.

**Emotional self-awareness**

Emotional self-awareness can be regarded as the transitional state between the physical world and the conscious mind. It associates the feedback of the conscious mind to the physical world. If a person agrees or disagrees on any issue or matter in the physical world, his/her conscious mind will have a perception or reaction of great or small magnitude. Emotion will arise in between the recognition of the physical world and the self-conscious mind. If the self is conscious that there is an emotional change, the perception of the physical world and the conscious mind can be clearer and more mindful. So, emotional self-awareness is a measure of the ability for self-recognition.

**Assertiveness**

Assertiveness is the measurement of the firmness of expressing opinion or trying to convince others. It also indicates how firmly one believes in oneself. In the business world, it is an art to be able to achieve a balance of contributing one’s own opinions and accommodating the opinions of the other party. Strong assertiveness is reflected by a strong desire and insistence on one’s perspective in respect of the topic in question. At the extreme, when self interest is strongly rooted in self assertiveness, a person may dominate a situation to the extent that they suppress all concern for others. In spite of the importance assertiveness plays in customer service behaviour, its extreme effects are often diluted by the
organisational setup. Senior managers can always overrule their subordinates, and thus negate the extreme effects. Hence, assertiveness is not just a personality trait. Its application will fluctuate in different situations according to outside forces.

*Independence*

Independence is the measurement of the ability to work or perform a job by oneself. Independence can be viewed as evidence of self-confidence and autonomy. Independence requires different levels of analytical and logical thinking skills in the handling of complex situations. It is demonstrated by the ability to undertake tasks without interference from other parties. It also indicates the self-competence of a person in their ability to perform their work without guidance or help from others, whether they are colleagues or one’s supervisor. In the customer service industry, customer enquiries are usually not sophisticated. But for customer complaints or conflict issues, customer service staff may need help from others and so the degree of independence will reflect the quality of the staff.

*Self-actualisation*

Self-actualisation is recognised as the psychological and spiritual need of human beings. If a person can actualise their own goal and direction, then the resulting contentment as self-achievement will gratify their emotional and spiritual condition. Self-satisfaction triggers the transcendence of human beings and shields them from the negative feelings to a large extent. In Maslow’ Hierarchy of Needs (Gwynne, 1997), self-actualisation is the highest level of human need. Once the person has satisfied their physiological and emotional needs, the final
level, self-actualisation, will promote stability of the human being. Hence, self-actualisation indicates a high level of emotional stability.

**Interpersonal scale**

The Interpersonal scale measures an individual’s social competence. The scale includes empathy, social responsibility and interpersonal relationships.

**Empathy**

Empathy is the ability to share the feelings and perceptions of other people. It is the important connection between the involving party and the opposing party. The superficial needs or opinions of either party will be conveyed through verbal or written communication which can be clearly assessed and understood, but the hidden state of either party can only be detected by empathy. If the customer service staff have low or no ability to empathise, the true needs and intentions of the customer cannot be identified. The difference between the customer’s expectations of service provision and the interpretation of their feedback by the customer service staff will, if allowed to persist, intensify and the conflict will remain unresolved. Hence, empathy is an important skill for connecting and relating to the other party in the business world.

**Social responsibility**

Nobody can isolate themselves from society and every role had its expected social responsibility. In today’s business world, social responsibility is the norm for profit earning and making a contribution to society which is equally important to a company. That is, there needs to be a balance of the company’s interests and the society’s interests. If the concerns cannot be balanced, conflict will result due to
the existence of a gap between the company’s perception of its social responsibility and the social acceptance of this perception. On the level of individual staff, the sense of social responsibility may still exist but the influence of individual values will be smaller than the influence of the company’s values. On company level, the sense of social responsibility of individual staff will be aggregated and translated into that of the company as a whole. The image of the company and its long-term relationship with society is then consolidated, which will affect its ability in conflict resolution.

_Interpersonal relationship_

Interpersonal relationship is the measurement of social competence in the aspect of concern for the welfare of others. It is an important factor for maintaining a good connection with other people. In the case of customer complaint and conflict, good interpersonal relationships can enhance communication and endurance for resolving the difference between service provision and expectations. Consistent and congenial relationships can smooth out the differences in interpretations of customer complaint and conflicts. Good interpersonal relationships induce forgiveness and endurance, and can significantly affect the opinions and perceptions of the concerning parties on both sides of an argument. Therefore, there is a need to smooth out interpersonal relationships with the other party so as to reduce misunderstandings and improve communication. Interpersonal relationships also involve the connection of emotion and perception.

_Stress management scale_

_Stress endurance_
The stress management scale includes the measures of stress endurance and impulse control. For stress endurance, the scale measures the ability to withstand high pressure from time to time. When a person is faced with high pressure, their performance will decrease or become less motivated. If the stress continues for a long period of time, their level of performance of the concerning party will deteriorate. Stress endurance involves the ability to control one’s emotions. When people consider stress to be a part of life, they treat stress as normal and harmless. They divert the stressful feelings into the desire to perform well in a difficult job. On the other hand, those people who regard stress as a blockage or interruption of their ordinary job will experience psychological dissonance and behave badly in the job.

In the customer service industry, there are numerous customer enquiries and complaints, and some are even conflict issues. For those difficult cases and issues, customer service staff may be under pressure and feel stressed. The ability to endure stress is important for preventing some complaint or conflict from affecting their morale. The staff are expected to perform well under all conditions. Stress endurance can be improved through job training or relevant education.

**Impulse Control**

Impulse control is a measure of the ability to remain psychologically stable under impulse. Impulse is regarded as a sudden change, regardless of whether or not there are sufficient reasons for the change. Some people are controlled by their impulses and they will not be able to respond normally and rationally. They will disagree with whatever happens and are deterred from reacting in a sensible manner. Once they recognise the reality of an impulse setting in, they may feel
happy in good situations and distressed in bad situations, and sometimes simply cannot react. In addition, they need time to adjust.

In the customer service industry, impulse control is important as customer complaints are usually the elements which trigger the reactions of the customer service staff. If the staff behave badly in front of their customers, further complaints or conflict will result. The customer service industry can arrange drills for different kinds of emergencies and customer complaint handling so as to prepare staff for coping with different impulses.

**Adaptability scale**

The adaptability scale measures social competence. The scale includes reality testing, flexibility and problem solving.

**Reality testing**

Reality testing measures the ability to perceive and interpret reality. Through continuous testing of perceptions and interpretations through which an individual understands the world, a person shall improve their recognition of reality which gives them the power to adjust to a dynamic environment. So, the concern for reality and the ability to accurately recognise reality are indicators of a concern for the other party. Reality testing measures an individual’s openness to the world and the other party and hence is a measure of their adaptability in relating to the world and the other party. In reality, all people are interrelated and reality is perceived in multiple perspectives. The complexities of the relationships between people need reality testing. The better the ability in reality testing the better an individual’s recognition of the truth in depth.
Flexibility

Flexibility is the ability to adapt to change. It is the measurement of the power to tailor-make the necessary changes according to reality or the actual need of the other party. The identification of the others’ need and adjustment to accommodate it can effectively and efficiently resolve the conflict. In the business world, every action and behaviour should have a clear goal and objective. Flexibility will then be the buffer to relate the goal and the objective through appropriate action in every case. The goal can be short term or long term. So flexibility is also the ability to adjust. In the customer service industry, customer needs may be unique and therefore flexibility is essential.

Problem solving

Problem solving is the direct ability to resolve conflicts and problems, and is the critical and direct power for conflict resolution. The significance of problem solving is to minimise the repercussions to the self and opposing party when resolving conflicts and customer complaints. So problem solving involves the improvement of the conflict situation rather than balancing the interests of both parties. It directly satisfies the needs of the concerning parties. In consequence, the ability of problem solving requires the skills of analysing, communicating and decision-making. The ability involves not only the management of emotions but also rational and analytical thinking. Therefore, problem solving is a mix of emotional intelligence and intelligence quotient, a mix of task-related solutions and relationship-related solutions.

2.3 Research problem theory: analytical, theoretical frameworks and
related research issues

2.3.1 The relationship between conflict formation and emotional intelligence

Determinants

Researchers found that people of high emotional quotient are more confident, optimistic, creative, flexible and happier. Generally, they are more successful at solving problems, being able to cope with stress, have higher self esteem, fewer behavioural problems, and are also able to handle their own emotions better (Abraham, 1999; Hein, 1996). High emotional quotient can be regarded as the capacity to be rational and analytical (Mayer and Cobb, 2000). It helps to solve problems in a flexible and creative way even in highly stressful situations, which in turn reduces the occurrence of conflict.

The concept of emotional quotient provides a framework that allows the identification of specific skills needed to understand and experience emotions, and to facilitate emotional growth and development (Seval, 2004). That is, under the model of emotional quotient, some particular ability or characteristic will affect the development and handling of conflicts. In the customer service industry, customers will demand service and are dissatisfied with the service provision when their needs cannot be fulfilled. The customer will feel helpless when their demand is repeated but is misinterpreted or ignored. The perception of helplessness creates in a vicious cycle and culminates in the creation of conflict. During service delivery, the customer service staff have the chance to empathise with the customer. If the emotional quotient of the customer service staff is high enough to empathise with the customer, conflict development will be eased.
The impact of emotional quotient is to improve performance through greater harmony with other people (Ann, 2002). The ability to affect other people in the workplace depends on successfully building up interpersonal relationships and effectively communicating with other people. Communication and feedback is a chain reaction between customer and customer service staff. When the staff can affect customers in an effective and positive way, the delivery of service will be good and efficient. Otherwise, conflict will waste time and resources and it will take more effort for the customer service staff to serve the customers.

High emotional quotient can reduce the risk of turning conflicts into emergency situations (Carmichael and Maxim, 2005). When people have low emotional intelligence, the burnout rate due to conflict is likely to be high (Scherl et al, 2005). Conflict formation arises from the complex interaction of attitude and behaviour. In the customer service industry, when the behaviour and arrangements for service provisions of the customer and customer service staff do not match, such behaviours will develop into differences in goals, interests, values, attitudes and perception. These differences can trigger distrust and apathy. That explains why the emotional intelligence of the handling staff is important and closely related to the occurrence of conflict.

The determinants of the conflict formation are affected by emotional intelligence at different stages, including the period in which the conflict is created, during the outbreak of the conflict and the period in which the impacts of the conflict are experienced. In particular, emotional intelligence affects the efficiency and effectiveness of communication during the formation of conflict (Rapisarda, 2002).
The communication between the concerning parties will be affected by the factors of attitude, perception, personality and past important experiences (Banff, 1999). The communication style of those involved will also be affected by their emotional quotient (Shapiro, 2001). The role of attitudes, perceptions, personalities and past important experiences in various aspects of emotional intelligence and conflict formation will be discussed in details below.

Attitude

Attitude is the manner in which one carries oneself, or a state of mind or a feeling (answers.com, 2006). It is the way one deals with a thing or with other people and rarely changes in a person (Dalton, 1999). Emotional intelligence can improve the cognitive capacity applied in decision-making and creative problem solving in a complex environment and significant adaptability to problem solving can be achieved (Eugenio, 2003). Adaptability can greatly reduce the misunderstanding between parties. The reduction of misunderstanding will certainly reduce the occurrence of conflict as some conflict arises solely because of misunderstandings. Adaptability encourages not only openness to others but also cooperation with others.

It is important to maintain perspective in challenging times. Loss of balance and perspective will increase the possibility of stress and anxiety (Parachin, 2003). Inconsistency in attitude occurs when a component of a person’s attitude is inconsistent with either (1) their overall evaluation of the object of their attention or (2) other components of their attitude (Maio, 2000). Inconsistency will trigger conflict. However, ambivalent attitudes can be simultaneously favourable and unfavourable toward an object (Eagly and Chaiken, 1998). Attitude will directly
affect human relationships and induce emotional reactions in various situations. As human relationships are interdependent, interrelated and interconnected, one’s attitude affects the reaction and feedback of the other.

Attitude can appear in many ways. When some people are aggressive in attitude, other people will react in a variety of ways (Wiebe, 2004). If the concerning parties choose to avoid or escape, no conflict happens. However when the opposing party takes a defensive stand or competes with the aggressive party, conflict is triggered (John, 2001). Conflict arises when both parties have strong emotional reactions. The situation will be eased only when either a party calms down or adapts to the problem in a flexible way, and correctly interprets and solves the conflict issue in a rational manner. Emotional state affects attitudes and then triggers the conflict formation.

On the other hand, if the attitude of the involving party is cooperative and helpful, the opposing party will not be aggravated and will react in an emotionally positive manner. Attitude not only drives the issue but also induces different reactions in different people. Cooperative and helpful attitudes promote information exchange and enable the precise identification of the nature of the reasoning being employed by the opposing party (Tjosvold & Johnson, 1977). The precise identification of the conflict issue makes it possible to understand the source of incompatible activities, feelings, or intentions. It is important that both parties in a situation approach communication in an effective and efficient way.

Endurance is the buffer which enables an individual to accept the different views of the other party (Arkoun, 1992). As everyone has a different perspective and
attitude, there needs to be room for mutual recognition. Endurance can help bring this about and reduce the emotional fluctuation of concerning parties. Sometimes, endurance can manifest as patience, which helps improve relationships and reduces the occurrence of conflict (Roger Warrum National Center, 2003). Without endurance, the differing views of the parties will be focused on or exaggerated, preventing recognition and acceptance. Endurance can enable in-depth consideration of the conflict issue, and promote sharing and change the original perspectives of the involving parties. Hence attitude is one of the key determinants of the formation of conflict.

*Perception*

Perception is the process of acquiring, interpreting, selecting, and organising sensory information (Wikipedia, 2006a). During the process of perception there may be many faults or wrongful processing of information. The involving party or opposing party may jump to a conclusion without careful and serious consideration of the issue. Feeling can affect perception to a large extent. Feeling is an emotional reaction to the conflict issue which is not objectively analyzed with the rational mind. Hence perception is determined more by emotion rather than rational thinking.

Perception can easily become biased during the process of information gathering, interpretation and analysis. It is important to be neutral at all stages of information processing. Peoples view’s of conflict situations will vary according to their ethics, practicality and civility (Chris, 2004). Their thought processes will tend towards finding evidence which validates their ethics, practicality and civility (Chris, 2004). The thinking of one party is not necessarily the same as the
thinking of the other. So when the thinking of the involving party is different from the opposing party, misunderstanding arises and conflicting interpretations occur. When communication is effective, the situation will be clarified through a series of information exchanges. But when emotional intelligence is low in either party, communication is ineffective and the clarification of wrong thinking cannot proceed.

Perception during conflict situations may be over-simplified, resulting in dichotomies such as ‘right or wrong’, ‘good or bad’, etc. (Beech, 2001). Personal judgements about conflict issues or related matters will induce inaccurate interpretation of information. This over-simplification triggers the stereotyping of the concerning parties. In reality, every person will react differently. The involving party needs to judge the conflict issue and interact objectively with the opposing party from time to time. The tendency towards stereotyping may save time but may also induce misunderstanding.

The information exchange process may require much effort to clarify all the details of the conflict. Hence it is important that all relevant information be scrutinised carefully. The involving party needs to identify the critical and related information for clarification. He needs to carefully verify the information so as to have an accurate and appropriate perception. The information must be timely, honest, clear, and informed (Norton, 2003). Accurate information reduces the effect of emotion and makes the perception more accurate. The information will match what is needed and be related to the deeper problem or matter of the conflict (John, 2001).
Perception will be affected by the situation in which it takes place. The situation is a complex combination of environmental factors and determinants of conflict formation. The environmental factors can include perceptions about justice, culture and conflict (Fazzi, 2001). In particular, perceived injustice is a frequent source of conflict (Fazzi, 2001). Cultural conflict may arise due to misunderstanding or cultural differences (Ambe, 2004). Hence it is important to identify significant factors or value judgments relating to the conflict issue. Perception plays a key role in conflict formation and the severity of emotional behaviours of stress and anger will intensify the conflict to the level that occurs in quarrels, fights, or struggles (Berstene, 2004).

**Personality**

Personality can be defined as a dynamic and organised set of characteristics possessed by a person that uniquely influences his or her cognitions, motivations, and behaviours in different situations (Ryckman, 2004). Personality can be assessed according to five factors: (1) neuroticism, (2) extraversion, (3) openness to experience, (4) agreeableness, and (5) conscientiousness (Goldberg, 1993). Personality traits are considered unchangeable and enduring (Goodstein et al., 1987). Personality is a description of the pattern of behaviour beginning in the past and extending into future. It is regarded as a habit or trend of behaviour and will not be easily changed. Hence, the interpretation of personality can be used to predict the behaviour of the involving party and that of the opposing party. Some personality traits can be used to label a person according to his behaviour patterns and mindset.

As every person has his own personality, and researchers would like to classify
personalities into major types, which is useful for analysis and has applications in different academic or business disciplines. Personality will affect behaviours in conflicts as neuroticism is related to avoidance of conflict, and extroversion, openness and conscientiousness are related to the collaboration, compromise, and accommodation styles of conflict management (Cynthia, 2000). When personality is combined with emotional instability, people will have irrational ideas and will be unable to control their impulses, or be less able to cope with stress (Cynthia, 2000). Neuroticism, which is regarded as an individual’s level of non-adjustment or emotional instability, tends to be affected by fear, anger, guilt, or disgust (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Hence, people having weak self control of their emotions, are more vulnerable to conflict issues. Thus personality induces different behaviours affecting conflict, and is related with the emotional intelligence of a person.

In terms of personality, there are different patterns or emotional behaviour in various situations. Temperament in the context of personality refers to constitutionally based individual differences in reactivity and self-regulation, as observed within the domains of emotionality, motor activity, and attention (Rothbart et al., 1995). Temperament manifests in strong emotional behaviour and responses to different affective and social events with different emotion regulation processes in different activities (Marie, 2002). When emotional regulation is strong, the temperament is stable. Emotional intelligence has some incremental value in the prediction of outcomes such as self-reported life satisfaction and loneliness (Palmer et al., 2002). Researchers have related personality and emotional quotient, and have investigated the relative strength of association of emotional quotient and personality with measures such as social
Past rivalry
Conflict is really all about history (Iain, 2005). When people are not neutral to the matters they are dealing with or the people they are dealing with, a history of bad experiences may dominate and their emotions or perceptions may determine what happens rather than rational thinking and behaviour. The impact of unpleasant past experiences can govern an individual’s mindset for a long time. The formation of conflict correlates positively with the severity of prior conflict between the parties (Fazzi, 2001). The experience of past rivalry will induce untrustworthy, unreasonable, angry, responses or make it impossible to communicate. Such problems are made worse by the presence of strong ideological or cultural differences (Fazzi, 2001). Past experiences relate the existing feelings and perceptions (Fazzi, 2001). Unhappy feelings and perceptions induce dissatisfaction or anxiety if the experience is repeated. When there is a strong memory of bad feelings regarding a certain matter or people, it results in incompatible interests, goals, value judgments and expectations. Emotional intelligence is affected by past experience and biased behaviours or perceptions which will shape conflict.

Biased behaviours or perceptions will affect the communication between the involving party and the opposing party. Ineffective communication blocks the true meaning of the either party and the matter they are dealing with, and induces misunderstanding. When the task or environment is affected by the stimulus of experiences, people will be angry and will find other concerned people untrustworthy. Conversely, if their emotional intelligence is high enough to
enable them to differentiate the bad feeling and the nature of the problem, there is less likelihood for conflict to happen. Conflict formation will be subject to the control of emotion and the objective and rational thinking of the concerning parties. However, either party in a situation of potential conflict may have been affected by the impact of past rivalry. In the customer service industry, a biased customer will initiate conflict and the biased customer service staff will trigger the conflict if there is poor communication or a poor customer service attitude.

People have the tendency to escape from unhappy experiences and bad feelings. They try to avoid the occurrence of issues related to past rivalry and have a strong tendency towards flight in situations similar to those in the past involving rivalry. Their emotional intelligence may not be good enough to drive them to face reality in an objective manner. All their behaviour and the feedback from the opposing party will only be interpreted as the repetition of past rivalry. Biased behaviour and interpretations will trigger the formation of conflicts. So, if the customer or the customer service staff have had past rivalries or unhappy experiences, they will have ineffective and inefficient communication and will be vulnerable to even minor fault finding or mistakes.

All these four factors, attitude, perception, personality and past experience contribute to the formation of conflicts in the same way as the level of emotional intelligence of the involving party.

2.3.2 The relationship between conflict management strategies and emotional intelligence
Determinants

It is important to note that the resolution of moderate conflict can lead to enhanced decisions to resolve the negative effects of relationship conflicts (Jehn, 1997). Emotions are an important element in conflicts and the involving party is affected by their subjective interpretations of reality and their reactions to conflicts (Thomas, 1992). Thus for those conflicts associated with stress and threat, conflict increases emotional responses and negative arousal (Thomas, 1992). Pinkey (1990) has studied the relationship between the emotional dimension of conflict resolution and intellectual behaviour. Pinkey’s finding is that the degree of negative emotionality associated with both relationship and task conflict and has effect on the group performance (Pinkey, 1990). However, in the study by Kennedy (1999), task conflict has more favourable performance consequences than emotional conflict.

People’s emotional reactions and behavioural responses influence relationship outcomes (Knobloch, 2003). Fluctuations in relationship certainty and uncertainty are tied to a variety of experiences as conflict (Siegert and Stamp, 1994).

On the other hand, Lazarus (2001) put forth the appraisal theory in which he concludes that people will first review a situation to evaluate the change of environment, and then assess their affective emotions to motivate action associated with those emotions (Lazarus, 2001). Bippus (2003) reveals that greater relationship satisfaction will induce more integrating and compromising behaviour for securely attached individuals as compared to those who are preoccupied, dismissive and fearful. This shows that emotional intelligence
relates to the conflict management styles.

Emotion-related behaviour and the complex interaction of emotional intelligence and behavioural responses directly affect the choice of conflict management strategy. This interaction not only affects the choice of strategy but also its content conflict management. The interpretation of the nature of conflict formation will affect the choice of conflict management strategy. When the awareness and knowledge about conflict resolution is not sufficient, the involving party may not be able to identify the appropriate conflict management strategy to suit the needs of the situation. Emotional intelligence not only affects the formation of conflict but also the rationale and logic of the choice of conflict management strategy. The determinants of the relationship between emotional intelligence and conflict management strategy need to be recognised so as to identify the significant factors which determine the choice of an appropriate conflict management strategy.

The determinants may involve both individual concerned and the other stakeholders. According to the study of Miller and Rollnick (1991), using a warm and empathic manner in response confrontation can encourage the person ‘to see and accept reality so that one can change accordingly’. However, anxiety is invariably an inhibiting factor in behaviour including learning which receives wide attention due to its close relationship to arousal emotions, attention and motivation (Clark and Fiske, 1982; Mandler, 1984). Goleman (1998) identifies emotional intelligence in relation to potential performance gains while Jordan (2006) finds that the contribution of emotional quotient is exaggerated. In this connection, the application of emotional intelligence may imply different effects in
various conflict situations.

Self-centred concerns are for self and the ability to affect other people whereas the stakeholders concerns are for other people and connections with other people.

Therefore: (1) communication and interpersonal relationships involve the ability to affect other people and one’s connections with them (2) the concern for self and (3) the concern for others are the perspectives involved in conflict management strategies and their relationship with emotional quotient and (4) finally, transformation and reinterpretation represent the ability to affect other people and the conflict issue.

*Communication and interpersonal relationships*

Emotional intelligence quotient affects the efficiency and effectiveness of communication during conflict formation (Ann, 2002). Since emotional states such as aggression affect the communication choices made and hence interpersonal relationships, the conflict resolution strategies will be affected by these states (Olson, 2004). The study has identified a relationship between aggressive behaviour and the irrational choice of conflict management strategies. This is because aggressive behaviour is associated with ineffective communication and irrational behaviour rather than problem solving interactions. As communication is one of the effective means of conflict management, aggression will destroy the communication and thus the chance of mutual understanding. If the misunderstanding increases, the effect of other conflict management strategies of integration, compromise, obliging, and accommodation will also become ineffective. Communication can promote relational outcomes through the
application of integrative conflict management strategy (Canary & Spitzberg, 1989). During the course of communication, a collaborative style will lead to better outcomes in understanding and sharing opinions (Marvel, 2004).

Conflicts can be critical in the establishment of interpersonal relationships. The kinds of conflict behaviour engaged in will determine attractiveness (Esin, 1999). Conflict management strategies are found to be associated with relationship satisfaction (Esin, 1986). Esin’s study (1999) evaluated (1) collaborating and compromising as more goal-oriented behaviours when compared with avoiding, (2) compromising, when compared with accommodating as more effective for accomplishing goals, and (3) compromising, when compared to obliging, as more successful both in accomplishing goals and in establishing friendships. Interpersonal relationships directly affect mutual attraction related to similarity and dissimilarity and therefore the determinants of conflict management strategy (Johnson and Johnson, 1994). The mutual attraction and repulsion greatly affect the effectiveness of communication. Ineffective communication induces misunderstanding that impairs the recognition of the perspective of the other party. If either party cannot sense or be alerted to misunderstandings between them, unfavourable and negative emotions will accumulate. The cyclic process of ineffective communication and misunderstanding then triggers mistrust between the concerning parties and hence produces poor interpersonal relationships.

Building a long-term relationship with a customer goes beyond the service of the company (Savvy, 2003). The relationship is based on credibility and trust (Savvy, 2003). Conflict management is a skill that has lifetime consequences for initiating and maintaining relationships (Jensen-Campbell, Graziono & Hair, 1996). One of
the effective means of resolving conflict is to build up a good interpersonal relationship. However, good interpersonal relationships are related to effective and competent communication skills and techniques. Interpersonal relationships directly relate to emotional intelligence whereas communication indirectly relates to emotional intelligence. In this connection, emotional intelligence affects the choice of conflict management strategy.

Communication is a means of sharing the perspectives of both parties, and provides the platform to affect the perspective of other party. Emotional intelligence can directly affect the effectiveness of communication in either a positive or a negative way. The quality of an interpersonal relationship is a good measure of the effectiveness of communication. That is, poor communication leads to poor interpersonal relationships and good communication produces good interpersonal relationships.

**Self interest**

Self-help is an attractive proposition because it appeals to our desire to remain in control and to our sense of involvement (Frak, 2005). It can surely be consistent with the individual’s needs in a conflict situation (Frak, 2005). In conflict management strategy, self interest is the basis for arriving at a ‘win-win’ approach. An absence of self interest will result in misallocation of resources and induce an imbalance of interests. A degree of self interest is important in conflict situations. On the other hand, excessive self interest will also result in a misallocation of resources and an imbalance of interest. The appropriate proportion of self interest may not be quantifiable but the direction is important. Since the conflict issues are always inter-connected, the direction of concern of the involving party
will affect the reaction of the opposing party. Accordingly an appropriate amount of self interest brings with it self-control and a sense of involvement. Self-control is highly related to emotional intelligence and the sense of involvement is the motivation to put forward a rational choice of conflict management strategy. In extreme cases, when one cannot keep one’s emotions under control, aggressive behaviour will have destructive consequences.

Thus in conflict management, whether or not one can keep emotions under control is an important issue (Keil, 2000). Since ‘emotion’ is a general term and its implications are convoluted, the measurement of emotional quotient can identify its effects on the conflict situation. Life satisfaction and job satisfaction can affect emotional wellbeing and the measurement of emotional quotient. When one is satisfied with one’s life and job, the overall positive emotions can compensate for the bad feelings about some particular issues. The emotional quotient is an indication of the individual’s general emotional state and implies the cumulative and interactive nature of general emotional wellbeing can affect a particular issue. Self interest involves taking care of one’s own perspective and one’s own emotions. The control of emotions is thus a focus of conflict management strategy.

In conflict issues, either party may find some excuse to defend his/her perspective or behaviour. However, defence mechanisms produce negative feelings which cannot be lessened without an alteration of the situation that is producing them, often by distorting the reality of that situation in some way (Encyclopaedia of Psychology, 2001). Defence mechanisms are used only to alleviate negative feelings. If the interests of an individual are not taken into account adequately in a situation, negative feelings may be triggered. Everyone has limits of endurance.
But when negative feelings exceed one’s endurance level, one may defend oneself or even struggle with the opposing party. In this way, an absence of concern or an insufficient recognition of one’s own interests will eventually go beyond the tolerance level. Emotional intelligence is a reflection or indication of the endurance level. Hence, emotional intelligence will quantify the level beyond which a situation will not be tolerated. Since everyone differs, the emotional intelligence will be different. The relationship between emotional intelligence and conflict management will depend on the situation and the people involved.

**Concern for others**

In the customer service industry, conflict involves customer service staff and customers when the concerning parties have incompatible differences. Through engaging in interaction, mutual respect and the willingness to explore new ideas, a commitment to an agenda-free resolution can be emerged (Erik, 1999). Concern for others can help identify the needs of others and settle the conflict. Concern for others is an ethical principle and arises from a corporate culture that fosters reciprocity, ethical behaviour, and mutual respect (LaBerge, 2000). Concern for others can build up a long-term environment which fosters conflict resolution (Gourley, 2005). If there is no concern for others, it is impossible to achieve a ‘win-win’ approach. Thus a concern for others is also a basis for a ‘win-win’ approach to take care of the interests, perspectives and perceptions of the opposing party.

Generally, the low-level cognitive conflict expressed during group decision-making produces higher quality decisions about complex problems (Priem et al, 1995). The cognitive conflict brings out the different perspectives of the concerning
parties and conflict management strategies need to incorporate an awareness of incompatible differences. When the conflict issue is complex, conflict resolution may require the consideration of multiple perspectives and factors. Hence, if the conflict is not significant in scale or if the conflict issue and its effect are not critical, the expression of the conflict can improve the quality of decisions about complex problems.

Kurtz (2004) suggests that concerning parties try to change others’ perceptions of social relations during conflict situation. Concern for others can encourage sharing of opinions and recognising the different interpretations of the conflict issue. The sharing and recognition alter others’ feeling and perceptions by fostering an understanding of the situation and building up relationships. The reframing enactments are intended to build up a better relationship through a merged perspective of the parties involved. Self interest is only part of the perspective of the merged reframe. Concern for others is the remaining part of the perspective. Both self interest and concern for others encourage a balance of interests. In the customer service industry, a balance of interests is achieved through the process of communication.

Nowadays, people change values and these new values affect the way people relate to themselves and each other (Fisher, 1999). People are more educated and more aware of the rights and responsibilities of the customer. They don’t just rely on the presentation and rationale of the customer service staff and they know how to ask for good service. Whenever the service provision is below the expectations of the customer, they will complain. This situation requires the customer service staff to recognise the needs of the customer. Moreover, the
business world emphasises service quality nowadays. The customer service staff provide not just service but also take care of the feedback of the customer. Hence the customer service staff must recognise the needs and rationale of different customers from time to time. The precision of the service provision is important.

Conflicts prevention is too big a task for one actor to undertake alone. There is a need for a multi-stakeholder approach that utilises effective coordination, timely exchange of information on ongoing or potential crises, field coordination, appropriate training and the pooling of resources (Vandy, 2005). So concern for others can resolve conflict and provide a good environment to prevent the outbreak of conflict. As the environment is affected by the interactive activities of the concerning parties, the customer service staff must initiate the coordination. Otherwise, the customers will react negatively. There is the need for flexibility and mutual cooperation and coordination during the delivery of service provisions. Thus, conflict prevention can only be achieved through self interest and concern for others at the same time.

Transformation and reinterpretation

A good policy is one that clearly articulates not only the desired outcomes the policy maker is seeking to achieve through the issuance of the policy but also the means by which those expected to implement the policy can make it a reality (Sylvester, 2003). When there is conflict, a change to the existing situation provides the chance to resolve the conflict. There is the need to be flexible, and to face the reality of unsolved issue. When differences of opinion are managed effectively, a blend of push and pull processes is important in producing the most positive outcome (Kim, 2004). Through the process of assimilation of different
Ideas and opinions of concerning parties, the conflict can be resolved through a mutually accepted solution. But the choice of a conflict management strategy involving ambivalence and resistance to change is somewhat more complicated and frustrating (Kane, 2004). However, an understanding of the concept of ambivalence is part of the process of change and will likely increase the chances of a positive outcome (Kane, 2004).

Structured methods for resolving conflicts involve making decisions, managing commitments, and managing information flows (Gordon, 2001). Transformation and reinterpretation require the courage to adopt a change of attitude, mindset, communication skill, and level of responsibility so as to provide sufficient and effective flexibility to achieve the appropriate conflict management strategy. The significance of transformation and reinterpretation is to search for substantive issues and outcomes (Blair, 1991). A subtle change in the attitudes, values, and expectations of the concerning parties can bring about a focus upon substantive goals in a firm way (Gordon, 2001).

The process of transformation and reinterpretation comes about when an actor’s outcomes are contingent not just on his or her own behaviour but also on what other actors do simultaneously or in response to the actor’s behaviour (Bacharach and Lawler, 1980). Diversity paves the way for new innovations in practice, and organisations, particularly those that have been successful because of their rich traditions and practices in the past, are challenged to pursue efforts that lead to changes (Mateo, 2001).

The power to adjust is another contribution to the resolution of conflicts (Richard,
Transformation and reinterpretation are required to make the adjustments needed to serve the needs of the concerning parties. The adjustment needed is to allocate the energy and effort to resolve the apparently incompatible differences. When the adjustment provides a new way to meet the different needs simultaneously, the incompatible differences of value, interest, and perception will lessen and the conflict is resolved. But the way to bring about the necessary rearrangement of energy and effort depends on the rationale of action. The rationale of action allows the concerning parties to frame the specific means and ends that they bring to an exchange relationship (Collins, 1988). The purpose of the exchange relationship is to compromise and bargain to converge a ‘win-win’ situation.

However, success of reconstruction and development depends on comprise, capacity building, sustainability, selectivity, assessment, results, partnership, flexibility, and accountability (Natsios, 2005). All the arrangements need the vision of the concerning parties. When only one party generates the reconstruction process, the success will be greatly impaired or may even fail at the end. The vision to implement the transformation and reinterpretation is very important and significant in the process of change (Fairbanks, 2006). Hence the transcendence of the conflict issue to reconstruct the process needs emotional intelligence. High emotional intelligence can distinguish negative feelings from the conflict issue and trigger positive thinking and a constructive mindset to come up with an appropriate conflict management strategy.

The four elements of (1) communication and interpersonal relationship, (2) self interest, (3) concern for others and (4) transformation and reinterpretation all have
an interrelated, though undefined, relationship with emotional intelligence and conflict management strategy.

2.4 Conclusion

After defining conflicts, identifying major theories of conflict formation and discussing leading measures of emotional intelligence, this chapter identified the significant conflict management strategies in the context of self interest and concern for others and their determinants in relation to emotional intelligence.

It is important to identify whether there is a relationship between emotional quotient and conflict formation. From the view of the customer service staff, emotional quotient may be the major factor which prevents the outbreak of conflict. Hence, attitude (Gregory, 2000), perception (Chris, 2004), personality (Rothbart et al., 2005), and past rivalry (Fazzi, 2001) and their roles in preventing the outbreak of conflict are discussed in the following chapters on methodology and analysis of data.

Conflict management strategies include the avoiding, obliging, dominating, compromising and integrating approaches and these methods can be applied in different forms of negotiation, consultation and communication, education and public relations, reinterpretation, mediation and arbitration. The existence of a relationship between emotional intelligence and conflict management strategies is verified in the following chapters.

From the viewpoint of the customer service staff, the determinants of conflict in
relation to emotional quotient are attitude, perception, personality and past rivalry. Similarly, the determinants of conflict management strategies in relation to emotional quotient are communication (Brigette, 2002) and interpersonal relationship (Esin, 1999), concern for self (Frak, 2005), concern for others (Gourley, 2005), transformation and reinterpretation (Richard, 2004).

The actions of these variables will be discussed and analysed individually. However, the complex relationships of these determinants are beyond the scope of this dissertation.

This literature review surveyed the relevant issues of emotional intelligence and conflict management in the customer service industry. The next chapter outlines the methodology used in this research and then explores the methods used to study of the correlation of emotional quotient and conflict management.
Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Conflict not only reduces service quality but also induces customer dissatisfaction. The theme of this paper is to inspire property management companies in Hong Kong and their customer service staff, and expose some ideas and concepts regarding emotional intelligence and conflict management. The property management customer service staff can improve service provision through the appropriate application of conflict management strategies and an awareness of the significance of emotional intelligence. When conflict does arise, the customer service staff should pay attention to resolving the conflict using systematic analysis and a thorough recognition of the conflict situation and its relationship with emotional intelligence instead of losing focus on implementing a conflict management strategy.

The aim of this dissertation is to study the relationship between emotional intelligence and conflict management in the customer service industry in Hong Kong. The property management industry in Hong Kong has been chosen as the target sector because the service industry as a whole would be too broad. On the other hand, because of its nature, conflicts in the delivery of property management customer services are a daily occurrence. By focusing on a people-to-people business, the study can better demonstrate the various theories and relationships between emotional intelligence and conflict management.

Property management in Hong Kong involves the management of various types of
properties. These include residential, commercial, industrial and shopping mall management. Within each of these categories, there are further classifications into low-, mid- and high-class ones and they involve customers with corresponding levels of wealth, education and social background. Thus, the property management industry is selected for study in this dissertation.

The first task of the research is to identify the causes of conflict and then categorise the types of conflict so as to enable conflict to be resolved in an amicable way.

The paper then identifies the relationship between emotional intelligence and conflict formation. The objectives of the research are:

1. To study the effect and significance of the emotional quotient of the involving party on conflict formation.
2. To identify the critical factors which can prevent conflicts.

The identification of the causes of conflict between customer service staff and the customers in the property management industry will provide the basic and essential information for the resolution of conflict. Accordingly, the categorisation of the causes of conflict can reveal the scenarios for conflict management strategies in respect of emotional intelligence.

The methods used to resolve conflicts will be interpreted as conflict management strategies. Conflict management strategies will be studied and differentiated according to the level and scale of the conflict and the relationship with emotional intelligence in each case. So the second aim is to identify the relationship
between emotional quotient and conflict management strategies. Objectives are:

3. To study the effect and significance of the emotional quotient of the involving party in conflict management strategy.

4. To identify effective conflict management strategies.

Research on the reasons conflicts happen and how to manage conflicts is emphasised. The questions of who is prone to have conflicts and their frequency, what kind of conflicts happen more frequently, and their level and scale are the minor emphases. Thus, the exploratory variables involved are the determinants of conflict formation and conflict management strategies in relation to emotional intelligence. They include the connection between attitudes, perceptions, personalities and past rivalries and conflict formation. They also include communication and interpersonal relationships, self interest, concern for others, transformation and reinterpretation as conflict management strategies.

Qualitative data was gathered for this research. This is because qualitative research involves the understanding of different independent factors in the property management industry, and personal experience of how the property management staffs interacts with customers. Conflict management skills and techniques can be studied and explored in greater detail during the interviews and incorporated in the analysis. Tests of emotional quotient are applied to measure the emotional intelligence of the participants and demographic data are gathered for triangulation purposes.

The aim of this chapter is to describe the research framework used to gather the
information for analysis. The framework entails the selection of the paradigm used to obtain the relevant data and provide the rationale for investigation using sampling, interviews and a survey. Provided the validity and reliability of the sample is ensured, the data should be ready for multivariate analysis. Thus the data gathering methods include interviews about conflict formation and management strategies, measures of emotional quotient and demographic data of the participants. The content of the interviews and the survey needs to be comprehensive and ready for multivariate analysis. Triangulation will be adopted for counterchecking the validity and reliability of the data collected. Finally, the systematic collection of data must also involve a series of procedures and proper ethics consideration.

3.2 Justification for the paradigm and methodology

3.2.1 Qualitative analysis chosen

There are two major methods of data collection, namely the qualitative and the quantitative paradigm. In this dissertation, the qualitative approach is adopted. The adoption of a qualitative method allows the proper understanding of the details of the formation of conflict and conflict management strategies. On the other hand, the occurrence of conflicts in the service industry cannot be quantified because it is a people-to-people matter. Simply counting the number of conflicts cannot reflect the nature and importance of the conflicts.

By adopting a qualitative methodology, the personal experiences of participants which show how customer service staff react to customer complaints can be
explored in greater depth.

Qualitative analysis can provide a framework for gathering primary data and building up a theory of conflict formation and management strategies in relation to emotional quotient. During the handling and processing of data, data quality is more important than data quantity. Hence, the elaboration and clarification of data is recommended and qualitative analysis is suitable for this dissertation.

A one-directional study of conflict formation

By nature, such conflicts are always in one direction, as described by the well-known saying ‘the customer is always right’. Therefore, this dissertation is also in one direction – it focuses on the study of the emotional intelligence of the service staff, and ignores that of the customer.

Adoption of grounded theory

When a grounded theory approach is used, theory is built from the ground up based on data from observations, conversations, surveys, and formal interviews. According to Wikipedia (2006b), grounded theory ‘is an approach for looking systematically at (mostly) qualitative data (like transcripts of interviews or protocols of observations) aiming at the generation of theory. Sometimes, grounded theory is seen as a qualitative method, but grounded theory reaches farther: it combines a specific style of research (or a paradigm) with pragmatic theory of action and with some methodological guidelines. This approach was written down and systematised in the 1960s by Anselm Strauss (himself a student of Herbert Blumer) and Barney Glaser (a student of Paul Lazarsfeld). For and with their studies, they developed a methodology that was then made explicit and became the foundation
Important concepts in grounded theory are categories, concepts, codes and coding. The research principle behind grounded theory is neither inductive nor deductive, but combines both in adductive reasoning (coming from the works of Charles S. Peirce). This leads to a research practice where data sampling, data analysis and theory development are not seen as distinct and disjunct, but as different steps to be repeated until one can describe and explain the phenomenon that is to be researched. Data processing includes open coding, axial coding and selection coding (Barker et al., 2006). Open coding is the process of selecting and identifying categories from the analysis of the data (Barker et al., 2006). Axial coding is the next stage in which data is put together in new ways which recognise the causal relationships between categories (Barker et al., 2006). The objective of the coding is to make explicit the connections between categories and sub-categories (Barker et al., 2006). The final stage is selective coding in which the core categories are selected and identified and systematically related to other categories and the validation of the relationships and the development of the theory from the categories (Barker et al., 2006). This stopping point is reached when new data does not change the emerging theory anymore.

Similarly, grounded theory (Wikipedia 2008) is ‘a research method that operates almost in a reverse fashion to traditional research and at first may appear to be in contradiction of the scientific method. Rather than beginning by researching and developing a hypothesis, a variety of data collection methods are the first step. From the data collected from this first step, the key points are marked with a series of codes, which are extracted from the text. The codes are grouped into similar
concepts, in order to make them more workable. From these concepts, categories are formed, which are the basis for the creation of a theory, or a reverse engineered hypothesis. This contradicts the traditional model of research, where the researcher chooses a theoretical framework, and only then applies this model to the studied phenomenon.’ Hence, the stages of codes, concepts, categories and theory generating are followed in the dissertation.

Table 4  Four Stages of Analysis of Grounded Theory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Codes</td>
<td>Identifying anchors that allow the key points of the data to be gathered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concepts</td>
<td>Collections of codes of similar content that allows the data to be grouped</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Categories</td>
<td>Broad groups of similar concepts that are used to generate a theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory</td>
<td>A collection of explanations that explain the subject of the research</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The strength of the grounded theory is directly gathering grounded data to use in theory building with no preconceived hypothesis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). But grounded theory does have its weaknesses: (1) a risk of non-cumulative theory development and (2) the lack of good illustration techniques (Goldkuhi and Cronholm, 2003). The adoption of the grounded theory enhances the theory building of this dissertation and weaknesses are addressed accordingly.
3.2.2 Units of analysis

The units of analysis and subjects, the sources of data, the steps involved in deciding the population, the sampling frame and the sample, and the sample size are discussed below.

The unit of analysis and the subject is the individual customer service staff of different property management companies. Customer service staff are officers and managers of the property management companies who deal with customers. Conflict happens during the delivery of services. The officers are further graded as assistant officers, officers and senior officers according to seniority and authority level. Similarly, managers are divided into assistant managers, managers, and senior managers. The participants from different grades of officers and managers are drawn from different companies. This is to avoid the duplication of patterns of conflict formation or management strategy due to common property management experiences from the same company with the same grading.

The process of recruiting participants was purely on the basis of convenience sampling and was on a strictly voluntary basis amongst the customer service staff of the property management industry in Hong Kong. Customer service staff were asked if they were willing to be interviewed and complete the survey and demographic data and return them to the researcher. The interviews for the conflict management data collection were arranged through direct contacts with the participants personally known to the researcher, friends of the researcher and by referrals.
The population was made up entirely of property management staff in Hong Kong and the sampling frame was among the grades of assistant officer, officer, senior officer, assistant manager, manager, and senior manager from different property management companies or organisations. The sample is the individual property management staff.

**Measurement of emotional intelligence**

The measurement of the emotional intelligence of customer service staff was performed using the Bar-On Inventory Scale (1997). The 67 samples were measured for their emotional quotient and compared accordingly. Only the median of the emotional quotient was calculated with the objective of splitting the entire sample group into two dimensions of either high or low scales.

**Sample size adopted**

The general concept of data reliability is that the bigger the sample, the more reliable the results when the data are analysed. This is because the bigger the sample size, the chance of being distorted due to random or unstable error is reduced.

However, in the case of qualitative research, Crouch Mira (2006) suggests that for interview-based research, small samples of less than 20, with the researcher’s close association with the respondents, enhance the validity of fine-grained and in-depth inquiry.

A sample of 30 is suggested by Margarete (1995) so as to give more reliable
information for analysis. If the interview sample size falls below 30, the reliability will be low. Therefore, a researcher should always aim at having at least 30 samples by obtaining more referrals in case some of those approached do not participate.

In this research, 67 participants were taken from the population of the total workforce of around 65,000 in the property management industry in Hong Kong (The Hong Kong Association of Property Management Limited Companies, 2006). This means that each participant represented approximately 1,000 in the population. The sample size of 67 was greater than the minimum requirement suggested by the scholars.

Scales for measuring emotional intelligence

The emotional quotient of a person is a quantified comparison of the ability of that person to manage human relationships and their own emotions compared to a standard of a group of people. Goleman (1995) argues that the significance and application of the emotional quotient is more important than the intelligence quotient in the present-day economy which is complex and a difficult environment in which to have clear insights. In 1997, Bar-On (1997) introduced fifteen sub-scales for his measure of emotional intelligence, which was recognised as a reliable measurement of overall personal competence and social competence. The self-awareness category recognises personal emotion is measure of a person’s in intrapersonal skills. Stress management and adaptability measures together quantify the social relationship management skills of a person. Finally, a person with a higher emotional quotient is generally a person who usually has a happier mood and feelings of optimism and happiness which are measurable within the 15
sub-scales.

The major emotional intelligence assessment tools are the Emotional Competence Inventory of Richard E. Boyatzis and Fabio Sala, Maer-Salovey-Caruso, Emotional Intelligence Test of Marc A. Brackett and Peter Salovey, and the Bar-On Scale. The Bar-On scale was chosen for this study because it is widely applied and is able to demonstrate high validity (Glenn, 2004).

With voluntary participation, the emotional intelligence of the participants was analysed in a systematic way so as to verify the relationship with conflict formation and related management strategies.

In applying the Bar-On Scale, it is important to note its general applicability. For example, the indication and measurement of emotional quotient of different people can result in different reaction and attitude. Such difference has to be taken into account in the analysis of specified issues. However, such consideration has been ignored in this dissertation in order to present clearer conclusions without too many variables.

The emotional quotient is also a measure of the ability of a person to apply multiple perspectives through the recognition and regulation of his emotions. A person of high emotional intelligence is able to recognise the logic of difficult situations and accept the differences which give rise to conflicts. Such acceptance will trigger endurance and a more open minded approach will induce new ways of conflict resolution, which are more likely to be agreed by concerning parties.
The application of the sub-scales of emotional quotient can identify the exact type of recognition or ability to regulate emotion. It assists in identifying the reason and assessment of possible condition for interpersonal behaviours and reactions. As the sub-scales of the fifteen items of emotion are interrelated, the general scale will simplify the sophisticated emotional state if necessary. Some people are especially good at handling conflicts in a tactful and sensible way and have become targets of study for scholars and the concept of emotional quotient is applied to quantify the ability to manage emotion (Bar-On, 1997; Glenn, 2004; Schutte and Malouff, 1999).

The concept of emotional quotient also involves the management of emotion within oneself. It recognises the importance of interdependence with other people. It gives an insight into what kind of personality will have a positive attitude towards human relationships, including the resolution of conflict. So in addition to the summation scale, the 15 sub-scales provide a total of 16 coefficients for the quantitative measurement of emotional quotient in the Bar-On scale used in this paper.

3.2.3 **Instruments and procedures of data collection**

Instruments or procedures used to collect data, including how the dependent variable was measured, details of pilot studies and the explicit concern about specific procedures used to ensure internal and external validity are discussed below.

The relationship between emotional intelligence and conflict formation, and the
relationship between conflict management strategies and emotional quotient are measured through the tests of emotional quotient and interview questions about conflict formation and management strategy. Demographic data is the supplementary information for triangulation of the result.

Through interview questions, this dissertation seeks to explore the frequency, types, cause, development, and effect of conflict as well as conflict management strategies. Each interview was carried out with the same set of interview questions. Emotional intelligence is measured by the Bar-On Scale (1997) which measures emotional intelligence with fifteen sub-scales in different aspects. Since grounded theory is adopted for this dissertation, the dependent variables and independent variables are not pre-set during the interviews.

A pilot study was conducted on the staff of officer and manager grade in a property management company. The study includes interviews, test of emotional quotient and collection of demographic data. The sample questions for the interview (total 20), emotional quotient (total 133) and demographic data (total 10) had previously been commented by the dissertation supervisor. The duration of interviews and scores of emotional quotient of the pilot study were measured.

The feedback in the pilot study indicated that both emotional quotient of the customer service staff and their concern for others would influence both the formation and the resolution of conflict. That is, both high staff emotional quotient and high staff concern for others would induce less conflict in some ways. The pilot study designates that the research design of data collection should include the test of emotional quotient of staff and their concern for others.
Then the feedbacks of the participants in the pilot study were considered for the research methods used in the main data collection. The data collection method was primarily face-to-face interviews. The advantage of face-to-face interviews is that information can be obtained through the process of instant feedback by two people talking to one another (Frank and Lindsay, 2000) and the feedback includes facial expression and gesture as a countercheck for the accuracy of the interview answers. However, if the interview sample refused to do face-to-face interviews due to time constraint, a telephone interview was considered as an alternative. Compared to face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews could lower cost and save time without sacrificing the significance of gathering valid information (Roger and Susan, 1994). The advantages of both face-to-face and telephone interviews are that they can provide more details about the perceptions of the customer service staff and so the interviewer can recognise more about the reactions and feedback of the interviewees. On the other hand, interviews demand more time and effort to gather the sufficient information than questionnaires or surveys.

Data were collected through customer service staff interviews to identify the causes of conflicts between customers and staff of property management companies/organisations, and the styles of conflict management strategy employed and their effectiveness. During the interviews, the interviewees were chosen from the property management staff of companies of various sizes and they were encouraged to provide information about their experience of conflict formation and conflict management.

Apart from encouraging the interviewees to provide information about the causes
of conflict and conflict management strategies, the interviewees were also asked to clarify the concept of emotional intelligence and conflict definition and enquire about conflict formation and conflict management strategies. Since the customer service staff had many chances to deal with customers and tackle conflicts, they could disclose much experience about conflict management.

A total of 67 interviewees voluntarily took part in the survey. Each interview took an average of 23 minutes and it took a further average of 25 minutes to complete the survey and demographic data.

For the measurement of emotional quotient and the demographic surveys, similar surveys are common in Hong Kong. Therefore, written surveys are of minimal risks for the participants.

In the whole exercise, apart from the researcher obtaining desired results for this dissertation, the participants also benefited during the interviews or questionnaire surveys by learning how emotional quotient is handled by others when the survey results are sent to them.

The validity of the measurement of emotional intelligence is important (Schutte and Malouff, 1999). As the Bar-On scale for measuring emotional intelligence is a scale to check the fifteen different qualities related to emotions, the measurement must be able to quantify the fifteen different abilities and show overall emotional intelligence with a summary scale rather than just provide a summary scale. The summary scale and the 15 sub-scales of emotional quotient are for comparison and reference for a particular person, as human reactions to different issues and
matters will change in a dynamic situation. The quantification of the emotional quotient makes it easy to assess individuals’ attitudes and emotions and to assess their relationship with conflict formation and their impact on conflict resolution.

**Interview questions**

The interviews covered the subjects of conflict, the causes of conflict, the effects of conflict, and conflict management. Each interview was divided into five parts (see Appendix A) as follows:

i.) Frequency of conflicts
ii.) Example of conflict
iii.) Cause and development of conflicts
iv.) Effect of conflicts and
v.) Conflict management.

**Part i: Frequency of conflicts**

The first part, frequency of conflicts, included questions about the outbreak and frequency of conflict in property management services.

Question 1 was to identify whether customer service staff encountered conflict or not.

Question 2 was to identify the frequency of outbreaks of conflicts.

**Part ii: Example of conflict**

Question 3 was to identify the most frequently encountered conflict in property management.
Question 4 was to identify the most crucial conflict which happened between the customer service staff of the property management company and the customers.

Part iii: Causes and development of conflict

Question 5 was to identify the concerning party initiating the conflict.

Question 6 was to discover the reason for the conflict.

Question 7 was to understand the formation of the conflict.

Question 8 was to understand the development of the conflict.

Question 9 was to discover the way the conflict was resolved.

Question 10 was to categorise as a task conflict or relationship conflict.

Part iv: Effect of conflict

Question 11 was to discover the consequences of the conflict.

Question 12 was to discover what feedback the customer gave.

Question 13 was to know the opinion of participant about whether the conflict could have been avoided.

Question 14 was to discover how the conflict could have been avoided.

Part v: Conflict management

Question 15 was to gauge the skill of the interviewee in conflict management.

Question 16 was to know the knowledge of conflict management.

Question 17 was to identify the techniques or strategies for conflict management.

Question 18 was to determine whether the participant needed help from others for conflict management.

Question 19 was to discover the reason for the need to get help for conflict management, or why no help was needed.
Question 20 was to find out how help from others was obtained.

The tactics or methods used to handle conflict were identified, with the research interview questions focusing on conflict management. Whenever any of the techniques of conflict management of avoidance, obliging, domination, compromise and integration were applied during the process of the conflict management, the details would be recorded on the type, and effectiveness of the particular techniques were analysed.

Then the demographic data (Appendix B) was gathered. The purpose of the gathering of demographic data was to provide supplementary information for analysis and triangulation of the data.

Finally, the participants went through the measurement of emotional quotient (Appendix C). The measurement of emotional quotient of customer service staff was conducted according to the analytical method of Bar-On (1997) and summarised for analysis. The five categories of fifteen sub-scales were measured for study when necessary.

3.2.4 Administration of instruments and procedures

In Hong Kong, there is only one official association of property management companies. It is the Hong Kong Association of Property Management Companies Limited. According to information provided by the Home Affairs Department (Home Affairs Department, 2005), the member companies of the association represented 85% of the market share in the property management industry of Hong
Kong. Samples were taken from the members of the Association. There are 86 registered companies with a total workforce of around 65,000 (The Hong Kong Association of Property Management Limited Companies, 2006). For a valid research, a sample size of at least 30 interviews is needed (Margarete, 1995) so as to give a reliable sample base of information for analysis. If the interview sample size of the research falls below 30, the reliability will be low. For this dissertation, a sample was taken for approximately every 1,000 property management staff from the member list of the association and the total interview sample size was 67. Every participant had to undertake both the interview and supplementary data collection.

The total staff size from the 86 property management companies added up to around 65,000. Therefore, the average staff size of each company was around 753. However, because of the uneven staff size of different companies, only 15% of the companies were below the 276 median staff size, and most companies had a staff size which was above the median. Therefore, the median was not a good basis on which to partition the sample. Half of the sample was therefore selected from companies below the average and the remaining half was from companies above the average. The companies with staff sizes below the average were regarded as small-scale companies whereas the company with staff sizes above the average were regarded as large-scale companies. The process of calculating the number of recruitment participant’s respondent was based on method of the cluster sampling on the pro-rata basis of the staff size of the relevant portion of the large-scale companies and small-scale companies. Customer service staff was asked to voluntarily take part in the interview and complete the emotional quotient measurement and demographic data.
Academically, the researcher graduated with a Bachelor of Business Administration from the Chinese University of Hong Kong in 1988, finished by distance learning a Bachelor of Estate Management from the University of Reading in 1998 and graduated with a Master of Housing Management from the University of Hong Kong in 2007.

The researcher also obtained the qualification of Chartered Surveyor in the division of Facility Management of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors in 2004, attained corporate membership of the Chartered Institute of Housing and corporate membership of the Hong Kong Institute of Housing in 2008. The researcher has discussed the subject of this research with about 70 classmates of these courses and many business colleagues with the ranking of officer and manager who come from different property management companies of varying sizes. They pledged support and participation in the research interview and supplementary data collection, and gave their contact details to the researcher. Some of them have also enthusiastically helped by referring participants for the study. Being in the same field of professional practice, the researcher is also a personal friend of senior staff of most registered property management companies in Hong Kong.

Therefore, the assessment and contacts of the participants have been accessed through the connections of the researcher as the researcher has worked in the field for about 20 years. The interview places were chosen by the participants and were mostly the workplaces of the participants or that of the interviewer. The door of the rooms for the interview was kept locked during the interview and during supplementary data collection for more privacy and to minimise
unnecessary disturbance.

In this study, careful assessments of risk factors were made with regard to the gathering of information through interviews and supplementary measurement of emotional quotient and collection of demographic data. Before the start of the schedule of interviews and supplementary data collection, the researcher informed his supervisor so that the supervisor could be alert for any sudden request for help. Moreover, briefings were arranged for every participant to explain the procedure of the interviews and supplementary data collection and their attention drawn to the procedure of the interviews and supplementary data collection. During the process, the researcher closely observed the participant to see whether that participant felt uncomfortable with all of the questions raised and was prepared to terminate the process immediately if necessary. No such termination was necessary during the entire course of the process. The researcher was also prepared to discuss with the supervisor any unexpected happening in order to mitigate any risk. Every risk was to be assessed and handled by the researcher and the supervisor simultaneously. Again, no such risk occurred.

Though questions involving the assessment of emotional quotient usually tend to be sensitive, the Hong Kong population is relaxed about such matters, and problems arise only when very sensitive issues are involved. As mentioned, the interviewees were mostly friends or were referred by friends of the researcher, and so there existed a high degree of trust. The interviews were also assured of high confidentiality as it was important to have no risk of confidential information being disclosed inappropriately.
The process of recruitment of participants was on the basis of cluster sampling and was carried out with the consensus of participating customer service staff of the property management industry in Hong Kong. Customer service staff were asked to undertake the interview and to voluntarily complete the emotional intelligence measurement and demographic data and return them to the researcher.

The sample size was 67. The interviews and supplementary demographic data were qualitatively analysed. Hence only descriptive data were incorporated into the results. The age range of participants was between 20 and 70 years and they were from both sexes. During the course of recruiting, 20 targets refused to participate and further referrals were made until the target of 67 participants was reached.

Before the data collection for each participant, the researcher would outline the requirements for the consent of the participant. Participants were advised that they could ask for a summary of the findings and measurement of emotional quotient when the project was completed. Results were sent to each of the participants by mail on request.

3.2.5 Validity and reliability issues

Concerning reliability of the data collected, the approximation of the extent to which the measurements of the variables were free of random or unstable error was considered in determining the size of the sample. Enough participants were selected.
Grounded theory allows researchers to obtain highly reliable results from raw data to study complex, rapidly changing behaviours of emotional quotient and conflict management. The inability to establish internal validity and the limits to external validity when using grounded theory were considered. Internal validity is said to occur if the inference is the best estimate of the existence or lack of existence of a causal relationship. So, the relationship between emotional intelligence and conflict formation, and the relationship between conflict management strategy and emotional quotient are inferred no matter whether there is causal relationship or not. External validity is the extent to which it is justifiable to generalise the causal relationships across different times and situations. In this dissertation, the generalisation is applied to the property management industry and the customer service industry and does not apply to sales-oriented or task-related industries.

The President of the Hong Kong Institute of Facility Management and former Deputy Managing Director of a property management conglomerate, Mr. Lau Po Chi, kindly commented on the research methodology and gave valuable comments to the dissertation so as to improve the validity and reliability issues.

3.3 Research procedures

A 10-stage research procedure was used as discussed below:

1. Literature review: Establish theoretical framework from literature in previous chapter to develop the constructs of conflict management, emotional intelligence measurement and its relationship with conflict management.
2. Design research questions: Based on the literature review a series of research questions designed to give direction to the research.

3. Design Survey and Interview Instrument: The survey and interview instrument developed.

4. Preliminaries, research protocols: Identification of population and participants.

5. Ethics approval: Approval obtained from Ethics Committee of Southern Cross University, with the approval number ECN-07-113.

6. Pilot data collection and interview: A pilot exploratory survey was conducted to identify the issues which would have an impact on the relationship between emotional intelligence and conflict management.

7. Administration of data collection and interviews: The required 67 participants were secured.

8. Construct validation and reliability testing of constructs in data analysis.

9. Analysis of data: Qualitative analysis led to the identification of relationships and answers to research questions.

10. Findings were available from the interpretation and data analysis.

3.4 Ethical considerations

The policy of voluntary participation has been strictly adhered to throughout this research. All participants who attended the interviews and responded to the survey were informed beforehand of the purpose of the research, how information and data collected were to be handled and treated with high confidentiality and no individual information would be kept once the data was collated. All participants gave their written consent.
In the letter to the participants, there was a section that could be detached and sent back with the completed questionnaire, with the commitment that a copy of the summary of the emotional quotient and research findings would be sent to the participants and to thank them for their contributions.

In the same way as the participants decided to participate, they were free to withdraw and to discontinue participation at any time. They might also elect not to answer any questions asked. Participants could ask for a summary of the findings and measurement of their emotional quotient and this was forwarded to each of the participants if they completed the separate request form that provided their email contact. Furthermore, a copy of the results was provided on request.

The dissertation supervisor and customer service staff of property management industry in Hong Kong examined the sample of the survey and interview questions so as to ensure they complied with the ethics consideration. The Southern Cross University Human Research Ethics Committee approved the ethical aspects of this dissertation. The Approval Number is ECN-07-113. If anyone had a complaint or reservation about ethical aspects of participation in this research, he/she was free to contact the Committee through the Ethics Complaints Officer. This was explained on the information sheet for the research.

The researcher has not been informed of any complaints on any ethical issue from any of the 67 interviewees.

3.5 Triangulation of the data
The relationship between emotional intelligence and conflict formation, and the relationship between conflict management strategy and emotional intelligence are revealed through the measurement of emotional quotient and interview questions about conflict formation strategy.

Demographic data includes the information of (1) gender, (2) age, (3) marital status, (4) education, (5) working experiences, (6) property management experiences, (7) working organization major in private companies or non-private companies, (8) number of property management organization/company having worked for, (9) current rank and (10) existing company/organization working for, being the supplementary information for data analysis. If the findings have concluded that there is a direct relationship among demographic factor(s), emotional quotient and conflict formation/management strategies, it would shown that the demographic factor(s) are significance to the research question. On the other hand, if the findings have shown that there is no direct relationship between demographic factor and emotional quotient/conflict formation/management, it would conclude that demographic factor is not the substance of the study.

The demographic factor(s) then act(s) as the reference point for finding the relationship of emotional quotient and conflict formation/management strategies. It helps to triangulate the finding which was used to improve data accuracy.

In the process of complication of the data, demographic factors are taken into consideration.
After the process of compilation of the data, the research findings were discussed with the dissertation supervisor and senior personnel in the property management sector, both in the government and private sector in Hong Kong. The findings were also cross-checked with: (1) the annual customer service survey results of the respective property management company/organisation providing information on the effectiveness of emotional intelligence and conflict management, and their impact on customer service, (2) individual case analysis of particularly difficult conflicts and most frequent conflicts so as to identify the further consequence of effective customer service.

3.6 Conclusion

The research questions about the relationship between emotional intelligence and conflict formation, and the relationship between conflict management strategy and emotional intelligence were answered through interviews, measurement of emotional quotient, and the collection of the demographic data.
Chapter 4: Analysis of data

4.1 Introduction

This chapter summarises the collected data, analyses the data through the methodology of grounded theory in the aspects of emotional quotient and conflict formation leading to the handling of emotions and to the formulation of conflict management strategies.

The interview answers, emotional quotient questionnaire results and demographic data were recorded and the emotional quotients of participants were calculated.

Hence the categories and coding are divided into the categories of conflict formation and conflict management strategy in relation to emotional quotient. By the adoption of the grounded theory, the data collected were then analysed through the stages of codes, concepts, categories and then theory.

The procedure used for the investigation of the relationship between emotional intelligence and conflict formation was to analyse conflict formation in the matter of dynamic change of the conflict issue, repeated conflict over similar issues, perception and reality, and in-depth reasons for conflict formation. Furthermore, the investigation of the relationship between conflict management strategy and emotional intelligence involved analysing how conflict related to management strategy, positive thinking in conflict management strategy, conflict and its potential for improving the situation, and different aspects and wholeness of the
particular circumstance.

The total of sixty-seven (67) participants was examined to estimate their emotional quotient and conflict frequencies, and the management strategies used in cases where conflict arose. The demographic data was also used to triangulate the data in different groups so as to improve the accuracy of the information. Hence the matrix of the four main groups of concern for self and others by customer and service staff was analysed to reveal the conflict frequency in each category. High and low emotional quotient of service staff would be analysed in different situation. Afterwards, the conflict management style of customer service staff and customers with different degrees of concern for self and others was formed into a matrix with the high and low emotional quotient of customer service staff respectively. In the former part of the analysis five conflict management styles were analysed according to the degree of concern for self and others. The latter part of the analysis examined the effects of the five conflict management styles in different situations.

For each main group of the matrix, the coding was analysed to determine the relationship of emotional quotient of staff with conflict formation and management strategy. These results are shown in the following section.

4.2 Patterns of data for the research issue, ‘emotional quotient and conflict formation and strategy’

Table 5 shows the relationship between the level of concern for others on the part of customer service staff with the level of concern for others exhibited by the
customer – Groups 1, 2, 3 and 4.

Each of the four (4) groups is further split up into scenarios according to the level of the emotional quotient of customer service staff. The emotional quotient of staff was classified as either high or low.

Staff and customer were classified according to their level of concern for others and their concern for self. Group 1 represents high staff concern for others and high customer concern for others. Group 2 represents high staff concern for others and low customer concern for others. Group 3 represents low staff concern for others and high customer concern for others. Group 4 represents low staff concern for others and low customer concern for others.

**Table 5  Conflict formation and emotional quotient**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staff concern for others</th>
<th>Group 1</th>
<th>Group 2</th>
<th>Group 3</th>
<th>Group 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>No conflict</td>
<td>50% conflict</td>
<td>50% conflict</td>
<td>Conflict formed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Customer concern for others**
The above relationships are demonstrated in Table 5, which applies to both (1) the relationship between conflict formation and emotional quotient (as described in 4.2.1 below) and (2) the relationship between conflict management strategy and emotional quotient (as described in 4.2.2)

4.2.1 The relationship between conflict formation and emotional quotient.

After classifying the data collected into the four (4) main groups, they are then further classified according to whether the staff’s emotional quotient was high or low for each group.

Below, the Codes (4.2.1.1) are further developed into Concepts (4.2.1.2), and Categories (4.2.1.3). From Categories, the theory is developed (4.2.1.4)

4.2.1.1 Codes of conflict formation and emotional quotient – The twenty-six (26) Codes established

There are twenty-six (26) codes in total and they are described in details below.

4.2.1.1.1 Group 4: If both parties have a high concern for self, conflict arises.

As shown in Table 5, Group 4 experiences more conflicts than the other groups.

4.2.1.1.2 Group 1: No conflict occurs as both parties have a high concern for others.

As shown in Group 1, no conflict occurs when both parties have a high concern for others.

4.2.1.1.3 Groups 2 and 3: As shown in Table 5, either party concern for others induces a
medium rate of conflict.

The chances of conflicts happening here is between the rates for Group 1 and Group 4. The conflict frequency is around 50%.

4.2.1.1.4 Groups 2 and 3: When the emotional quotient of staff is high, and either party has a high concern for others, no conflict occurs.

4.2.1.1.5 Groups 2 and 3: When the emotional quotient of staff is low, and either party has a high concern for self, conflict occurs.

4.2.1.1.6 Groups 1 and 2: When staff has a high concern for others, and either staff has a high emotional quotient or customers have a high concern for others there is no conflict.

4.2.1.1.7 Groups 3 and 4: When staff concern have a high concern for self, and either staff have a low emotional quotient or customer concern for self is high, conflict occurs.

4.2.1.1.8 Groups 1 and 3: When customer concern for others is high, and either staff have a high emotional quotient or staff have a high concern for others there is no conflict.

4.2.1.1.9 Groups 2 and 4: When customer concern for self is high, and either staff emotional quotient is low or staff have a high concern for self, conflict occurs.
4.2.1.10 Groups 2 and 3: Concern for others and high emotional quotient of staff is interchangeable in medium conflicts.

The impact of high concern for others whether it is shown by staff or customers and the impact of high emotional quotient of staff is the same.

4.2.1.11 Critical conflicts always involve a combination of a difference in interests, perspectives and opinions, and narrow mindedness.

The state of mind is a kind of attitude (answers.com, 2006). Narrow mindedness means defending one’s own opinion or self-perspective and ignoring the feedback and perspective of the opposing party. The way of thinking of the narrow mind induces a discrepancy between customer service expectation and staff service provision. Narrow minded people believe they are right on certain issues and that others are wrong. They trust their past experiences of the issue and their behaviour indicates a dislike of people with different beliefs and value judgements. So, conflicts are usually formed with narrow minded people. Narrow minded people are concerned for self most of the time and are generally not concerned for others.

Critical conflict vs. combined difference

It was found that critical conflicts always involve combinations of differences in interests, perspectives and opinions. Complexity makes the conflict too complicated to be resolved by the customer service staff alone and they need to escalate to senior management. These conflicts could also be treated as a series of unsolved conflicts or repeated conflicts on different levels and scale. That is,
the conflict first involves the details of property service provision but ultimately involves the company policy. During the developmental stage of a critical conflict, the customer service staff still have many chances to direct the conflict by adopting different approaches of resolution to diffuse it into a number of minor conflicts. It is important for the customer service staff to be able to split up the differences so that conflicts will not develop into a critical one.

4.2.1.12 Role conflict between customer service staff and customers as they always have different interpretations on the issue of property service provision.

The self perspective of either party might be regarded as uncooperative or offensive by the opposing party. Since they have different roles in the interpretation of the Deed of Mutual Covenant, building rules and regulations, the provision of property services standard, and the selection of service contractors on the estate management services, role conflict between property management and the general residents, tenants, and the Incorporated Owners has become inevitable. For those different roles and interpretations, the concern for others was low and conflict happens.

4.2.1.13 Availability of resources available and service staff flexibility are key factors in conflict formation.

Resources allocation was one of the key factors in conflict formation. However, resources misallocation results from business competition. Business organisations emphasise operational effectiveness and efficiency which leads to tight budgets. Therefore, estate management offices can only provide the basic
and reasonable services to customers. If the customer requires any special service, the customer service staff will face difficulties in attempting to provide the required service. Conflicts are formed whenever the customer service staff do not have sufficient flexibility to deal with customer. Since flexibility is also a sub-scale of emotional quotient, resource allocation problems and lack of flexibility are reasons for conflict formation. Flexibility is directly related to emotional quotient and is one of the factors for conflict formation.

The regulatory power has the ability to arrange resource allocation. If the regulatory power can only enable the staff to understand the situation but cannot control the situation to develop in an expected way, the incompatible physical potency will be affected by outside factors, such as environment or others’ behaviour. If the regulatory power has a high concern for others the outcome will be improved.

4.2.1.14 Conflicts are formed due to poor communication and understanding between customer service staff and customer, that is, poor information sharing.

Poor communication distorts the meaning of message and information. Thus a difference between service provisions by customer service staff and the expectation of service delivery by customer can be created if, when difference arises, both parties express their own opinions and perspectives. Poor communication exaggerates the difference and distorts mutual understanding. Verbal messages only reinforce differences and imply a lack of flexibility to recognise the authenticity of the situation. Hence, conflict is formed by poor communication and an inability to understand the motives of the other party.
It was found that low emotional quotient results in poor communication and easy to misunderstand messages.

4.2.1.15 Hidden real needs hinder information sharing.

Conflicts are often formed because of the hidden real need of the customer if they are not identified by the customer service staff. It is important, therefore, that the customer service staff be sensitive enough to identify such needs and verify them with the customer through communication and information sharing.

4.2.1.16 The more complex the conflict, the greater the need for more concern for others in information sharing.

Complicated issue induce conflict easily. Complex issues may be a series of simple issues or a genuinely difficult issue. So, the number of issues and the difficulty of an issue can both affect the provision of property services. The complicated issue usually requires skill and experience to handle. If the customer service staff do not have sufficient skill and experience to provide the service, they usually lack confidence and are low in emotional quotient. Hence the interpretation of the customer service staff is biased and their role is not well defined in authority and power. The staff do not have enough endurance and ability to perform the customer service well. Consequently, if the customers form the opinion that the services is not up to expectation, conflict is formed.

Since different parties often have different opinions and perspectives on complicated issues, careful and prudent communication and feedback on the part
of the concerning parties is needed. Low emotional quotient interrelates with complicated issues, since low emotional quotient service staff turn simple issues into complicated ones. High emotional quotient service staff can handle complicated issues in a better way and so they are less likely to have conflicts. On the other hand, complicated issues discourage the customer service staff and further dampen their self-confidence and adversely affect their emotional quotient. The vicious cycle of emotional quotient and complexity of issues triggers the formation of conflicts. Emotional quotient affects the formation of conflicts in the case of complicated issues.

4.2.1.17 Customer service skills in the process of delivering customer services are vital to avoid conflicts in information sharing.

It is found that customer service skills are critical in the process of delivering customer services. For those customer service staff having taken a training course in customer service attitude and technique, less conflict tends to happen. The staff can handle their emotions and deal with the customers in an appropriate manner. Customer service skills prevent the outbreak of conflict to a great extent. Being alert for emotional fluctuations helps control the unstable behaviour of the customer service staff in a way that is more proactive and more sensitive towards preventing conflict formation. So, the inadequacy of customer service skills and the lack of awareness of the need for concern for others is one of the key factors of conflict formation.

4.2.1.18 Experienced property management service staff possess more concern for others and thus are less prone to arouse conflicts.
Those customer service staff with long working experience or those who have been with three or more property management companies or organisations, have had more exposure to handling conflict issues. Their working experience in conflict handling can reduce the possibility of conflict formation. Such experience includes a focus on dealing with customers, staying in contact, responding to complaints quickly, making it easy for customers to contact the staff, and making sure that policies on customer service are followed. Experienced customer service staff are more likely to be aware of the importance of prevention before the outbreak of conflict and are generally prone to react quickly to customers if necessary. Hence, customer service staff experience can improve their awareness of the importance of concern for others in customer service provision and can therefore help prevent the outbreak of conflicts.

Customer service staff who have worked with more property management companies usually have higher emotional quotient. Because they would have had more exposure to dealing with customers of different backgrounds and situations, they generally have a higher emotional quotient and higher concern for others.

4.2.1.19 When staff with low emotional quotient have a low general mood of optimism and happiness, which is influenced by their particular environment and situation, conflict is more likely to arise.

The low general mood is usually affected by the environment and situation. Low general mood means pessimism and unhappiness. Either party or both parties
is/are not interested the other party and like to criticise the opposing party. The criticism will quickly induce conflict and complaints about the delivery of services. The negative environment and situation sometimes creates inappropriate arrangements of service provision, such as third parties expressing unhelpful opinions about the service provision. Thus low general mood encourages criticism and induces conflict quickly. Emotional quotient is directly related to general mood and conflict formation.

4.2.1.20 During the delivery of services, conflicts also arise when staff has a low emotional quotient in stress management scales.

During service delivery, conflict forms if staff have a low measurement in the emotional quotient sub-class of stress endurance. Since work pressure is high in the current working environment, the staff will experience serious stress from time to time. It is important to have sufficient stress endurance to cope with difficult customer issues and handle them in a tactful and peaceful manner. However, some customer service staff have a low emotional quotient in the sub-class of stress endurance and they react to customer complaints in a rude manner. Conflict in such situations will easily form as it will mean that the customer finds the staff irresponsible and of poor attitude. Similarly, whenever the customer exhibits a poor attitude and does not behave in the way generally expected of customers, conflict occurs. Emotional quotient is directly related to the ability to endure stress.

4.2.1.21 Impulse control and stress endurance are vital for emotional quotient integrity.
Of the fifteen elements of emotional quotient, impulse control and stress endurance are the most important. This is because when these two are ill managed, conflicts are immediately aggravated and subsequent remedies are very difficult.

4.2.1.1.22 Empathy induces appropriate decision-making and feedback behaviour. Staff with high empathy scores adopt appropriate decision-making and feedback behaviour.

4.2.1.1.23 Building of corporate image and high staff emotional quotient in interpersonal relationships reduces conflicts.

It is important to have good interpersonal relationships and a good image of the company so as to create mutual trust between customer service staff and customers. Conflict usually arises if there is insufficient trust between the concerning parties during the delivery of property management services. Customers may not be satisfied with the service standards and service attitudes of the customer service staff and thus dissatisfaction arises. Similarly, dissatisfaction will occur if customer service staff think that a customer is expecting an unreasonably high quality of service and the company support does not achieve the provision. But when there exist good interpersonal relationships and the company image is good, less conflict occurs, existing conflicts are more easily resolved, and potential conflicts are prevented in advance. The quality of interpersonal relationships and the company image are strongly affected by emotional quotient.
4.2.1.1.24  Relationship conflicts often repeat themselves, and staff with high emotional quotients are able to reduce relationship conflicts with customers.

Relationship conflicts recur from time to time. Once relationship conflict happens and cannot be resolved in a good way, there is the tendency for it to replicate. The emotional quotient sub-scales of interpersonal relationship and empathy are related to repeated conflict. When the scores on these sub-scales are high, there is less relationship conflict and recurring conflict. Some task conflicts, if they are not resolved in reasonable time, will develop into relationship conflicts. Hence, repeated conflicts arise as the result of poor resolution of previous conflicts, which is often due to low emotional quotient of the service staff.

During the delivery of services, the emotional intelligence of customer service staff affects the way they relate to each other. Conflicts are formed by the fluctuation of emotion in the involving party. When the involving party has emotional changes or when his/her emotions are not under control the involving party will verbally attack the opposing party. Hence, a simple property service issue can escalate into a conflict or complaint. When the involving party loses his/her temper, the unstable emotional behaviour results in the formation of conflicts, which are associated with the emotional quotient of the service staff. In this connection, the conflict arises due to relationship factors.

4.2.1.1.25  Assertiveness reduces conflict.

During the delivery of services, the assertiveness and the ability of staff to
elaborate company policies is very important for increasing the likelihood of preventing conflicts. If the staff rates poorly in assertiveness, conflict easily forms. The interactions of the parties require energy to communicate and accommodate. Otherwise, the opposing party may think the involving party has no sincerity in its communication or has little respect for him/her. When staff assertiveness is low, conflicts may arise simply because the customer has formed the impression that the service staff does not have valid reasons for defending their position. Conflict may just be due to some misunderstanding of the transmitted message or misinterpretation of the perspective of either party, when reasonable demands are not backed up by the necessary assertiveness of the service staff.

When assertiveness is high enough, the staff can direct the behaviour or regulate the situation in the desired direction. So the regulatory power of self-behaviour and interaction with the other party are related to emotional quotient and conflict formation.

4.2.1.1.26 High emotional quotient of staff in problem solving reduces task conflict.

Task conflict is related to problem solving skills. When customer service staff apply their problem solving skills, task conflict can be resolved or prevented in advance. It seems that task conflict is a non-human problem and customer service staff can identify the focus of the problem and resolve it by a rearrangement of human resources and/or physical resources. Problem solving is an element within emotional quotient, a sub-scale of adaptability of regulation of social competence. Accordingly, task conflict is not related to emotional or relationship problems and thus can be resolved through the application of
emotional intelligence. So, the formation of task conflict is affected by emotional intelligence.

4.2.1.2 Concepts of conflict formation and emotional quotient – convergence from twenty-six (26) codes into twelve (12) concepts

The above codes were then condensed into twelve (12) concepts to escalate the findings of the study, pointing towards the development of the ultimate theory.

4.2.1.2.1 Group 4: Both parties concern for self induces conflict.

4.2.1.2.2 Group 1: Both parties concern for others induces no conflict.

4.2.1.2.3 Groups 2 and 3: Either party concern for others or a high emotional quotient of staff induces conflict in medium frequency of conflicts.

4.2.1.2.4 Groups 2 and 3: Concern for others by either party and high emotional quotient of staff have the same impact in which a medium frequency of conflicts can be expected.

High emotional quotient of staff and concern for others on the part of either party have an equal impact on conflict reduction. That is, when the service staff possess a high emotional quotient, the addition of either the staff or the customer having concern for others can reduce conflict. This situation lies in the medium stream in the likelihood of conflicts appearing.
4.2.1.2.5 When either party has concern for others in group 2 and 3, a high emotional quotient in the staff induces no conflict and low emotional quotient of staff induces conflict.

4.2.1.2.6 Groups 1 and 2: When staff have a high concern for others, either high staff emotional quotient or customer concern for others induces no conflict.

In regard to compatibility of the opinions of the service staff and customers, there is no issue at all. As the service staff possess a high emotional quotient, he/she is naturally sensitive of customer needs. Also, when both parties have high concern for others, misunderstanding cannot happen. Thus, conflict is avoided.

4.2.1.2.7 Groups 3 and 4: When staff have a high concern for self, and either staff emotional quotient is low or customers have a high concern for self conflict will occur.

4.2.1.2.8 Groups 1 and 3: When high customer concern for others is combined with, either high staff emotional quotient or a high staff concern for others, no conflict occurs.

4.2.1.2.9 Groups 2 and 4: When a high customer concern for self, is combined with either low staff emotional quotient or high staff concern for self, conflict will result.

When staff emotional quotient is low, the chances of both parties experiencing emotional change are at its highest. Such emotional change induces conflict
easily. This is because emotions, when out of control usually provoke conflict. An individual’s behaviour not only affects that person’s own performance but can also trigger conflict through the reaction of the other party. The low staff emotional quotient influences openness towards the other party. When staff emotional quotient is low, the concerning parties tend to be emotionally oriented rather than thinking rationally. They have less tolerance for stress and are therefore bad-tempered. As a result the concerning party will behave in an uncooperative way and will not have any interest the perspective and welfare of the other party. When the customer service staff cannot identify the real or hidden need of the customer, serious conflict is the natural outcome.

If the staff and the customers have incompatible opinions on an issue then mistaken expectations about the provision of services can result. When the concerning parties can identify the real cause of a particular issue, no conflict, or only minor conflict, will occur. But when the concerning parties insist on their own opinions and perspective as being right, conflict is inevitable. The focus on whose opinion being right results in a false direction in the provision of service. People with low emotional quotient usually do not have enough motive and concentration to recognise the reality of the issue, and will not accept the perspective of the other party which they consider to be wrong. Such incompatibility of opinion between the service staff and the customer will only produce conflicts when the customer service staff possess low emotional intelligence.

4.2.1.2.10 Narrow-mindedness in relation to concern for self.
When either party is narrow-minded, they are only concerned for themselves and are reluctant to consider the situation the other party is facing. Therefore, narrow-mindedness is directly related to concern for self, and is a contributor to conflict formation.

4.2.1.2.11 Information sharing relates to concern for others

Conflict arises partly because either side possesses insufficient information or has a false interpretation of a particular issue. Whenever the concerning parties do not have accurate information, they may jump to conclusions by making assumptions or taking their own perceptions to be accurate information. When the service staff have low emotional intelligence and both parties possess insufficient information, the likelihood of conflict increases. The attitudes adopted by the parties involved depend on their subconscious selection of information according to self interest or self interpretation. The low emotional quotient of the service staff reduces the motivation to clarify the conflict issue. It is very important for both parties to have full information about the issue or at least have the desire to have it and accept information from the other party as genuine. Therefore, communication plays an important part in ensuring that both parties get a complete picture of the issue through information sharing. A lack of information sharing will always induce conflict and this demonstrates the importance of having a concern for others, because this will motivate the parties to communicate the necessary information.

4.2.1.2.12 The following qualities promote high staff emotional intelligence and therefore mean less conflict: good interpersonal relationships, a positive mood, good stress
management, good impulse control, good problem solving, flexibility and empathy.

Low emotional quotient also affects the openness of attitude and mindset of the service staff. If the channels for sharing of information are blocked between the customer service staff and the customers, each party will have to rely on their own perspective and this will create differences of opinion and the emergence of mistaken interpretations. The resulting unfriendly verbal exchanges are likely to damage the harmony of both parties. When the service staff become emotional the resulting unfriendly behaviour will stir up defensive behaviour on the part of the customer. In this way, conflict arising from insufficient information sharing and false interpretation of the issue will lower the level of service provided.

Conflict arises when service staff experience negative feelings during the delivery of services. The negative feeling can be newly formed or may have accumulated from previous experiences of service provision. That is, the interpersonal relationships dominate and give rise to conflict formation. The negative feelings involved are emotional rather than rational. During the service provision, the concerning parties expect their needs to be met and assume that they can communicate with the other party. But when their needs cannot be satisfied or their perspectives are rejected, negative feelings arise conflict is created. So, even past negative feeling may still have an impact on the communication of the concerning parties. These past feelings may be to do with past rivalry about service provision or a bad impression of the management office or the company.

Negative feelings generally last until the satisfaction of the required need or the
person feels that their perspective has been recognised. On the other hand, if the relationship between the customer and the service staff is good, each will respect the perspective of the other party but the satisfaction of the need is still critical to the issue. Hence, provision of the service should satisfy the needs of the customer to some extent. Otherwise, conflict is created due to a low concern for others on the part of the service staff.

All these qualities – good interpersonal relationships, a positive mood, good impulse control, good problem solving, flexibility and empathy, and especially stress management – promote a high staff emotional quotient and reduce the formation of conflicts. Therefore, the general measure of emotional quotient of service staff is a good predictor of whether conflicts are likely to arise.

4.2.1.3 **Categories of conflict formation and emotional quotient – convergence from twelve (12) concepts to six (6) categories**

The above twelve (12) concepts were then condensed into six (6) categories to escalate the findings of the research, pointing towards the development of the ultimate theory.

4.2.1.3.1 High emotional quotient of staff induces less conflict, except when both parties have a low concern for others.
### Table 6  Conflict formation for high staff emotional quotient

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staff concern for others</th>
<th>Customer concern for others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>Group 1 No conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Group 2 No conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Group 3 No conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Group 4 Conflict formed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Chances of conflict are low** due to high emotional quotient of staff except for the situation where both parties have high concern for self.

When the service staff have a high emotional quotient and either party has a high concern for others, the chance of conflict happening will be low. However, should both parties have a low concern for others, the benefits of the service staff having a high emotional quotient may not prevent conflicts from occurring.

**4.2.1.3.2** Low emotional quotient of staff induces conflict, except when both parties have a high concern for others.
Table 7 Conflict formation for low staff emotional quotient

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Staff concern for others</th>
<th>Customer concern for others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 1</td>
<td>No conflict</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 2</td>
<td>Conflict formed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 3</td>
<td>Conflict formed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 4</td>
<td>Conflict formed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Chances of conflict are high** due to low emotional quotient of staff except for the situation where both parties have high concern for others.

The potential for conflicts to occur is directly affected by staff emotional quotient. This paper studies the effect of the emotional quotient of the service staff in the inducement of conflicts in the field of property management.

Once task factors have triggered a conflict issue, the effect and impact of the conflict issue is affected by the relationships involved. This includes the behaviour, attitudes, perceptions and personalities of the concerning parties. All the relationship factors are determined by the mindset of the concerning parties. If the customer service staff is willing to perform its tasks well and the customers are willing to communicate well with the staff, little or no conflict will occur. However, in the process of service provision, the level of staff emotional quotient can greatly
impinge on the communication between the parties and affect their behaviour. Even if one or both parties do not want to have any conflict over the service provision, staff with low emotional quotient may induce conflict even if they do not intend to.

The emotional quotient of staff gives an indication of their willingness to have good communication and understanding. The faith or belief that good communication can be achieved depends on the determination of the service staff. A sense of control and appropriate response to adversity are the essential aspects of their attitude. The service staff are ordinary people and they are constantly subject to the influences of their moods and the surrounding people and environment. They may be used to presenting their behaviour in a positive way to achieve the goals and objectives, but sometimes their emotions cause them to behave negatively. Whether they commit themselves to constructive behaviour and live their lives in a meaningful way also depends on their attitudes. Without the appropriate attitude conflict will occur and cause a waste of their efforts to provide good customer service. In conflict situations, circumstances change and the service staff need to keep up with the rhythm of changes. Emotional intelligence acts as a motive to change attitudes or perceptions, which can result in cooperative behaviour in opposition to the sudden impulse of the customer.

Every person has a different personality and has unique needs in different situations. Considering that customer service staff always face incompatible goals and objectives between themselves and their customers, most conflicts come from their subjective judgments and emotions. The identification of the customer’s need is commonly recognised to be the first step to preventing conflict formation.
Without identification of the customer’s needs, the customer service staff will not have enough self-confidence to act appropriately and will not be able to know what they should do during the delivery of services. Self-awareness and self-control are the basic abilities required to understand and control their emotions and to understand a particular issue. However, self-centredness would act as a barrier to the identification of customer needs. Conversely, self-awareness is the foundation for truly understanding the customer. The service staff usually have a continuous stream of awareness and perception. In addition to the service staff having a high emotional intelligence, conflicts can also be prevented by their determination and commitment to deliver good service. This attitude is also needed if they are to develop a sensitivity towards customer needs and preferences.

The last, though not the least, relationship factor in conflict formation is the process of matching needs to services. Both parties should make an effort to improve communication and understanding; otherwise the tone of their interactions will not come from the dynamic environment but only from their internal thoughts. Matching with other’s need is a process demanding the concern from other party from both sides of customer services. When either party wants to improve the existing situation and make use of his/her effort, he/she should be willing to improve it by matching the other’s need. Without self-motivation, neither party can achieve his/her goals and objectives.

During the delivery of services the parties have the tendency to follow their habitual actions. Therefore, when both the service staff and customer have a high concern for themselves, they will behave accordingly and will not be able to
put things in proper perspective. If an individual does not take notice of their own behaviour, loss of focus will occur and as a result, service provision will develop into conflict because of a mismatch of the behaviour of the parties involved. If the opposing party accepts and recognises the behaviour of the involving party, the service provision becomes smooth and can be performed in an effective and efficient way.

In conclusion, conflicts occur frequently when the service staff have low emotional intelligence unless both the service staff and customer are highly concerned for the welfare of the other.

4.2.1.3.3 When staff have a high concern for customers, no conflict will occur unless customers have a high concern for self and staff have a low emotional quotient.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staff’s high concern for customer</th>
<th>Group 1</th>
<th>Group 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No conflict</td>
<td>No conflict for high staff EQ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer concern for others</td>
<td></td>
<td>Conflicts formed for low staff EQ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8 Conflict formation for staff’s high concern for customer

Chances of conflict are low when staff have a high concern for customers. There is a 50% chance of conflicts in the event of low staff emotional quotient in group 2.
Chances of conflict are low when staff have a high concern for customers. If staff adopt the concern for others approach, conflicts will rarely happen. When the service staff has a low emotional quotient and customers have a high concern for self, conflict occurs only when service staff is low concern for others.

Conflicts arise when customer service staff cannot identify the customers’ real needs during the delivery of services. When this happens they fail to understand the personality and hidden needs of the customers and fail to be alert for the attitude of the customer so as to build up mutual trust. Insensitivity on the part of customer service staff towards the hidden or real needs of the customer breeds conflict because unsatisfied needs may result in customer dissatisfaction and complaints. Service provision depends on the service standard of the customer service staff, and the attitude of customer service staff will affect service quality and therefore the perceptions of the customers. It is common for customer service staff to categorise their customers according to whether they perceive them as being cooperative or uncooperative. Biased perceptions on the part of the staff affect the generosity of their service provision to their customers. That is, conflict arises when the staff cannot identify the needs of the customers and instead perceive the customer as over demanding. With training and encouragement from management, when customer service staff demonstrate a high concern for customers, complaints will turn into enquiries and conflicts will turn to compromises. Thus, regardless of the emotional quotient level of the service staff, if they have a high concern for their customers, the incidence of conflict will be lower.
From the customer’s point of view, they have paid the service management fee and in return they expect to receive adequate service. On the other hand, customer service staff get paid and provide service to the customer. Hence, the provision of service is an exchange relationship. Every party should behave accordingly. In customer service provision, there may be customers who are over demanding and service staff who have a poor attitude to service. Conflict happens whenever either party encounters an unfair exchange relationship that does not meet reasonable expectations. But the exchange should not just be interpreted as a materialistic relationship. The exchange includes an interpersonal relationship and mutual gain in emotional satisfaction. Since service provision is always a one-to-one relationship between customer and customer service staff, the improvement of interpersonal relationships is part of service provision. This is because no one expects a deterioration of interpersonal relationships after the delivery of service.

During the communication between customer and customer service staff, misinterpretation and misunderstandings always arise and hence develop into conflicts. Inadequate listening and presentation skills of the parties involved may distort the message of other party. But a high staff emotional quotient also motivates the concerning parties to understand the issue in both perspective and opinion. Low staff emotional quotient in an individual distorts their understanding and results in their belief that they are absolutely right. But in practice, either party may perceive a partial truth and hence may be partially wrong. This inaccuracy to a certain extent results in incompatible goals in service provision, which results in conflict.
4.2.1.3.4 When staff have a high concern for self, conflict occurs except when customers have a high concern for staff and staff have a high emotional quotient.

Table 9 Conflict formation for staff’s low concern for customer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staff’s low concern for self</th>
<th>Group 3</th>
<th>Group 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>No conflict for high staff EQ</td>
<td>Conflicts formed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Conflicts formed for low staff EQ</td>
<td>Conflicts formed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Customer concern for others

**Chances of conflict are high when staff have a high concern for self.** There is a 50% chance of conflicts for Groups 3 as the service staff in this case always have high concern for self while customers have a high concern for staff.

When both sides adopt the concern for self approach, whether the service staff has a high emotional quotient will not turn the situation around. For Group 3, since staff has a high concern for self, there is a 50% chance of conflict, which will be determined by whether service staff have a high emotional quotient to defuse the potential conflict.

4.2.1.3.5 When customers have a high concern for others, either high staff emotional quotient or staff concern for others results in an absence of conflict – Groups 1 and 3.
### Table 10  Conflict formation for customer’s high concern for staff

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staff concern for others</th>
<th>Customer’s high concern for staff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>Group 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Group 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No conflict for high staff EQ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conflicts formed for low staff EQ</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2.1.3.6  When customers have a high concern for self, either low staff emotional quotient or high staff concern for self induces conflict – Group 2 and 4.

### Table 11  Conflict formation for customer’s low concern for staff

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staff concern for others</th>
<th>Customer’s low concern for staff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>Group 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No conflict for high staff EQ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conflicts formed for low staff EQ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Group 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conflicts formed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The result of 4.2.1.3.5 and 4.2.1.3.6 triangulate the result of 4.2.1.3.3 and 4.2.1.3.4.

### 4.2.1.4 Theories in conflict formation and emotional quotient

#### Table 12 Theory I: Conflict formation and emotional quotient

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staff concern for others</th>
<th>Group 1</th>
<th>Group 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>High</strong></td>
<td>No conflict</td>
<td>No conflict for high staff EQ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Conflict formed for low staff EQ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Low</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group 3</th>
<th>Group 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No conflict for high staff EQ</td>
<td>Conflict formed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict formed for low staff EQ</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Customer concern for others

#### 4.2.1.4.1 There are three parameters which act to minimise conflict: (1) high staff emotional quotient (2) high staff concern for customers and (3) high customer concern for staff. In the four groups and its sub-groups of staff emotional quotient considered here, as long as at least two parameters are present, conflicts will seldom occur.
High emotional quotient of staff and high concern for others on the part of both parties will prevent the outbreak of conflict. If two of the three parameters are present, mild conflict will happen.

If at least two of the three parameters, high staff emotional quotient, high staff concern for customers and high customer concern for staff, are present, no conflict occurs.

4.2.1.4.2 There are three parameters which tend to create conflict: (1) low staff emotional quotient and (2) high staff concern for self and (3) high customer concern for self. In the four groups and its sub-groups of staff emotional quotient, as long as no less than two parameters are present, conflict will always happen.

Low staff emotional quotient and both parties’ concern for self will induce the outbreak of conflict. If even two of the three parameters are present, conflict will still happen, though not to the extreme that would occur when all three parameters are present.

If at least two of the three parameters, low staff emotional quotient, high staff concern for self and high customer concern for self, are present, conflict results.

4.2.1.5 Summary of the Relationship between conflict formation and emotional quotient (Theory I)

If at least two of the three parameters, high staff emotional quotient, high staff concern for others and high customer concern for others, are present, conflicts will
seldom happen.

Conversely, whenever at least two of the parameters, low staff emotional quotient, high staff concern for self and high customer concern for self, are present, conflicts will happen.

4.2.2 Relationship between conflict management strategies and emotional quotient

Table 13 Conflict management attitude and emotional quotient

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staff concern for others</th>
<th>Group 1</th>
<th>Group 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>Resolve conflict</td>
<td>50% resolve conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Group 3</td>
<td>Group 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50% resolve conflict</td>
<td>Not resolve conflict</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Customer concern for others

Table 13 shows the relationship between the attitude of staff and customer concern for others and the occurrence of conflict – Groups 1, 2, 3 and 4.

Some groups are further considered in different scenarios according to the level of
the emotional quotient of staff.

Service staff and customers were classified according to whether they had a high or a low concern for self and a high or low concern for others.

Below (in section 4.2.2.1) the codes are further developed into concepts (4.2.2.2), and categories (4.2.2.3). From the categories, the theories are developed (4.2.2.4) and summarised in (4.2.2.5).

4.2.2.1 Codes of conflict management strategies and emotional quotient

There are eighteen (18) codes in total and they are described in details below.

4.2.2.1.1 Group 4: Low emotional quotient of staff, and both parties have a high concern for self. Conflict resolution is unsuccessfully.

As shown in Table 13, Group 4 has the worst combination of attitudes and the conflict resolution will be ineffective.

4.2.2.1.2 Group 1: Both parties have a high concern for others. Most potential conflicts will be resolved.

As shown in Table 13, Group 1 has the most effective combination of attitudes and conflict will mostly be resolved.
4.2.2.1.3 Groups 2 and 3: One of the parties has a high concern for others or the staff has a high emotional quotient and this can help to resolve potential conflict.

4.2.2.1.4 Groups 2 and 3: High concern for others on the part of either party and high emotional quotient of staff are interchangeable.

Group 2 and Group 3 have both found the impact of conflict management attitude in the concern for others by either party and high staff emotional quotient is interchangeable.

4.2.2.1.5 Personal interest and habit, situational requirements and communication affecting the adoption of conflict management strategies.

When people have succeeded with a conflict management strategies before, they are likely to repeat the same strategy in whatever situation they face. They have not considered the need to match their strategy with the situation. They tend to use the same strategy and resist adopting other conflict management strategies. The low emotional quotient service staff think that the adoption of only one conflict management strategy is needed. Accordingly, they display low flexibility in emotional quotient sub-scales. High emotional quotient service staff have high flexibility to change their conflict management strategies provided that they have the necessary knowledge.

4.2.2.1.6 Balance between goals and interests
High emotional quotient service staff tend to choose compromising or integrating conflict management strategy. They treat all concerning parties as bearing the responsibility for conflict formation and believe that a balance between goals and interests is the good choice. They understand the imbalance of goals and interests will likely induce further conflicts. In this connection, a win-win situation is always better than a win-lose situation in the choice of conflict management strategies. They also have high scores in empathy and social responsibility scales, and understand and appreciate the feelings of others in conflict situations.

4.2.2.1.7 Transformation and reinterpretation help make difficult conflicts easy.

People with high emotional intelligence can demonstrate the ability to reinterpret conflicts. They can change difficult conflict issues into a simple case. They tend to adopt the conflict management strategies of compromising and integrating. Reinterpretation can always identify what the conflict issue is about. Thus they realise the tangible and intangible resources needed to select the best conflict management strategy. They utilise their competitive advantage over low emotional quotient service staff and create prosperity for themselves and others as well. Reinterpretation helps them to implement the conflict management strategies more effectively and efficiently.

4.2.2.1.8 Level of customer concern for self dictates either compromising or avoiding strategies.

When service staff is of high emotional quotient and the customer has a high
concern for self, compromising is usually chosen as the conflict management strategy. Since the service staff is of high emotional quotient and the customer has a high concern for self, the staff cannot apply an integrating management strategy as the customer will simply not listen to ideas which are not consistent with their own wishes. The staff can then only choose compromising strategies to resolve and improve the situation so as to have a win-win approach.

Conversely, if service staff is of low emotional quotient and customers have a high concern for self, the service staff will have even less choice. This is because the service staff will not have the desired level of emotional quotient to choose a compromising strategy. Therefore, service staff in such a situation will usually choose the strategy of avoiding.

In conclusion, when the customer has a high concern for self, the service staff will only choose between compromising and avoiding conflict management strategies to resolve or improve the conflict situation.

4.2.2.1.9 Education standard and customer service technique.

Customer service staff who have academic qualifications usually have a higher general scale of emotional quotient. They also tend to have higher independence in emotional quotient sub-scales and tend to adopt the conflict management strategies of compromising and integrating. They are self-directed and self-controlled in their thinking and actions. Their better education helps to better understand the importance of the conflict issue and conflict management. They have better communication and presentation skills and are more
cooperative and tactful in dealing with customers.

4.2.2.1.10 Education standard and conflict management knowledge.

Customer service staff with higher education standards generally have a better understanding of conflict management theory. This is because they have a better understanding of the significance of different levels of concern for self and others. Hence, educated service staff are more alert for the importance of conflict management strategies and flexible choices and the application of avoiding, dominating, obliging, compromising and integrating.

4.2.2.1.11 Level of self-regard and avoiding conflict management strategy.

When there is an outbreak of conflict, low emotional quotient staff tend to react by escaping from the conflict issue. They treat conflict as an evil and disgusting matter. They try all possible ways to defend their behaviour and portray other people’s actions as wrong. Accordingly, they put the responsibility of conflict formation on the other party so that conflict resolution should be also for the other party. They do not analyse the situation and jump to the conclusion that the fault lies with the other party. They choose the avoiding strategy and pretend the selection of avoidance is the best alternative in the particular situation.

4.2.2.1.12 Stress management relating to conflict resolution.

The sub-scale of stress management in emotional quotient has a direct
relationship with the chance of successful conflict resolution. When the service staff is poor in stress management, they are usually incapable of resolving conflicts. This is because they are unable to handle the complicated environments, which are part of all types of conflicts.

4.2.2.1.13 Concern for self and young age in relation to low empathy in emotional quotient.

Service staff having high emotional quotient in empathy sub-scales will recognise the feelings of customers and hence their real needs. They tend to accommodate the needs of customers and adopt the obliging strategy. They regard customers as most important character in the service provision process. The customer service staff acknowledge the importance of customer satisfaction, while on the other end the customer relies on the customer service staff for the service provision. Here, empathy seems to be good in conflict management resolution.

Some young customer service staff tend to act out of self interest and choose the strategies of dominating and integrating. They like to protect self-interest and concern for oneself most of the time. They do not understand that short-term sacrifice may bring in long-term benefits, especially in their interpersonal relationships. They usually have low interpersonal relationship emotional quotient sub-scales. The attitude of self interest dominates their mindset and so young customer service staff is biased in their selection of conflict management strategy.
Customer service staff having high social awareness sub-scale scores tend to adopt the conflict management strategies of obliging and integrating. They have a high concern for others and are considerate of the suffering of the customers. They are more alert to the emotional change of customers and are very helpful and cooperative to the customers. They wisely and correctly show their emotions at certain times, such as being compassionate and courageous. Their social awareness also helps the customers calm down and controls the emotions better. Once the conflict issue is treated in a peaceful and calm manner, they carry on to perform well in the selection of conflict management strategies.

The customer service staff with high social responsibility sub-scales scores tend to adopt conflict management strategies of integrating and obliging. They demonstrate cooperative behaviour and would like to be helpful to the customers and be constructive in the delivery of services. They have a high concern for their customers and like to communicate with people. They enjoy harmony and regard other people’s problems as their own. The significance of social responsibility is that it is a proactive method to alleviate social problems. Since the staff is considerate, they also have better interpersonal relationships.

Customer service staffs with high relationship management sub-scales scores of reality testing, flexibility and problem solving are inclined to select conflict management strategies of dominating, obliging, compromising and integrating
according to the situational requirements. They also have the ability to change the conflict management strategies from case to case. They have good interpersonal relationships and good communication skills. They work out relationship management and easily resolve conflict issues. On the other hand, service staff having low relationship management sub-scale scores find it hard to adopt conflict management strategies, including those of dominating and obliging.

4.2.2.1.16 Perception and attitude in relation to reality testing.

Perception and attitude always distort the recognition of reality. Service staff with low scores in reality testing sub-scales cannot assess the real situation and cannot distinguish between what actually happens and what subjectively exists in conflict issues. Service staff with high scores in reality testing sub-scales are capable of assessing the distinction between what actually happens and what subjectively exists and can adopt different conflict management strategies according to the situation. They understand the match of strategy and situational needs and make changes to the strategy in different situations. They also emphasise a concern for self and a concern for others from case to case and have the tendency to adopt the strategies of either compromising or integrating. Such service staff with high emotional quotient also have the ability to adopt different conflict management strategies in different situations.

4.2.2.1.17 Change of situation in relation to flexibility.

When there is change in the situation, only high emotional quotient in flexibility
sub-scale service staff are alerted to apply a mix of conflict management strategies according to different situations. Service staff with low scores in the flexibility sub-scale would just repeat the current conflict management strategy in different situations. Since change of situation means change of requirements and conditions of the conflict issue, the prevailing conflict management strategy would then be insufficient to address the concerns of the customers.

4.2.2.1.18 Problem solving

Customer service staff with high scores in problem solving sub-scales have the ability to identify and define problems as well as to generate and implement potentially effective conflict management strategies. They analyse the situation according to the source of conflict and the advantages and disadvantages of different conflict management strategies. They do not have any preference in their concern for self and concern for others and therefore are competent to resolve the task related conflict and exercise the relevant conflict management strategies according to the needs of the situation.

4.2.2.2 Concepts of conflict management strategies and emotional quotient –

The convergence from eighteen (18) codes to eight (8) concepts

The above eighteen (18) codes will now be condensed into eight (8) concepts to escalate the findings of the research, pointing towards the development of the ultimate theory.

The following discussions are with reference to Table 13, in section 4.2.2.1,
Conflict management strategies and emotional quotient

4.2.2.1 Group 4: When both parties have a high concern for self, conflicts will not be resolved.

This case has the least chance of having the conflicts resolved. Here, both the service staff and the customer only care about their own interests and do not care about the other party.

4.2.2.2 Group 1: When both parties have a high concern for others, most conflicts can be resolved.

This case has the best chance of having the conflicts resolved. Here, both the service staff and the customer have a high concern for the other party.

4.2.2.3 Group 2 and Group 3: High emotional quotient of service staff and a high concern for others in either party have an equal benefit in resolving conflict.

For Group 2 and Group 3, since customers’ concern for the service staff and service staff concern for customer are exactly the same impact, the emotional quotient of the service staff and their concern for others are interchangeable and will produce the same results in resolving conflicts.

4.2.2.4 Communication relating to concern for others

Effective communication and conveyance of the true situation and the
identification of the needs of the customers directly relates to concern for others. Good communication means that the involving party has a concern for others in his/her effort to resolve conflicts.

4.2.2.5 Goals and objectives relating to concern for others

When there is an outbreak of conflict, it is important to have a clear goal and objective for its resolution.

For low emotional quotient service staff, the goal is just for conflict settlement or escape. On the other hand, the high emotional quotient service staff have a clear goal and objective for improvement of the conflict issue. Hence, low emotional quotient service staff tend to choose the conflict management strategies of avoiding, dominating or obliging whereas high emotional quotient service staff tend to adopt conflict management strategies of compromise and integrating.

When the objectives are not clear, the service staff will only focus on dealing with the conflict issue and will not spend much effort on taking care of the real needs of customers. If the service staff have clear objectives, they will expend much effort to consider the real needs of the customers and resolve the conflicts with long-term benefits of customer relations. The level of service staff emotional quotient affects the selection of conflict management strategy.

4.2.2.6 Transformation and reinterpretation relating to concern for others.
Positive competition encourages people to apply their creativity to the question of how to satisfy their desires. People will try all means to achieve advancement. If the service provisions are supported by good systems or mechanisms of human and physical sources, company supports, the competition of either party will drive them to advance their self interests at all means. This is especially the case for high emotional quotient people. Hence, the creativity of each personal potential and benefit will be realised. Most people want to improve and enhance their personal benefits. There is nothing wrong in this provided that in the process no harm is done to others or to the provision of services. When either party or both parties understand their own position, improvements in service quality will resolve conflicts.

Transformation and reinterpretation can change the conflict issue into a new situation with the integrated consideration of balance of interest, realisation of truth, and skill and technique to achieve the objectives of the concerning parties. The new situation could be heuristic or optimum and all depends on the available resources and effort. The optimum resolution needs trial and error and a practice-oriented approach should be adopted. It is a cyclic relationship of conflict formation and conflict management strategy. When the adopted conflict management strategy resolves the particular conflict entirely, no further conflict will result. The critical point depends on whether there is effective communication and mutual trust.

The final objective of both parties is to match their needs and ensure that the conflict management strategy is adopted with appropriate timing. Service staff
emotional quotient is related to communication and to understanding of feelings during the process of transformation and reinterpretation. Hence, the confidence and toughness of the service staff can help them to perform their roles better. When the service provisions are in a state of conflict, the natural feelings of the service staff are not always negative. High emotional quotient service staff utilise the energy to go for advancement for improving the existing service provisions. They will find a balance between staying in the existing situation and striving for improvements. Hence, high emotional intelligence helps service staff to be mindfulness and stimulates them to make improvements in services.

4.2.2.2.7 Customer service technique

Low emotional quotient service staff usually adopt the conflict management strategies of avoiding, dominating and obliging. These strategies require less effort and are highly dependent on the attitude of the service staff. They require less conflict management knowledge and techniques.

High emotional quotient service staff adopt the conflict management strategies of compromising and integrating, which require more effort and interaction with customers. High emotional quotient service staff have more conflict management knowledge and techniques. They understand the details of the operation of service provision and adopt the most suitable conflict management strategy so as to effectively resolve the conflict. High emotional quotient service staff spend much effort in identifying the needs of customers and serving their needs accordingly.
Work experience and openness of character on the part of the service staff with higher emotional intelligence can also help them choose better conflict management strategies. Previous training in conflict management strategies interrelates with the emotional quotient of the service staff. That is, better techniques in choosing conflict management strategies can improve the emotional quotient of the service staff and the adoption of the right strategies.

4.2.2.2.8 High scores for service staff in the adaptability, reality testing, flexibility and problem solving sub-scales help to resolve conflicts.

Reality testing
Bias on the part of service staff will mean that inappropriate conflict management strategies could easily be introduced. Bias is formed by attitude, perception, perspective, and narrow-minded thinking. Low emotional quotient service staff strongly believe in their own perceptions of right or wrong through their own interpretation of the conflict issue. They may be aware of the different interpretations of the customers but usually disregard the importance of the perspective of the customers. In such situations, conflict management strategy cannot match the situational need and can only resolve a portion of the conflict. On the other hand, high emotional quotient service staff are more open minded and take account of the opinions and perspectives of the customers. They consider the situation in multiple aspects so as to evaluate the different scenarios of the conflict management strategies and identify the best strategy.

The balance of the interests of different parties can bring about equilibrium of the conflict issue and a conflict management strategy which does this would be
successful in resolving the conflict. High emotional quotient service staff have the insight of the need to balance interests and are aware of the impact of equilibrium. But low emotional quotient service staff ignore the situational needs and behave in extreme ways. When they attach to the extremities, no conflict management strategies can resolve the conflict. Hence, one important aspect of the emotional quotient of service staff is the ability to identify the effective conflict management strategy through an openness of rational thinking or emotional ability.

The emotional quotient of service staff greatly affects their perceptions and interpersonal behaviour and reactions. Low emotional quotient service staff perceive the negative side of the conflict issue whereas high emotional quotient service staff perceive the positive ones. Such perception hinders the understanding of the truth of the conflict issue because reality does not change with personal perceptions. Misunderstanding affects interpersonal behaviour and causes negative reactions. The conflict then deteriorates and the service staff cannot adopt the appropriate conflict management strategy.

The full understanding of the conflict issue requires sufficient communication and mutual understanding. Thus, high emotional quotient service staff can focus on the conflict issue. They realise their own needs and those of the customers. Low emotional quotient service staff feel at a loss or stand firm without making any effort to clarify the truth. A display of emotion may even provoke further conflicts and make the issue more complicated. Certainly, low emotional quotient service staff cannot effectively identify the appropriate conflict management strategy both in the short and long run. Consequently, the emotional quotient of service staff affects the selection of the appropriate conflict management strategy.
Flexibility

In conflict situations, details change with interactive behaviour and reactions and neither party can dominate the situation easily. High emotional quotient service staff coordinate the need of the concerning parties simultaneously and act accordingly in an appropriate way. Hence, an appropriate conflict management strategy would be employed and have certain effects to resolve the conflict. But low emotional quotient service staff are not sensitive to the dynamic changes of the conflict situation but insist on directing the situation according to their own needs, which makes the conflict worse and weakens the effects of their conflict management strategies.

Flexibility in conflict handling stimulates the insight needed for conflict resolution. Every moment is critical and high emotional quotient of service staff can greatly improve the situation by the application of the power in a flexible manner.

The flexibility of service staff can regulate the interpersonal relationship and make the effort to convey the different opinions and perspective of the customer. As different service staff have different emotional quotients, the success of conflict management strategies depends on the right application of energy and effort. When the flexibility of service staff is high, the selection of conflict management strategy and the change in dynamic situation can match the conflict issue and hence resolve the conflict in a better way. So, the emotional quotient of service staff helps focus the appropriate selection of the conflict management strategies to a great extent.
Problem solving

Low emotional quotient service staff tackle the conflict issue with inappropriate timing whereas high emotional quotient service staff react to the issue with good timing and with an appropriate conflict management strategy. Low emotional quotient service staff, tend to hide from the conflict issue or to prefer to settle the conflict with little effort. They treat conflict as a fault of the customer and wish to settle it as fast as possible. Hence, they jump at adopting a heuristic conflict management strategy without serious consideration of the details of the conflict issue. Conversely, high emotional quotient service staff usually think rationally and adopt problem-solving methods by selecting conflict management strategies to match the situation.

In this connection, the timing of high emotional quotient service staff is more appropriate than that of low emotional quotient service staff. The timing includes the length of decision time and the adoption of a conflict management strategy. The length of decision time for low emotional quotient service staff is very short and for high emotional quotient service staff it is longer but still reasonable. The adoption of a conflict management strategy for low emotional quotient service staff is also very quick and for high emotional quotient service staff it is suitable and changes with the situation.

4.2.2.3 Categories of conflict management strategies and emotional quotient –

Convergence from eight (8) concepts to six (6) categories

The above eight (8) concepts will now be condensed into six (6) categories to escalate the findings of the research, pointing towards the development of the
ultimate theory.

As discussed in Table 1 in Chapter 2 – Conflict management strategies – there are five major strategies. When there is high concern for others the strategies include (1) integrating (2) obliging and (3) compromising where there is only medium concern for others. When there is a low concern for others, the strategies include (4) dominating and (5) avoiding.

4.2.2.3.1 Groups 1, 2 and 3 in Table 13: Effective resolution of conflict due to either party’s high concern for others and staff with high emotional quotient

Table 14 below is the elaborated matrix form in parallel with Table 6 (p.143).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staff Strategy</th>
<th>Integrating</th>
<th>Obliging</th>
<th>Compromising</th>
<th>Dominating</th>
<th>Avoiding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Integrating</td>
<td>Resolution</td>
<td>Resolution</td>
<td>Resolution</td>
<td>Resolution</td>
<td>Resolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obliging</td>
<td>Resolution</td>
<td>Resolution</td>
<td>Resolution</td>
<td>Resolution</td>
<td>Resolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compromising</td>
<td>Resolution</td>
<td>Resolution</td>
<td>Resolution</td>
<td>Resolution</td>
<td>Resolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominating</td>
<td>Resolution</td>
<td>Resolution</td>
<td>Resolution</td>
<td>No Resolution</td>
<td>No Resolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoiding</td>
<td>Resolution</td>
<td>Resolution</td>
<td>Resolution</td>
<td>No Resolution</td>
<td>No Resolution</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

High emotional quotient service staff usually end up with effective conflict resolution. The only exceptions to this general rule are when both the service staff and the customers have a high concern for themselves.

When both parties have a high concern for themselves, they will be either dominating or avoiding, and resolution of conflicts will be made impossible.
On the other hand, when one party has a high concern for them, they have to be integrating, obliging and compromising and resolution of conflicts will still be achieved.

4.2.2.3.2 *Ineffective resolution of conflict* due to either party having a low concern for others and staff with low emotional quotient

Table 15 illustrated below is the elaborated matrix form in parallel with table 7 (p.144).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staff Strategy</th>
<th>Customer Strategy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Integrating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrating</td>
<td>Resolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obliging</td>
<td>Resolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compromising</td>
<td>Resolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominating</td>
<td>No Resolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoiding</td>
<td>No Resolution</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Low emotional quotient service staff usually end up with ineffective conflict resolution. The only exception to this general rule is when both the service staff and the customers have a high concern for others.

When both parties have a high concern for others, they will adopt integrating, obliging and compromising strategies and resolution of conflicts will be achieved.
On the other hand, when even one party has a high concern for themselves, they will adopt either dominating or avoiding strategies, and resolution of conflicts will be made impossible.

4.2.2.3.3 Conflict management strategies and staff’s high concern for customers in Table 16

Effective conflict resolution occurs when both parties have a high concern for others. However, there is 50% effective conflict resolution when staff has concern for others and customer has a low concern for others.

Table 16 below shows the elaborated matrix form in parallel with table 8 (p.147).

Table 16 Conflict management strategies and staff’s high concern for customer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staff Strategy</th>
<th>Customer Strategy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Integrating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrating</td>
<td>Resolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obliging</td>
<td>Resolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compromising</td>
<td>Resolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominating</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoiding</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Low emotional quotient service staff usually end up with ineffective conflict resolution. The only exception to this general rule is when both the service staff and the customers have high concern for others, in which case conflicts are resolved.
When both parties have a high concern for others, they will adopt integrating, obliging and compromising strategies, and resolution of conflicts will be achieved.

On the other hand, whenever customer has concern only for themselves, they will adopt either dominating or avoiding strategies, and resolution of conflicts will be made ineffective at some times.

A concern for others is one of the objectives of an appropriate conflict management strategy. The value of sharing opinions and respecting the other party’s perspective help will initiate communication and build up interpersonal relationships. This sharing not only helps to identify an appropriate conflict management strategy but also prevents further conflict. The habit of concern for others can really demonstrate the high quality of service provision and accommodating the need of the other party. It helps to balance the interests of both parties where staff with a higher emotional quotient tend to have concern for others because they have sufficient empathy and have the skills and techniques to serve others.

After considering the needs of others, the adoption of a relevant conflict management strategy will enable the other party to feel the support from the involving party. Support means the initiative to resolve the conflict from the perspective of the opposing party. High emotional quotient service staff can better appreciate the feelings and needs of their customers. Interaction and feedback help build up mutual trust that helps resolve conflict. When this happens, the conflict management strategy can effectively enforce and achieve the
objective of supporting the other party. In the extreme case, conflict management strategy of obliging, the behaviour of the involving party is cooperative, and plays a constructive role in conflict management and will finally win the support of others in achieving a resolution.

Conflict management strategies can be categorised into short term and long term. The advantage of the conflict management strategy of obliging is short-term and will not last. Excessive concern of others means the sacrifice of concern for self. The imbalance caused by settling existing conflict at the expense of future benefits may induce conflict later because the other party will continue to demand the same level of service. Such over concern for others masks the truth of the conflict issue and gives a wrong perception of the situation. Therefore, it means that excessive concern for others in conflict management strategy can only resolve the conflict partially.

When both parties exercise integrating, obliging or compromising conflict management strategies, conflict can be resolved whether the customer service staff have high or low emotional quotients. That is, conflict is resolved only when both parties have a high concern for others.

When the customer service staff have a high emotional quotient, conflict is more easily resolved. Exceptions to this only occur when the customers exercise a dominating or avoiding conflict management strategy. But when the customer service staff have a low emotional quotient, conflict resolution is more difficult. Conflict is not resolved when the customer exercises a dominating or avoiding conflict management strategy. That is, conflicts will not be resolved when service
staff have a low emotional quotient and the customer has a low concern for others.

**4.2.2.3.4 Conflict management strategies and staff’s low concern for customer in Table 17**

*When both parties have concern for self, conflict cannot be resolved. However, there is a 50% effective conflict resolution when customer has concern for others and staff has concern for self.*

Table 17 below shows the elaborated matrix form in parallel with table 9 (p.150).

**Table 17 Conflict management strategies and staff’s low concern for customer**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staff Strategy</th>
<th>Customer Strategy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Integrating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrating</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obliging</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compromising</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominating</td>
<td>50% effective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoiding</td>
<td>50% effective</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Low emotional quotient service staff usually end up with ineffective conflict resolution. The only exception to this general rule is when both the service staff and the customers have a high concern for others.

When both parties have a high concern for self, they will adopt dominating and avoiding strategies, and resolution of conflicts will not be achieved.
On the other hand, when customer has concern only for themselves, they will adopt either dominating or avoiding strategies, and resolution of conflicts will only be 50% possible.

When the customer service staff have a low emotional quotient, conflict management strategies have more chance of being ineffective. They do not make enough effort to care for others and tend to adopt a dominating strategy or avoiding strategy, both for themselves and for others. A higher concern for self will result in individuals not opening up to others and causes differences in interests, understanding, values, style and opinion, which easily cause further conflict. In such cases the chance of getting conflicts resolved is greatly reduced.

Moreover, the imbalance induces negative feedback due to poor communication and interpersonal relationships. The imbalance will intensify the conflict and a ‘win-lose’ situation will arise. Since service staff of low emotional quotient cannot consider the balance of interests, the selection of conflict management strategies by the service staff in this situation will usually be biased and so the precision and flexibility needed to resolve the conflict cannot be achieved. In order to have better resolution arrangements, the service staff should identify their objectives, consider the timing and apply the appropriate skills and techniques of the strategies. Otherwise, their efforts will be of no help to the conflict issue.

Concern for self implies a focus of energy and attention of one side and it is one of the elements which contribute to the resolution of the conflict issue. To strive for a ‘win-win’ solution should be the first priority in choosing conflict management strategies. Otherwise, a ‘win-lose’ or even ‘lose-lose’ situation will occur and the
conflict is either only partially settled or the conflict will be even aggravated later. Concern for self is part of the objective of an appropriate conflict management strategy but should not be regarded as the ultimate goal. High emotional quotient service staff can identify with precision the conflict situation and regulate the situation to suit the needs of the customers.

4.2.2.3.5 Conflict management strategies and customer’s high concern for staff in Table 18

When both parties concern for self, conflict cannot be resolved. However, there is a 50% effective conflict resolution when customer has a high concern for others and staff has concern for self.

Table 18 below shows the elaborated matrix form in parallel with table 10 (p.151).

Table 18  Conflict management strategies and customer’s high concern for staff

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staff Strategy</th>
<th>Customer Strategy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Integrating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrating</td>
<td>Resolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obliging</td>
<td>Resolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compromising</td>
<td>Resolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominating</td>
<td>50% effective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoiding</td>
<td>50% effective</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2.2.3.6 Conflict management strategies and customer’s low concern for self in Table 19
When both parties have a concern for self, conflicts are not resolved. There is a 50% effective conflict resolution when customer has a low concern for self and staff has concern for others.

Table 19 below shows the elaborated matrix form in parallel with table 11 (p.151).

Table 19  Conflict management strategies and customer’s low concern for staff

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staff Strategy</th>
<th>Customer Strategy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Integrating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrating</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obliging</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compromising</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominating</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoiding</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The result of 4.2.2.3.5 and 4.2.2.3.6 triangulate the result of 4.2.2.3.3 and 4.2.2.3.4.

4.2.2.4 Theories in relationship between conflict management strategies and emotional quotient

Theory in conflict management strategies and emotional quotient in table 20
Table 20 Theory II: Conflict management attitude and emotional quotient

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staff concern for others</th>
<th>Group 1</th>
<th>Group 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>Resolve conflict</td>
<td>Resolve conflict for high staff EQ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Not resolve conflict for low staff EQ</td>
<td>Not resolve conflict</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group 3</th>
<th>Group 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Resolve conflict for high staff EQ</td>
<td>Not resolve conflict for low staff EQ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not resolve conflict for low staff EQ</td>
<td>Not resolve conflict</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

High          Low
Customer concern for others

4.2.2.4.1 As long as at least two of the three parameters, high staff emotional quotient, high staff concern for customer and high customer concern for staff exist concurrently in any of the four groups, conflicts are always resolved.

High emotional quotient staff and both parties having a high concern for others will always resolve conflicts. Should there exist only two of the three parameters, conflicts will also be resolved.

4.2.2.4.2 If at least two of the three parameters, low staff emotional quotient, high staff concern for self and high customer concern for self exist concurrently in any of the four groups, conflicts cannot be resolved.
In cases where staff have a low staff emotional quotient and both parties have a high concern for self, conflicts will not be resolved. Should there concurrently exist even two of the three parameters, conflicts will not be resolved.

4.2.2.5 Summary of conflict management strategies and emotional quotient (Theory II)

As long as at least two of the three parameters, high staff emotional quotient, high staff concern for customer and high customer concern for staff, are present concurrently, conflicts are always resolved.

Conversely, as long as at least two of the three parameters, low staff emotional quotient, high staff concern for self and high customer concern for self, exist concurrently, conflicts are always not resolved.

4.2.3 Theory of conflict management and emotional quotient (Theory I and Theory II)

In Theory I, arguments focus on the situation before conflicts have been formed and try to ascertain the interrelationships amongst the parameters of level of staff emotional quotient. They deal with whether the service staff have more concern for themselves or for the customers and whether the customers have more concern for themselves or for the service staff. Since the three parameters each have their own pros and cons, the resultant matrix determines whether conflicts are avoidable.

In Theory II, arguments focus on the situation after conflicts have been formed
and try to ascertain the interrelationships amongst the parameters relating to the level of staff emotional quotient, whether the service staff has more concern for themselves or for the customers and whether the customers have more concern for themselves or for the service staff. Since the three parameters each have their own pros and cons, the resultant matrix determines whether conflicts can be resolved.

As long as there exist concurrently at least two of the three parameters of high staff emotional quotient, high staff concern for others and high customer concern for others, conflicts are always avoided or resolved.

Conversely, as long as there exist concurrently at least two of the three parameters of low staff emotional quotient, high staff concern for self and high customer concern for self, conflicts are not avoided or remain resolved.

In conclusion, if two out of the three parameters, of high staff emotional quotient, high staff concern for others and high customer concern for others are present conflicts can either be avoided or resolved after their formation.

4.3 Analysis of the patterns

This section seeks to find the common ground between the two theories developed in Section 4.2.1 and Section 4.2.2. In Section 4.4 the two theories are combined to arrive at a single theory which applies to all situations.

4.3.1 Relationship between conflict formation and emotional quotient
In Section 4.2.1, Theory I analyses the various ingredients in the formation of conflicts between property management service staff and the customers. The level of emotional quotient of the service staff is identified as the single most important of these ingredients. Theory I then explores the relationship between emotional quotient of the service staff and the formation of conflicts. The level of the emotional quotient of the service staff plays a vital role in the formation of conflicts and their prevention.

In conflict formation, it is found that most people have more concern for self than for others. Only after being provided with sufficient self-benefits or self-interest, do they consider the interests of others. On the other hand, concern for others is preceded by or equalled by a concern for self among high emotional quotient service staff, and high emotional intelligence is the foundation for choosing appropriate conflict management strategies. Service staff with high emotional intelligence recognise that integration of concern for self and for others is the foundation of quality service and the basis for equilibrium for conflict situations. The full picture always needs to be taken into consideration. In conflict issues, both parties are interdependent and interrelated. It takes at least one party to take the first step to resolve the conflict.

High emotional quotient of staff and their high concern for the customers could prevent the outbreak of conflict most of the time. Even if the customer service staff only has one of these two qualities (that is, high emotional quotient or high concern for the customers), the outbreak of conflict has a fifty-fifty chance of being avoided. On the other hand, low emotional quotient staff and their low concern
for the customers will always invoke conflict.

The development and impact of the conflict formed depends on the relationship factors of willingness, confidence, identification of customer’s real needs and matching process skill and technique of the service staff and their service provisions. Low emotional quotient staff are likely to have conflict with customers with high concern for themselves only. However, in the case of complicated issues or when there is poor communication between the concerning parties, a change in the emotions of the service staff will also lower their own emotional quotient to a level which makes them unable to prevent conflicts. So, in order for the service staff to be able to avoid conflict, they should have a high emotional quotient. Otherwise, the fluctuation of emotional quotient will create a conflict.

During the delivery of services, the interaction of customer service staff and customers requires both parties to contribute sufficient effort and willingness to accomplish the service provision, especially in complicated situations. It takes attention and concentration, and the assimilation of different perspectives and opinions. The service expectations of customer and the service staff must converge; otherwise conflict happens due to a gap between service quality and expectations. Either party can judge the situation and observe the other party according to their own values or apply wider criteria. There is no absolute right or wrong on either side but it is critical and important that there is a match of perspectives on a particular issue. Common sense means general acceptance of the norms of the majority. Usually, openness and fairness are the guiding principles in service provision. Openness stimulates better communication and information sharing. In addition, respect for others is one of the most important
attitudes for positive interaction and it can greatly reduce the risk of conflict.

Although many conflicts arise in the service provision sector, the integration of the concepts of emotional quotient and conflict prevention can help solve most of these problems. For the customer service staff who are not willing to provide the required service provision, they should be aware of the self emotional quotient. Emotional quotient makes communication and mutual understanding which prevents conflict formation. Emotional quotient then can be used to balance the inadequacy of service quality and to compensate for the disadvantage of unreasonable service demands.

4.3.2 Relationship between conflict management strategies and emotional quotient

In Section 4.2.2, Theory II explores the choices of conflicts resolution strategies in relation to the emotional quotient of the service staff. It goes further to identify the chances of success of having the conflicts resolved using the techniques of avoiding, dominating, obliging, compromising and integrating. The level of the emotional quotient of the service staff plays an important role here in the choice of strategy for conflict management resolution.

Emotional intelligence is a general term to describe the ability and capacity to understand the situation and to apply the knowledge and resources in an appropriate way. Emotional quotient is the term for a quantitative measure of emotional intelligence. In the Bar-On assessment of emotional quotient, fifteen sub-scales are used to measure different aspects of emotional intelligence.
High emotional quotient of service staff and high concern for customers are factors which can contribute effectively to conflict resolution. When customer service staff have a high in emotional quotient, and both parties have a high concern for self, dominating or avoiding conflict management strategies will be adopted and this will not resolve the conflict. Equally, when customer service staff have a low emotional intelligence quotient, and even one party has a high concern for self, a dominating or avoiding conflict management strategy will be adopted and thus conflict will not be resolved.

Emotional quotient interrelates with selection of conflict management strategies and their effectiveness. High emotional quotient service staff integrate concern for self and concern others whereas low emotional quotient service staff will consider themselves first. High emotional quotient service staff can implement conflict management strategies with greater impact and effectiveness. On the other hand, low emotional quotient service staff usually are unable to protect themselves and do not have the respect of the other party. They cannot manage stress by recognising the needs and feeling of the customers, and their interactive behaviour with the concerning parties will be inadequate. The staff alertness of personal emotional change could help reducing the intensity of the emotional reactions to conflict, learning to moderate the physical reactions to conflict, building up the foundation of communication and maintaining good interpersonal relationship with others.

High emotional quotient service staff achieve conflict resolution through concentration and an open mind in addition to their other skills. The application of a conflict management strategy means a new arrangement of resources in order to
achieve customer satisfactions. Real conflict resolution should be the state where no further conflict or psychological disturbance or defects are left for either party. High emotional quotient brings about openness in attitude to the service staff and openness is the ability to appreciate the interests, ideas, status, and concepts of the customers without any prejudice. In this connection, the service staff can understand the importance of equality and the significance of fairness to both parties. Openness should mean being open to the all thoughts and situations related to the conflict issue. High emotional quotient service staff understand why and how disagreement about service provision occurs. But low emotional quotient service staff will just stay within their own narrow-mindedness and cannot choose the appropriate conflict management strategy. Sharing and mutual respect are the skills and techniques needed to deal with the other party to resolve conflicts. If the service staff has a high emotional quotient, he/she can implement a conflict management strategy successfully.

4.4 Conclusion

In Section 4.2.3, Theory I and Theory II were combined, bringing out the ultimate and real conflict resolution situation in which conflicts are resolved without leaving matters unsettled and future conflict is avoided. That is, a theory was developed that applies to all situations.

This chapter analysed the relationship between emotional quotient and conflict formation, and the relationship between emotional quotient and conflict management strategy. Grounded theory was applied in the analysis and in the process of forming the theories of conflict formation and conflict management.
strategies.

The relationship between the level of emotional intelligence and conflict formation is closely related to the complicated matrix of issues which involves understanding the real cause behind conflict issues, rational thinking and emotional behaviour. High emotional quotient of service staff and high concern for others of both parties are adequate to prevent the outbreak of conflicts and to resolve them if they do occur. Even if only the customer service staff have both high emotional quotient and high concern for others, the outbreak of conflict will be avoided.

Furthermore, the relationship between conflict management strategy and emotional quotient has raised the issue of appropriate selection of conflict management strategy. Factors which need to be considered include concern for self and others, application of precision, flexibility and equilibrium, rational thinking related to emotional quotient, interpersonal relationships and mutual trust, exchange of ideas and opinions through communication and having an open mind towards conflict issues. High emotional quotient of service staff and high concern for others of both parties are the determining factors for conflict resolution. But when customer service staff have a low emotional quotient and either party has a high concern of self, no conflict management strategy will be effective for resolving the conflict.

As long as at least two of the parameters, high emotional quotient of staff, high concern for the customer on the part of service staff and high concern for other on the part of customers, are present simultaneously, few conflicts will arise.
Similarly, as long as at least two of the above three parameters are present, conflicts can be resolved.

To sum up, as long as the service staff has a high emotional quotient and the customers have a high concern for others, the service staff is free to choose any of the five conflict management strategies to solve the problem.
Chapter 5: Conclusions and implications

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the conclusions of the research and discusses the application of the findings to conflict issues. The analysis in Chapter 4 found that emotional quotient relates to conflict formation and the selection of conflict management strategies. When customer service staff have a low emotional quotient and a low concern for customers, conflict will result. Furthermore, low emotional quotient customer service staff are less effective in the selection of conflict management strategies used to resolve conflict. They tend to have a high concern for self at the expense of concern for others and tend to select dominating conflict management strategies. Even when they adopt an obliging strategy and have a high concern for others, the imbalance of interests will induce further conflicts as an equilibrium state in the conflict situation cannot be achieved.

In conflict formation, it is found that either staff emotional quotient or concern for others by either concerning party could be sufficient to prevent conflict from happening. There is a summation effect that a high emotional quotient in customer service staff and high concern for others can prevent the outbreak of conflict in most cases. Similarly, high emotional quotient and high concern for others in customer service staff can prevent the outbreak of conflict. The worst case is that low staff emotional quotient, together with a low concern for others on the part of customer service staff can easily induce conflict.
5.2 Conclusions about the research issue

In the literature review chapter, it was suggested that emotional intelligence is related to conflict management in some ways (Thomas, 1992). Although emotional intelligence has no direct relationship with cognition, it has a relationship with conflict formation and conflict management strategies (Pinkey, 1990). Moreover, it is important to identify effective conflict management styles for conflict resolution and assess their effect on business relationships.

Views of conflicts

Traditionalists view conflict as the evil side of life or business and believe that conflicts should be resolved by the concerning parties (Robbins, 1978). On the other hand, behaviourists interpret conflicts as neutral to the conflict situation, that is no harm or no help to the situation, and the service staff should only attempt to resolve major or critical conflicts which exceed the endurance levels of the concerning parties (Robbins, 1978). For the interactionists, conflict should be resolved as there is the need to survive through the process of change and adaptation (Robbins, 1974).

Research findings of this dissertation suggest that it is impossible to resolve all conflict. When both of the concerning parties have a high concern for themselves, there is no way to resolve the conflicts. In the case of low emotional quotient of the customer service staff, conflict cannot be resolved when both parties have a high concern for self but a low concern for others. So, conflict in business is a part of our lives as people have a high concern for self most of the time. Even for those people likely to have a high concern for others and a low concern for self
most of the time, there is still some chance for conflict which exceeds their personal endurance level. It is wise to have a high concern for self and others all the time. Otherwise, conflict may arise when either or both parties have a high concern for self and a low concern for others. In those cases, high staff emotional intelligence can help to reduce the conflict when the level of one party having high concern for self and low concern for others.

Emotional quotient is the measurement emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence affects the quality of business decisions and operations (Bar-On, 1997). High emotional quotient indicates the capacity for good performance in service provision whereas low emotional quotient indicates lower ability. Emotional quotient can therefore be interpreted as an aspect of human behaviour which affects the quality of service provisions (Goleman, 1995). The reasons why particular individuals have their particular level of emotional intelligence are beyond the scope of this study. It is important in the service provision sector to prevent conflict before it arises. After the outbreak of conflict, conflict management strategy is critical for the resolution in order to mitigate the impact of conflict and to improve the situation to a level that is even better than the original situation.

Hence, the mitigation of the bad impacts of conflict and the improvement of the conflict situation need a rearrangement of existing resource allocation including both human resources and physical resources (Abraham, 1999; Hein, 1996). The resources may be intangible such as service attitude and communication skills and techniques. The implication of the study is that new arrangements are needed to prevent conflict formation and adopt appropriate conflict management strategies.
after the outbreak of the conflict. For the purpose of the new arrangement of service provisions, the relationships between emotional quotient, conflict formation and conflict management strategy have been identified through in-depth study. In those cases, high emotional intelligence can only help to reduce the conflict from the level of both parties having high concern for self and low concern for others to one party having high concern for self and low concern for others.

**Conflict formation**

As conflict can happen in any form and at any time, the concerning parties should not treat conflict as an evil or negative side of an issue (Seval, 2004). Conflict serves to show not only the others’ need but also a signal for change of oneself. To address the cause of the conflict then requires suitable feedback. The concerning parties cannot change the past but can change the future through a commitment to cooperation with other people (Brigette, 2002). In this way, the duty of the concerning parties is to identify the reasons for conflict and not to defend against other party. Improvement of the conflict situation can be initiated by either party and accomplished by the effort of both parties. If the other party does not cooperate with the involving party, the involving party can just perform its own duty and not contribute to a deterioration of the situation.

Nevertheless, conflict provides important information and is signal of the need for improvement of the particular issues and also provides motivation for change of an unacceptable situation. Through the process of conflict resolution, both parties are involved and communicate better with each other. If the service staff has a high emotional quotient, the involvement and communication of both parties will
have better understanding of the emotional feeling of the other party. With high emotional quotient, no conflict will arise or if it does or it will be easily resolved. That is, high emotional quotient can improve the situation at all times.

Attribution Theory
In the research findings, there is no significant indication and implication to Attribution theory.

Attribution theory suggests that the outcome of an action depends upon a combination of effective personal force and effective environmental force (Heider, 1958). The research only identifies the personal attitude and staff emotional quotient and does not examine the relationship to environmental force.

Interpersonal attraction and repulsion
Byrne (1971) proposes that people tend to like those who have similar attitudes and dislike those who hold dissimilar ones. Deutsch (1992) finds that interpersonal attraction produces less conflict and dislike produces more conflict. Boardman and Horowitz (1994) suggest that similarities in beliefs, attitudes, and values are usually conducive to reduced conflict while discrepancies in beliefs, attitudes, and values lead to increased conflict. High concern for others would be induced in the event of interpersonal attraction whereas low concern for others would be induced in the event of interpersonal repulsion.

For communication and interpersonal relationships, interpersonal attraction and repulsion affect the action and reaction of human behaviour in conflict situations (Deutsch, 1994). Interpersonal attraction produces less conflict and facilitates
better communication and better interpersonal relationships. Similarities in attitudes and values can promote the sharing of the opinions of the concerning parties in an easy way. However, the communication and interpersonal relationship still depends on the emotional quotient of the involving party and are affected by their perceptions of the concerning parties in the particular conflict situation. In this way, interpersonal attraction and repulsion have certain effects in conflict situations but are not as important as emotional intelligence.

**Temperament theory**

Modern temperament theory has identified and described the four primary types of characters: the Artisan, the Guardian, the Idealist and the Rational (Keirsey, 1987). In the model of temperament theory, the Artisan is identified as having the need to act on impulse and make an impact; the Guardian is identified as having the need to belong and be secure; the Idealist is identified as having the need to pursue ‘authentic’ being; and the Rational is identified as having the need to know, achieve, and then control nature. All needs are interpreted as the firm needs of a specific type of person (David, 1987). Different types of people would only stick to his/her personal needs and so are less flexible to adapt to change. In this way, the concerns for self and others would be sustained and so conflict will evolve when there is high concern for self and low concern for others.

**Contingency theory**

According to contingency theory, the effectiveness of an organisation is not related to the qualities of an ideal profile but is directly related to the combination of an organisation’s profile and the environmental conditions in which it operates (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967). Motivation based on individual needs is one of the
elements of the theory (Gray & Starke, 1984). So, a high concern for self and a low concern for others would significantly affect the effectiveness of the organisation, with resulting conflicts.

**Environmental factors**

Poncelet (2004) believes the effect of environmental factors in conflict situation contribute greatly to conflict as so many stakeholders have different interests in today’s changing world. Daniels and Walker (2001) associate environmental disputes and conflicts with long-running and deep-rooted conflicts. In this dissertation, there is no direct finding related to environmental factor. So, further research should be arranged if necessary.

**Theory of Self-control**

Theory of Self-control holds that human nature consists of selfish impulses whose satisfaction often entails offending (Wiebe, 2004). The high concern for self and low concern for others implied in this theory would easily induce conflict.

**Theories of causation and the Social Exchange Theory**

In the research findings, there is no significant indication and implication to theories of causation and the Social Exchange Theory.

According to Theories of Causation, a win-lose relationship between or among the concerned parties induces conflict (Folger et al., 1997). So, low concern for others could easily induce win-lose outcomes and conflict will arise.

According to Social Exchange Theory, business people will evaluate the reward and
cost in business situations (Folger et al., 1997). Conflict arises when cost exceeds reward. Hence a low concern for self and a high concern for others could easily reduce the imbalance between the concerned parties and then conflicts are avoided.

The determinants of conflict formation, attitude, perception and personality could reinforce the tendency of having a concern for self and others. If there is a low concern for others and high concern for self, the determinants of attitude, perception and personality can easily induce conflict. Similarly, the introduction of past rivalry into the present is just the repeated behaviour involving a low concern for others and a high concern for self, which makes it likely that conflict will happen again.

The second issue of conflict formation depends on the nature of the interpersonal relationship and effectiveness of communication. Good interpersonal relationships and communication involve the sharing of feelings and opinions between the concerning parties, which greatly helps to prevent the outbreak of conflict. On the other hand, poor interpersonal relationships and communication block the sharing of feelings and opinions and widens the gap in opinions, which is a critical reason for conflict formation. That is, levels of emotional intelligence have a long-term effect on interpersonal relationships while the quality communication has an immediate effect on the likelihood of conflict formation.

Attitude and perception are significant determinants of the likelihood of conflict formation. Attitude and perception are the cause of the human behaviour. When the attitudes and perceptions of the parties involved in a situation are
divergent so that each party does not understand or share the feeling and opinion of the opposing party, conflict is likely. Since human behaviour is interdependent and interrelated, if the attitudes and perceptions of the concerning parties are divergent, the resulting differences in feeling and opinion can develop into conflict. On the other hand, a cooperative attitude and positive perceptions tend to promote sharing of feeling and opinions in a constructive manner, which can diffuse the differences between the parties and encourage a better understanding of the particular issue.

Since conflict can arise because of past rivalry, it is important to avoid significant conflict from happening often. If either party does not have sufficient impulse control, serious or significant conflict forms. The serious and significant conflict can be one of the factors contributing to further conflict. In this connection, the concerning parties should make the effort to reduce the impact of conflict so as to have better interpersonal relationships and prevent further conflict. Otherwise, significant conflict would have negative impacts both in the short and long term. High emotional quotient enables one to share feelings and opinions through the application of empathy and reduce the negative impact of conflicts.

Finally, it is important to identify the initial differences in opinion, attitude, perception and personality of the concerning parties. The identification of these differences by both parties can pinpoint the changes needed and guide the concerning parties to helpful and cooperative behaviour. If there is no identification of these differences, both parties could be at a loss and efforts to prevent or resolve conflict may be wasted. Usually, conflict arises because of unclear motives and uncontrolled behaviour. Hence, levels of emotional
intelligence are an indication of whether the concerning parties can easily and effectively identify their initial differences and behave in a cooperative and positive manner.

Secondary industries can be assessed through the quality and quantity of the tangible goods produced. Service industries involve the provision of services through one-to-one communication and there are no rigid criteria to distinguish between good or bad services. The communication between the concerning parties will be affected by the attitude, perception, personality and past relationships (Banff, 1999). The effectiveness of communication is the crucial factor in determining the success of service provision. Emotional quotient affects the behaviour of the concerning parties and in turn the effectiveness of communication. In order to have professional service provisions, customer service staff must be alert to the significance of communication skills and techniques and emotional intelligence. Emotional quotient can be treated as a measurement of the regulatory power of human behaviour and the tool for the accomplishment of professional service provisions.

**Conflict management strategy**

**Emotional intelligence vs. communication and interpersonal relationships**

Although service provision involves both parties all the time, the customer service staff can usually control themselves effectively. When both parties are inconsiderate of the other party, competition between the concerning parties occurs. This will affect different people in different ways but the effect depends on many complicated factors such as the situation, communication skills,
interpersonal relationships and professional knowledge involved in each particular issue. The customer service staff must understand their situation and control their own behaviour. Their level of emotional intelligence will determine their ability to do this. The better they are able to control their own behaviour, the more they can influence the opposing party instead of trying to control them. From the findings of this research, it can be concluded that the stress management quotient is an important indication of the individual’s ability to control their own behaviour so as not to diminish the quality of the service provision. Hence, the critical point is to control oneself and influence others in an indirect way. In conflict situations, the understanding of the situation and self-control require much effort and emotional quotient is the indication of the ability to do this.

**Goal and objective for concern for others vs. concern for self**

It is important to identify the objective of conflict management strategy and then guide the direction for further action. In order ensure the effectiveness of the conflict management strategy, the concerning parties must take the right action at the appropriate time. Since flexibility is critical in conflict resolution, the direction is a guideline for behaviour during conflict resolution. If there are no guidelines, the flexibility of the behaviour and the management strategy may be lost and no effective resolution would result. Emotional intelligence is a very important tool for focusing energy in the desired behaviour while being flexible.

The integrating conflict management strategy requires having a high concern for both self and others. If this condition exists, then conflict can be resolved. Otherwise, if either or both parties have a low concern for self and others, conflict would not be or cannot be resolved respectively. The conflict management
methods of negotiation, consultation and communication, education and public
relations, reinterpretation, mediation and arbitration, all involve trying to change
the concern for self to concern for others. Hence the key determinants are
corns for self and concern for others.

When conflict occurs, appropriate feedback is needed. Otherwise, the conflict
will deteriorate and develop further consequences which make it hard to tackle
later. There are many factors affecting the effectiveness of conflict management
strategies, such as experience, perception, attitude and knowledge. In order to
have better implementation of conflict management strategy, the concerning
parties should have a clear expectation of the conflict issue and apply the most
appropriate strategy.

The finding is that both high emotional quotient of service staff and high concern
for others by both parties can resolve conflicts effectively. But when both staff
emotional quotient and concern for others by either party is insufficient, the
customer service staff should be aware of whether the customer is adopting a
dominating or avoiding conflict style. If the customer is adopting a dominating or
avoiding conflict resolution style, the conflict is unlikely to be resolved.

Since a conflict usually has a strong impact on the concerning parties, they may be
distracted from the issue and adopt defensive and offensive behaviour. Moreover,
it is hard for inexperienced and ignorant people to handle conflict management in
a systematic and organised way. In consequence, the goal for conflict
management strategy is to achieve the expectation of the concerning parties.
During the process of applying a conflict management strategy, interpersonal
relationships and communication are important. Hence, communication skills and techniques and the level of emotional quotient greatly affect the success of the conflict management strategy. High emotional quotient service staff have a better ability to communicate with other people and can build up better interpersonal relationships so as to resolve the conflict in an effective way.

From the findings, conflict can be resolved when both parties apply the same strategy of integration, compromising and avoiding. For conflict management strategy, the concerning parties should be aware of the importance of a concern for self and a concern for others. Insufficient concern by either side could increase the difficulty of resolving the issue both in the short run and in the long run. The failure to resolve conflict in the short run brings about wrong perception and poor communication and can induce further conflict later. In order to have more effective conflict resolution, the concerning parties should consider the importance of concern for self and others. The combination of both concerns can enable a better understanding of the needs and requirements of the concerning parties and enhances the effectiveness of the conflict management strategy.

Transformation
Conflict can be considered as a dead end and so transformation of the conflict issue is one of the important objectives. Transformation can change the perception of the concerning parties and their attitudes to each other and towards the conflict issue. In the process of conflict management, transformation means transforming the conflict issue by adopting a new interpretation and rearrangement of the ingredients making up the issue. In this way the issue can be transformed into a resolvable and expected situation. Since emotional
intelligence is a means to interact with other parties, it can be applied to transform the conflict issue into a resolvable and manageable situation, which is accepted by the both parties.

Emotional quotient and conflict management involve psychology and organisational behaviour. From the research findings, it can be seen that emotional quotient and conflict management involving a high concern for others have the combined effect of preventing the outbreak of conflict and promoting the effective resolution of conflict. In conflict management, balancing concerns for self and others is very important. Excessive provision of services or excessive concern for the customers may resolve the present conflict, but if this is done by sacrificing self-interests, future conflicts will be created.

5.3 Conclusions about the research problem

5.3.1 Conflict formation and emotional intelligence

Of the five categories of emotional intelligence, stress management is the most important factor in preventing conflicts. The other four – general mood, interpersonal skills, intrapersonal skills and adaptability – have their roles to play and each has a fairly equal influence on personal emotional quotient.

Conflict formation – stress management in emotional quotient

From the findings on conflict formation, both high emotional quotient of service staff and high concern for others can prevent the outbreak of conflict. This implies that if the customer service staff have a high emotional quotient, conflicts are less
likely to happen. Emotional quotient is a general scale and the sub-scale of stress management has a direct relationship with conflict formation. That is, low emotional quotient in the stress management sub-scale tends to induce conflict. Therefore, the stress management sub-scale of the emotional quotient has a significant relationship with the frequency of conflicts.

This sub-scale of stress management measures the degree of stress endurance and impulse control. For stress endurance, the scale measures the ability to bear high pressure from time to time. Impulse control is a measure remaining being normal and stable despite strong impulses. Since human beings undergo dynamic changes of emotion in different situations, effective stress management can prevent misbehaviour and can instantly improve the quality of decision making and tends to raise the emotional quotient in the long run. Consequently, effective stress management is the power to regulate one’s emotions. The improvement of the emotional intelligence of service staff has the potential to raise that of the opposing party through interactive behaviour. Consequently, the alertness of one’s emotional intelligence would likely prevent the outbreak of conflict during the delivery of service provisions.

*Conflict formation – general scale of emotional quotient*

When customer service staff have a low emotional quotient, the customer service office must endeavour to prevent the outbreak of conflict by changing the duty staff and the content and timing of the service provisions. For example, changing duty staff means to ask some other customer service staff who have a higher emotional quotient to deliver the service provisions so as to decrease the probability of the outbreak of conflict. When the content of service provisions is changed, the duty
customer service staff serve offer different service provisions or provide more physical resources to improve customer satisfaction.

In addition, if the duty staff changes, and the content and timing of the service provisions do not suit the needs of the conflict situation, the involving party should try some other means applying rational thinking or intuition so as to compensate for the lack of emotional intelligence. Rational thinking is the ability to understand the situation in a systematic way and analyse the possible scenarios for resolution whereas intuition involves applying personal insight to interpret the situation by personal experience. The change of application of these means is to prevent the outbreak of conflict from time to time.

It is important to hear the opinions of high emotional quotient service staff about the delivery of service provisions. High emotional quotient service staff have the style and ability to recognise and regulate personal and social competence. Sharing with them can improve the mindset of their low emotional quotient colleagues. Moreover, continually alerting staff to the significance of emotional quotient can also improve their emotional quotient. Hence, to appreciate the importance of emotional quotient is to identify the way to prevent the outbreak of conflict and to improve the quality of service provisions.

The effective application by involving party of the ability to think rationally, and to use sound intuition, also helps match different needs. Low emotional quotient service staff may not control and monitor their behaviour appropriately and this will affect their rational thinking and perception. Rational thinking can directly resolve the conflict issues. In this connection, the application of emotional quotient of the
involving party is the foundation to provide the platform of rational thinking and analysis of the conflict issue by both concerning parties.

Finally, the long-term interests of both of the concerning parties is to stimulate the parties to satisfy the immediate needs without sacrificing the interpersonal relationship. The service provisions are an intangible ingredient between the concerning parties. The customer service staff should try their best to deliver quality service in order not to provoke conflict. The motivation and perception of provision of quality service is the key to improving the emotional quotient of service staff during the delivery of service. It is always in the interests of the service staff to combine the power of rational thinking and emotional quotient in the delivery of services.

5.3.2 Conflict management strategy and emotional intelligence

Since conflicts happen during the delivery of service provisions from time to time, customer service staff must treat conflict as a reality in the customer service industry. The concerning parties should have an open mind to react to conflict and resolve it in an effective manner. Conflict can be treated as a signal for the need to improve the quality of services. Hence, only the most appropriate conflict management strategy should be adopted when conflict happens. The concerning parties should even utilise the chance to have better communication with each other and build up their interpersonal relationships.

When customer service staff have a positive attitude regarding conflict as part of their jobs and apply suitable skills and techniques and appropriate conflict
management strategies, the conflict issue will not deteriorate and develop into further disaster. An appropriate reaction to conflict can be constructive and can turn the situation into an opportunity to serve the customer in a manner which exceeds their expectations. Since service provisions are usually on a one-to-one basis, high emotional quotient service staff can effectively communicate with the customers and so the effectiveness of the conflict management strategy is enhanced.

It is important that service staff should have sufficient knowledge and enough experience in the handling of different conflict situations. Service staff possessing high emotional quotient, empathy, social awareness and relationship management skills are usually more effective in conflict resolution. In turn, need encourages the concerning parties to settle and resolve the concerns of self and the others. Emotional quotient not only stimulates an alertness to the significance of conflict management strategy but also helps the concerning parties to focus their efforts. The alertness and focus of effort greatly helps with the ‘win-win’ approach of conflict management strategy integrating the dual concerns of self and others. So, the application of emotional quotient and conflict management requires balancing the concerns of self and for others. The difference is that conflict management strategy adopts rational thinking and analysis whereas emotional quotient adopts emotional awareness and utilises its regulatory power in the resolution of the conflicts. For the purpose of conflict resolution, the integration of conflict management strategy and emotional quotient can ensure the effectiveness of the resolution.

Emotional quotient is a general scale to summarise personal and social
competence. The fifteen (15) sub-scales of optimism, happiness, self-regard, emotional self-awareness, assertiveness, independence, self-actualisation, stress endurance, impulse control, empathy, social responsibility, interpersonal relationship, reality testing, flexibility and problem solving specify the ability and potential in different and complex situations. The sources of conflict formation may be lack of one or more of such ability and potential measured by the sub-scales. The balance of the sub-scales of the emotional quotients of the service staff indicates their strengths and weaknesses in certain areas of behaviour. When the conflict situation is in the weakness area, conflict escalates. Hence, the balance of the sub-scales of emotional quotient can decrease the chance of conflict formation and enable a better application of the conflict management strategy.

*Adaptability scale in emotional quotient*

Concerning the application of conflict management strategy, different people tend to adopt different types of conflict management strategy and develop their own expertise in that particular strategy. The pattern or habit of the application of a particular strategy induces a biased application. They lose focus of appropriate matches of conflict management strategies in diversified conflict situations. However, the purpose of conflict management strategy is to resolve the particular conflict instead of a habitual reaction. The biased application of a strategy implies a lack of rational analysis of the conflict situation. Low emotional quotient service staff tend to strictly follow their personal habit of the habitual application. On the other hand, high emotional quotient service staff usually have an open attitude to conflict situations and will analyse them rationally. Emotional quotient and rational analysis together will bring about the likelihood of transformation of the conflict. Hence, the possession of a high emotional quotient by the service staff is
an important element to support the appropriate conflict management strategy in the conflict situation.

5.4 Implications of the theory

If the operation of the service mechanism and system is efficient enough to provide quality service, little or no conflict will happen. However, the business environment is very complex nowadays. The expectation of quality service and customer in tertiary industries require more and more general and specialised services compared with those in primary and secondary productions. Once customer needs cannot be satisfied to the expected standard, conflicts are formed.

In the customer service industry, major conflicts may be needed to stimulate change (Berstene, 2004) and so the concerning parties should only resolve undesirable conflicts. The desired scale and level of conflict is the signal to change the required standard and type of service provisions whereas undesired conflict is the initiating stimulus to drive change in human behaviour. Human behaviour is affected by psychic energy through the human mind and conflict happens in some ways (Kirk and James, 2002). Moreover, social confrontation occurs when a person signals to another that his or her behaviour is violating a rule or expectation that governs the relationship (Folger et al., 1997). As the concerning parties interact with each other the likelihood of conflict formation depends on human behaviour in respect of mindset and interpersonal relationship. When the conflict is undesirable, the concerning parties should be alert to the behaviour through changing their mindset and improvement of interpersonal relationships.
5.4.1 Flexibility means adding successful parameters for conflicts prevention and resolution

Lawrence (1993) suggests that flexibility is the tool to help an organisation adjust quickly to its environment through the action of ‘all-to-all communication’. The service industry players can improve the organisation’s profile and the environmental conditions through the mechanism of service provisions and the enhancement of conflict-free or low-conflict conditions. Therefore, the service industry companies can improve the communication skill and technique of customer service staff so as to reduce conflict formation.

During the delivery of services, staff attitude in the achievement motivation model (Weiner, 1986) and learned helplessness model (Martinko & Gardner, 1982) can contribute towards the success or failure of each particular issue. Moreover, Heider (1958) indicates that the attribution theory is based on situational causes in particular events, the personal effect of any direct impact on the cause of the event, and the ability, effort and desire to deal with such events. Customer service staff are the crucial factor for conflict formation. They can adopt suitable attitudes to handle customer service provisions and deal with customers so that the service provision is provided with no conflict or little conflict. Since customers will require different services from time to time, there is no strict rule on how to provide the best service. However, customer service staff should be aware of the trend of customer service requirements over time in order to provide the expected, though possibly unwritten, standard of service of the company or the industry.
5.4.2 Independent pro-active behaviour instead of affected by opposing party

As conflict formation always depends on the perception of the opposing party in the process of acquiring, interpreting, selecting, and organising sensory information, conflict can be prevented in most cases. During the complex activities of acquisition, interpretation, selection and organisation of the sensory information, emotional reactions can improve the rational thinking of the concerning parties. Perception is a phenomenon of emotional sense rather than rational thinking. Equally true is that the perception is of reality and so high staff emotional quotient can help the concerning parties to face the reality with a rational mind. In this connection, emotional quotient serves to induce the perception in the direction of a no conflict or low conflict situation.

Low emotional quotient service staff will not have the skill needed to adopt the appropriate conflict management strategy. It is a challenge for them to identify the suitable strategy and they tend to have poor communication and interpersonal relationships with the customers. Conflict is a critical incident in the establishment of interpersonal relationships and the kinds of conflict behaviours engaged in will determine the nature of the relationship (Esin, 1999). Mutual dislike can also greatly affect the effectiveness of the conflict management strategy. In this way, low staff emotional quotient not only affects the adoption of suitable conflict management strategy but also the effectiveness of the adopted strategy. Conflict management is a skill that has lifetime consequences for initiating and maintaining relationships (Jensen-Campbell, Graziano, & Hair, 1996). Low staff emotional quotient damages interpersonal relationships and conflict management situations. Low emotional quotient service staff tend to have higher concern for
Generally, they are always concerned for self and this tendency induces the biased adoption of conflict management strategies in most situations.

In conflict management, it is important to keep one’s emotions under control (Keil, 2000). High emotional quotient service staff tend to have concern for both self and others. The increase of low-level of cognitive conflict expressed during group decision-making produces higher quality decisions for complex problems (Priem et al, 1995). The high staff emotional quotient have better social competence to cater for incompatible differences and resolve the conflict. The social ability or responsibility triggers them to cooperate, contribute and be constructive in the conflict situation and in conflict management. So, complex conflict situations can be resolved with mutual understanding and contribution from both parties.

5.4.3 Provision of services, emotional quotient and concern for others

Conflict management strategy involves the processes of conflict resolution and treatment of the dynamic changes of the conflict situation. Emotions are an important element of conflict and the involving party is affected by their subjective interpretation of reality and reactions to conflict (Thomas, 1992). Thus conflicts associated with stress and threat, are associated with increased emotional responses and negative arousal (Thomas, 1992). Emotional quotient is applied to take care of the alert of the dynamic changes of interactive behaviour. Alertness is required to identify the changes and steer towards helpful behaviour or decisions regarding conflict resolution. The sub-scale of flexibility is vital for the adjustment of one’s emotions, thoughts, and behaviour to changing situations and conditions in the conflict management situation.
Conflict management strategies include avoiding, dominating, obliging, compromising and integrating. The application of a strategy involves the methods of negotiation, consultation and communication, education and public relation, reinterpretation, mediation and arbitration. The conflict management strategies of compromising and integrating are effective in conflict resolution and the prevention of further conflict. Mediation and arbitration of conflict management methods are seldom used due to the complication of the procedures and high costs. In customer service industry, the costs and benefit of service provisions are vital to the success of the companies or organisation. Negotiation, consultation and communication, and reinterpretation are common in most customer service staff. Education and public relations measures are only adopted by large companies or organisations. Amongst the above-mentioned methods, communication is important for the prevention of conflict formation, and reinterpretation is an important and effective conflict management strategy. But there is no standard or general rule on the adoption of certain strategies or methods to resolve conflicts because conflict can happen in many forms.

In conflict management situations, the concerning parties must balance their interests from time to time. When there is an imbalance of interests, the conflict cannot be resolved in a simple way. Hence, the levels of concern for self and others are both important for conflict management and resolution. Emotional intelligence is effective and important to trigger both concerns. The sharing of emotional feelings and attitudes between the concerning parties promotes flexibility in the adoption of the most appropriate conflict management strategies and methods. Hence, achieving a balance of interests is the priority for effective
and rational analysis of the application and adoption of conflict management strategy. High staff emotional quotient can help to detect the concerns of the opposing party so as to behave and react in an effective way.

5.4.4 Interchangeability and accumulation of high staff emotional quotient and concern for customers

It has previously been demonstrated that high staff emotional quotient and high concern for others of the part of staff and customers are interchangeable in conflict resolution. In addition these two can be combined and, when in co-existence, help conflict resolution to a great extent.

In theory, it is important that high staff emotional quotient and staff concern for customers have the same effect in conflict prevention and resolution. The service staff or the customer service industry should be aware of the effectiveness of service provisions. When the staff does not have the insight of concern for customer or high emotional quotient to prevent or resolve conflicts, the customers are usually not satisfied with the service provided.

Since either parameter could prevent and resolve conflicts, the service staff should apply either parameter individually or in combination with other parameters to improve the situation. At least, the staff must adopt the parameter of concern for others to prevent or resolve conflicts from time to time. In this way, these parameters are interchangeable and have a cumulative effect. The service staff could then have a clear direction for conflict management.
Applicable in any situation, including both in conflict prevention and resolution

In customer service industry, customer service staff may have much experience and sufficient exposure to conflict management. They can prevent the outbreak of conflict and apply an appropriate conflict management strategy to match the conflict situation and this can be done with the same logic that is used in application of the parameters of emotional quotient and concern for others at all times.

Hence, the customer service staff should systematically categorise the experience and suitable application of the strategy in different conflict situations. This is because conflict can happen in different ways and situations, and situations can deteriorate quickly. The inappropriate application of certain conflict management strategies and method could escalate the conflict and a higher-ranked third party may be required to help to resolve the conflict. Generally, the third party would usually have high emotional quotient and better experience for conflict resolution, and hence, be able to apply the conflict management strategy in a better way.

Although the conflict management strategies of integrating, compromising and avoiding can resolve conflicts, the service staff must also know how to apply these strategies with suitable timing. When the customer demands a high concern for him/her, an integrating conflict management strategy involving high concern for both self and others should be applied. Similarly, when the customer requires medium concern, an integrating or compromising conflict management strategy involving medium concern or above for both self and others should be applied. And when the customer only requires a low concern, integrating, a compromising
or avoiding conflict management strategy would be suitable and should be applied. Naturally, an obliging conflict management strategy could be applied when the customer is on the right side and for the purposes of long-term customer relationship benefits. However, staff should be careful that obliging conflict management strategy does not induce excessive concern for others and sacrifice concern for self. Hence it is unwise to apply an obliging conflict management strategy all the time.

5.5 Limitations of the theory

The theory establishes the importance of the interrelationships of service staff’s level of emotional quotient and whether they have high concern for themselves or also for the customers, in addition to the customer’s level of concern for self or others. The theory does not tackle the question from the angle of the people to be served, the customers. However, although customer emotional quotient does have an effect on conflict resolution, the choice of conflict resolution strategy and method of approach are controlled by the service staff. Therefore, the theory is considered adequately established.

The theory, however, does have its limitations. One of the limitations of this research is its emphasis on conflict formation, management strategy and emotional quotient from the point of view of the customer service staff only.

This one-sided approach was adopted to save costs and time and therefore it cannot provide a full and comprehensive representation of the conflict issue and its relationship with emotional quotient. In spite of this limitation, the theory is still
adequately established because it is the service staff who provide services. The reaction of the service staff, the choice of strategy and the method to be adopted are covered by the service staff in most the situations. There are bound to be conflicts that cannot be resolved, but that is part of life due to the differences in human nature.

If this study had also considered the effects of the emotional quotient of the customers, there would simply be too many combinations of methods to resolve conflicts. This complexity would have made it impossible for anyone to apply any theory developed. With the emotional quotient of the service staff measured and available, coupled with appropriate training, the relatively simple theory can then be put to good use.

The property management industry has been used to develop the theory because the frequency and nature of the customer services conflicts arising are typical of those which occur in most customer service sectors. The theory developed can thus be applied to different customer services industries with minor adaptations according to the different proportions of service provisions and finished products. A systematic analysis of the different proportions of service provisions could provide a better understanding of conflict management and its relationship with emotional quotient.

Finally, the science of emotional quotient is still under development. The general scale of emotional quotient is a measurement of a particular state of emotional orientation towards the environment and changes. The emotional quotient of a person may change from time to time and its application is sometimes
controversial over different business activities and human lives.

5.6 Implications of findings on customer service industry

5.6.1 High staff emotional intelligence is essential to service provision success

Differences in value judgments about fairness and justice can be resolved by striking a balance of interests and benefits. This orients the physical behaviours and emotional quotients of both parties to achieve the short-term and long-term goals and meet service expectations. Staff emotional intelligence can be developed to address the necessary evil of conflict formation in an environment where the interests of the concerning parties compete with each other. An awareness of emotional change allows the involving party to become alert to any sudden destructive behaviours or decisions. The service staff may correctly utilise emotions at certain times, for example by being compassionate and courageous. This awareness also helps to calm down feelings of dissatisfaction and control emotional changes better. Once they are in a peaceful and calm condition, the concerning parties can carry on to perform the service provision.

Consequently, when the mind is calm, a person is able to control his emotions, and the quality of the decision-making for the adoption and execution of conflict management strategies is high. In order to do that, that person must have a high emotional quotient to control himself.

Service staff with high emotional intelligence can apply appropriate conflict management strategies and achieve good quality service provision. Some
thoughtful people may develop harmony, self‐exploration, self‐realisation, and social responsibility in their lives but all of these qualities depend on the support of emotional intelligence. High emotional intelligence is needed to select the appropriate conflict management strategy to achieve good outcomes for both social aspects and good service provision.

5.6.2 High staff emotional intelligence – a key factor for conflict prevention and resolution in the service industry

Staff emotional intelligence could help to prevent the outbreak of conflict and help to resolve conflicts when either party has a high concern for self. The mechanisms of service provisions are not always flexible and the staff should apply the flexibility, such as rearrangement of company resources and provision of more services to customers, to prevent the outbreak of conflict and apply effective conflict management strategy once there is conflict. The customer services industries emphasise that service quality and satisfaction of customer needs is one of the company objectives. This is particularly so when there is no pre‐determined standard of service within the industry. Standards differ according to the expectations of the customers, the service providers, the customer service staff and the environments within which such services are provided.

Emotion is a kind of internal reaction towards other people or outside phenomena where emotional intelligence is used to measure the personal ability to understand the feelings of oneself and others. The capacity for self‐control is dependent on and affects interpersonal relationships. They are interrelated. Since improper
management of feeling causes aggressive and violent behaviour, depression, anxiety disorders, and stress, customer service staff need to be aware of the destructive energy of emotions. On the other hand, if the service staff manages their emotions well, their interpersonal relationship with customers and the quality of service provisions can be improved. In order to provide services in an effective and efficient manner, the service staff should behave appropriately in response to their feelings and thoughts. Good emotional quotient can bring objective judgment, which means being free from personal judgments and maintaining impartiality. The objective is for neutrality, fairness, and openness. Without appropriate emotional intelligence, people find it difficult to accept and be open to others’ opinions. Hence emotional quotient is a tool to improve the ability for rational thinking in the aspect of observing, analysing and decision making.

Customer service staff should be able to distinguish between task factors and relationship factors when delivering services. A task factor is simply to get a job done while a relationship factor is to keep and improve on the relationship with the customers. When task factors are the priority of the service provision, the service staff should enhance their rational thinking so as to improve the quality of the service. When relationship factors are dominant in the service provision, the staff should be aware of the interpersonal relationship and apply communication skills and techniques to be open to the incompatible opinions and perspectives of the concerning parties. Whenever incompatible opinions and perspectives accommodated in a mutually agreed conclusion, the staff must be conscientious of their own emotional intelligence. This way, the staff should find ways to prevent the outbreak of conflict through the help of other staff or by trying to transform the customer needs. The transformation can be achieved by a change of timing,
attitude or service resources. Otherwise, conflict will occur and the quality of the service provisions will fall below the expectations of the customer.

5.6.3 Staff emotional quotient and concern for others together control conflict management rather than other factors

The level of emotional quotient of the service staff and the level of concern for self and others of both the service staff and the customer are enough to bring about the prevention and resolution of conflicts.

During the delivery of service, the behaviour of the customer depends on a stream of interactive activities and reactions. The activities and reactions are affected by the process of handling a mix of information and opinions. Raising emotional intelligence is a way to help the parties to be more focused in their thinking. The quality of thinking comes from how specific the parties understand the situation and the background on which conflicts arise. Once the parties fully acknowledge and comprehend the objectives of service provisions, a balance of the interests of the parties can be achieved. Through the interactive activities and reactions, the service staff should not provoke any conflict or produce negative thinking and ideas. The optimism and happiness associated with high staff emotional intelligence can develop and improve the concerned others in the formation of objective and positive opinions. If they realise the truth of every situation, they will understand that there is no need to make unnecessary or excessive demands. Therefore, false perceptions in response to conflict situations will be eliminated and mutual trust will develop.
5.6.4 High staff emotional quotient – transformation and concern for others

For conflict management methods, transformation is one of the useful and effective ways to change the conflict into a resolvable situation. The purpose of the change is to transform the negative situation into a positive situation through an attitude of optimism, happiness, positive statement and even a sense of humour to relieve the antagonistic environment. Service staff with high emotional intelligence can directly improve the conflict situation through the change of mindset and restatement of the situation. The repositioning of the conflict situation aims to develop the confidence of the parties involved and to identify the projected and expected situation. Certainly, the repositioning of the projected and expected situation should be under careful and prudent consideration so as not to induce any other conflict.

The initial step of the repositioning is self-oriented direction. Through self-confidence and interactive behaviour, the self-oriented direction triggers a mutually accepted direction. Transformation develops one’s potential and affects the other’s reaction. Only people with high emotional intelligence are able to focus their energy to produce a more profound impact through a series of progress.

5.6.5 High staff emotional quotient – transformation resolves past rivalry

The advantage of transformation is to prevent the deterioration of the conflict, enhance the influence of the power of the individual, and position and restore the conflict situation to fulfil the objective of service provisions. The enhancement of individual power results in the ability and energy to directly and indirectly motivate
or affect other people to satisfy the service expectation. For example, if there is insufficient trust between the concerning parties, influence does not exist. Moreover, there is always feedback for our behaviour, especially in the case of past rivalry, and the interaction of people will in turn affect our conduct towards others.

A person of high emotional intelligence has the ability to improve as a result of power generated from within. It is believed that there is always room to explore and develop staff potential with a better understanding of the level of their emotional intelligence. During the conflict management process, high emotional quotient service staff find it easier to accept the opinion of the customers and strike a balance to attain the mutual goals. Such ability will enable them to transform conflicts into resolvable situations which they are capable of handling.

5.6.6 Interpersonal relationships and corporate image in conflict formation and prevention

As interpersonal relationships are very important in the prevention of conflict and the application of conflict management strategies, company image and customer surveys are very useful and effective tools to improve interpersonal relationships. Company image can build up the customer relationship at the level of the service industry company and the customer. Company image is built up from many approaches and customer surveys are often used as a tool to identify the customer needs in general. For large service companies, the build-up of brand name depends on the goodwill accumulate through positive interpersonal relationships. Interpersonal relationships can enhance the trust between the customer service staff and the customer.
Like in governmental customer services, the staff must follow procedures and
instructions of the service provisions mechanism and therefore they have less
flexibility to make changes. The service types and resources are designed and
arranged through governmental departments and according to the relevant polices.
The clearly defined service scope confines the possibility and scale of conflict
formation. When the demand of service provisions is out of the scope, no service
is provided and there is no buffer area for the provision. Hence, the strict
definition of the service also implies the service scale and level of the provisions.
That is, the customer service staff provides the standard scale and level of the
service within the scope of the service.

5.6.7 Customer satisfaction is the end rather than the means of service provision

The emphasis of the service provisions is customer satisfaction but not the quality
of the service. There is no definitive standard to measure the quality of service.
It varies from customer to customer and from situation to situation. Except for
distinctive right or wrong and ‘have or have not’ situations, good service quality is
often the impression that the service staff is able to implant in the mind of the
customers.

The standard of service involves little variety and so the quality of the service does
not generally fluctuate. The customer service staff usually only aim to satisfy the
customer instead of exceeding service expectation. They prefer to perform
normal operations and try all means to prevent the outbreak of conflicts. When
there is incompatible belief, understanding, values and opinions, the concerning
parties refer to the bureaucratic mechanism of service provisions. Hence, the preset mechanism enhances the rational thinking and communal reference to merge the differences so less conflict would happen.

But for the case of conflict, the concerning parties need conflict management strategies to resolve the conflict. The dependence on bureaucratic mechanisms in the public sector helps to resolve the task factors of conflict issues. The conflict management strategy should then concentrate on the dual concerns of self and others through achieving a balance of interests. When one party overly emphasises a concern for self, the other party should balance the interests through concern for other side.

To sum up, service staff could independently affect the effectiveness of delivery of services in the aspect of conflict prevention and resolution. This is because two parameters of the theory – staff emotional quotient and staff concern for customer – are in the hands of the staff. That is, the service staff could manage the service provisions through their own attitudes and behaviour, and have the power to prevent and resolve conflicts by themselves.

In conclusion, service staff of high emotional intelligence are more successful in handling the situations and the two parameters of staff emotional intelligence and concern for others to the end of achieving customer satisfaction.

5.7 Further research

This paper has investigated the importance of the emotional intelligence of
participants in the property management service sector in Hong Kong in the prevention and resolution of conflicts. Making reference to theories developed by previous studies, investigations were made into five conflict management strategies and eight solution methods. Conclusions were then drawn that in all these approaches to conflict management, the emotional intelligence of the service staff, their level of concern for others and the customer concern for others are the critical factors for successful conflict resolution and prevention. Customer satisfaction is the objective of all customer services, regardless of how it is achieved.

Further research could be undertaken on (1) the change in the definition of emotional intelligence under varying environments, (2) the significance of the level of emotional intelligence on the part of the customers, a factor this paper has not taken into consideration.

The social recognition of emotional intelligence is high and the development of its knowledge and application is fast. In order to match the growth of societies, detailed study of emotional intelligence helps individuals and societies to grow effectively and efficiently in a better environment of service provision. The importance of handling emotion is targeted in dealing with conflicts. The awareness of the effect of emotions induces self-control in the expression of any negative emotion. This is because the reaction to the other party and to society is very important to all of us. Everyone can hopefully live in a happy environment of service provisions and societies will develop constructively and peacefully. More importantly, some people are unable to balance their opinions, which is not at all a healthy trend for the service providers. Accordingly, there are lots of emotional
illnesses and disorders.

As different customer service industry involves different business natures and operations, the further research in conflict management and its relationship with emotional intelligence should be conducted systematically so as to provide information for further application.

Emotional intelligence is only a description of one’s energy state in response to business life and daily changes. Further studies on this subject with other related social sciences will give a full understanding of ourselves, our society and community to the benefit of all concerned.
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Appendix A  Interview Questions for conflict management

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the Southern Cross University Human Research Ethics Committee. The approval number is ECN-07-113. If you have any complaints or reservations about any ethical aspect of your participation in this research, you may contact the Committee through the Ethics Complaints Officer, Ms S. Kelly, (telephone (02) 6620 9139, fax (02) 6626 9145, email: sue.kelly@scu.edu.au).

Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated, and you will be informed of the outcome.

Research on ‘Emotional Quotient and Conflict management’

Interview Questions for Conflict management

Frequency of conflict
1. During delivery of property services, have you ever encountered any kind of conflict with customer, such as disagreement in opinion or unfulfilled service expectation?
2. If yes, how often does conflict happen?

Example of conflict
3. Among the above-mentioned conflicts, what is the most often encountered conflict in property management? What do you feel?
4. Could you tell me in details the most crucial conflict ever happened between the customer service staff of your Property Management Company and the customers? What do you feel?

**Cause and development of conflict**

5. Who started this conflict?
6. Why did this conflict occur?
7. How did the conflict occur?
8. Was the conflict resolved?
9. How was the conflict resolved?
10. In your opinion, the above-mentioned conflict belongs to cognitive conflict (task-related conflict) or affective conflict (relationship-related conflict) or any other kind of conflict?

**Effect of conflict**

11. What are the consequences of conflict?
12. What was the feedback of the customer after the conflict ended?
13. In your opinion, could this conflict have been avoided before it broke out?
14. If yes, how could this conflict have been avoided before it broke out?

**Conflict management**

15. Can you resolve or manage conflicts?
16. If yes, how do you resolve or manage conflicts?
17. How many techniques or strategies are there for conflict management?
18. Do you need help from others in resolving the conflicts?
19. Why do you need or do not need help from others in resolving the conflicts?
20. How do you get help from others?
Appendix B  Demographic Data

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the Southern Cross University Human Research Ethics Committee. The approval number is ECN-07-113. If you have any complaints or reservations about any ethical aspect of your participation in this research, you may contact the Committee through the Ethics Complaints Officer, Ms S. Kelly, (telephone (02) 6620 9139, fax (02) 6626 9145, email: sue.kelly@scu.edu.au).

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Research on ‘Emotional Quotient and Conflict management’

Demographic Data

1. Gender
   - Male
   - Female

2. Age
   - 20-24
   - 25-29
   - 30-34
   - 35-39
   - 40-44
   - 45-49
   - 50-54
   - 55-59
   - 60-64
3. Marital Status
- Single
- Married
- Divorced
- Widowed
- Separated

4. Education
- Secondary
- Matriculation
- Undergraduate degree
- Master degree or higher
- Other__________

5. Working experiences
- 0-2 years
- 3-5 years
- 6-8 years
- 9-12 years
- 13-15 years
- more than 15 years

6. Property management experiences
- 0-2 years
- 3-5 years
- 6-8 years
- 9-12 years
- 13-15 years
7. Working organization □ major in private companies
   □ major in non-private companies, such as government,
     Urban Renewal Authority, Housing Society
   □ Other, pls. specify____________________________

8. How many property management organization/company have you worked for?
   □ 1
   □ 2
   □ 3
   □ 4
   □ 5
   □ more than 5, please specify______________

9. Existing grading □ Assistant officer
    □ Officer
    □ Senior officer
    □ Assistant manager
    □ Manager
    □ Senior manager

10. Existing company/organization worked for____________________________
     ________________________________
Appendix C  Emotional Quotient test

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the Southern Cross University Human Research Ethics Committee. The approval number is ECN-07-113. If you have any complaints or reservations about any ethical aspect of your participation in this research, you may contact the Committee through the Ethics Complaints Officer, Ms S. Kelly, (telephone (02) 6620 9139, fax (02) 6626 9145, email: sue.kelly@scu.edu.au).

Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated, and you will be informed of the outcome.

Research on ‘Emotional Quotient and Conflict management’

Emotional Quotient

The measurement of emotional quotient of Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory comes from Dr. Reuven Bar-On, Multi-Health Systems Inc., Toronto, ON-North Tonawanda, NY, 1997

Introduction

The emotional quotient consists of statement that provide you with an opportunity to describe yourself by indicating the degree to which each statement is true of the way you feel, think, or act most of the time and in most situations. There are five possible responses to each sentence.
1. Very seldom or Not true of me
2. Seldom true of me
3. Sometimes true of me
4. Often true of me
5. Very often true of me or true of me

1. My approach in overcoming difficulties is to move step by step.
2. It’s hard for me to enjoy life.
3. I prefer a job in which I’m told pretty much what to do.
4. I know how to deal with upsetting problems.
5. I like everyone I meet.
6. I try to make my life as meaningful as I can.
7. It’s fairly easy for me to express feelings.
8. I try to see things as they really are, without fantasizing or daydreaming about them.
9. I’m in touch with my emotions.
10. I’m unable to show affection.
11. I feel sure of myself in most situations.
12. I have a feeling that something is wrong with my mind.
13. It is a problem controlling my anger.
14. It’s difficult for me to begin new things.
15. When faced with a difficult situation, I like to collect all the information about it that I can.
16. I like helping people.
17. It’s hard for me to smile.
18 I’m unable to understand the way other people feel.

19 When working with others, I tend to rely more on their ideas than my own.

20 I believe that I can stay on top of tough situations.

21 I really don’t know what I’m good at.

22 I’m unable to express my ideas to others.

23 It’s hard for me to share my deep feelings with others.

24 I lack self-confidence.

25 I think I’ve lost my mind.

26 I’m optimistic about most things I do.

27 When I start talking, it is hard to stop.

28 It’s hard for me to make adjustments in general.

29 I like to get an overview of a problem before trying to solve it.

30 It doesn’t bother me to take advantage of people, especially if they deserve it.

31 I’m a fairly cheerful person.

32 I prefer others to make decisions for me.

33 I can handle stress, without getting too nervous.

34 I have good thoughts about everyone.

35 It’s hard for me to understand the way I feel.

36 In the past few years, I’ve accomplished little.

37 When I’m angry with others, I can tell them about it.

38 I have had strange experiences that can’t be explained.

39 It’s easy for me to make friends.

40 I have good self‐respect.
41 I do very strange things.  
42 My impulsiveness creates problems.  
43 It’s difficult for me to change my opinion about things.  
44 I’m good at understanding the way other people feel.  
45 When facing a problem, the first thing I do is stop and think.  
46 Others find it hard to depend on me.  
47 I am satisfied with my life.  
48 It’s hard for me to make decisions on my own.  
49 I don’t hold up well under stress.  
50 I don’t do anything bad in my life.  
51 I don’t get enjoyment from what I do.  
52 It’s hard to express my intimate feelings.  
53 People don’t understand the way I think.  
54 I generally hope for the best.  
55 My friends can tell me intimate things about themselves.  
56 I don’t feel good about myself.  
57 I see these strange things that others don’t see.  
58 People tell to lower my voice in discussions.  
59 It’s easy for me to adjust to new conditions.  
60 When trying to solve a problem I look at each possibility and then decide on the best way.  
61 I would stop and help a carrying child find his or her parents, even if I had to be somewhere else at the same time.  
62 I’m fun to be with.  
63 I’m aware of the way I feel.  
64 I feel that it’s hard for me to control my anxiety.
65 Nothing disturbs me.  
66 I don’t get that excited about my interest.  
67 When I disagree with someone, I’m able to say so.  
68 I tend to fade out and lose contact with what happens around me.  
69 I don’t get along well with others.  
70 It’s hard for me to accept myself just the way I am.  
71 I feel cut off from my body.  
72 I care what happens to other people.  
73 I’m impatient.  
74 I’m able to change old habits.  
75 It’s hard for me to decide on the best solution when solving problems.  
76 If I could get away with breaking the law in certain situations, I would.  
77 I get depressed.  
78 I know how to keep calm in difficult situations.  
79 I have not told a lie in my life.  
80 I’m generally motivated to continue, even when things get difficult.  
81 I try to continue and develop those things that I enjoy.  
82 It’s hard for me to say ‘no’ when I want to.  
83 I get carried away with my imagination and fantasies.  
84 My close relationships mean a lot to me and to my friends.  
85 I’m happy with the type of person I am.  
86 I have strong impulses that are hard to control.
87 It’s generally hard for me to make changes in my daily life.
88 Even when upset, I’m aware of what’s happening to me.
89 In handling situations that arise,
   I try to think of as many approaches as I can.
90 I’m able to respect others.
91 I’m not that happy with my life.
92 I’m more of a follower than a leader.
93 It’s hard for me to face unpleasant things.
94 I have not broken a law of any kind.
95 I enjoy those things that interest me.
96 It’s fairly easy for me to tell people what I think.
97 I tend to exaggerate.
98 I’m sensitive to the feelings of others.
99 I have good relations with others.
100 I feel comfortable with my body.
101 I am a very strange person.
102 I’m impulsive.
103 It’s hard for me to change my ways.
104 I think it’s important to be a law-abiding citizen.
105 I enjoy weekends and holidays.
106 I generally expect things will turn out all right,
   despite setbacks from time to time.
107 I tend to cling to others.
108 I believe in my ability to handle most upsetting problems.
109 I have not been embarrassed for anything that I’ve done.
110 I try to get as much as I can out those things that I enjoy.
111 Others think that I lack assertiveness.
112 I can easily pull out of daydreams and tune into the reality of the immediate situation.
113 People think that I’m sociable.
114 I’m happy with the way I took.
115 I have strange thoughts that no one can understand.
116 It’s hard for me to describe my feelings.
117 I’ve got a bad temper.
118 I generally get stuck when thinking about different ways of solving problems.
119 It’s hard for me to see people suffer.
120 I like to have fun.
121 I seem to need other people more than they need me.
122 I don’t have bad days.
123 I avoid hurting other people’s feelings.
124 I don’t have a good idea of what I want to do in life.
125 It’s difficult for me to stand up for my rights.
126 It’s hard for me to keep things in the right perspective.
127 I don’t keep in touch with friends.
128 Looking at both my good points and bad points.
129 I feel good about myself.
130 I tend to explode with anger easily.
131 It would be hard for me to adjust if I were forced to leave my home.
132 Before beginning something new, I usually feel that I’ll fail.
133 I responded openly and honestly to the above sentences.