Conflict management: an Islamic perspective

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1. Introduction

1.1. Introduction to the Problem

One of the common characteristic of UAE organizations is the multi-culture workplace environment. Such diversity of demographic characteristics is among the major sources of conflict between working groups and even between employees working for the same department (Jones and Melcher, 1982).

Song et al, (2006) noted that conflict is complex, multifaceted, and context specific, employees are consuming 20% of their working time to deal with conflicts. He recommended that more researches are required in order to make conflict more comprehensible.

The lack of understanding conflict and its management is having a major effect on innovation process, which is an essential requirement for today's global market. Any organization which aspires to improve its performance, retain its employees, provide a productive workplace environment to cope with the global market intense competition and to be able to handle project complexity, should have conflict management strategies that enhance problem solving approach. These strategies will have a significant influence on work groups' outcome (Aritzeta and Ayestaran, 2005; Song et al, 2006).

Conflict management strategies require appropriate skills and knowledge to manage conflict in the workplace arising from restructuring, downsizing, cutting costs, and/or altering objectives. Any decision will have supporters and oppositions, the project managers have to deal with them all (Blum and Wall, 1997; Ritov and Drory, 1996; Gulbranson, 1998; Driscoll, 1996; Song et al, 2006; Jabnoun, 2005).

The participation of all key players of any organization in the strategic planning is valuable to eliminate destructive conflict from two perspectives. Initially, a course of action establishes morale as individuals recognize that their opinions are heard and respected. Secondly, team planning necessitates optimizing the resources to cope with challenges and accomplish goals (Harolds and Wood, 2006; Gulbranson, 1998; Jabnoun, 2005; Ritov and Drory, 1996; Driscoll, 1996).

In addition, establishing a progressive policy manual and job descriptions with the contribution of organization members could help in mitigating destructive conflict, motivates team building, and explains common objectives (Harolds and Wood, 2006; Gulbranson, 1998; Ritov and Drory, 1996; Driscoll, 1996; Jabnoun, 2005).

The leader's role in conflict management is fundamental, which could require professional training in conflict management strategies. Leaders have to tackle current problems and keep team members informed about issues, steps required to resolve the situation and make the results broadly known as this will be helpful in anticipating future problems before they occur (Harolds and Wood, 2006; Gulbranson, 1998; Jabnoun, 2005; Driscoll, 1996; Ritov and Drory, 1996; Hirschhorn and Gilmore, 1992). Besides, a leader should not foster a hostile environment as this behavior is negative and leads to destructive conflict. In addition, he/she has to sustain official routes of communication to be cognizant of existing problems and predict potential ones. Such behavior creates a mutual trust environment, improves effectiveness, keeps all key players informed of major disputes, and redirect conflicts into productive and constructive ways (Harolds and Wood, 2006; Driscoll, 1996; Ritov and Drory, 1996; Gulbranson, 1998; Jabnoun, 2005).

Productive or constructive conflicts can be achieved through considering and revealing in a friendly respectful environment the opposing opinions and facts. Decisions

which could be based on what is fair may probably be unsuccessful in delivering long-term results (DeChurch and Marks, 2001; Harolds and Wood, 2006; Gulbranson, 1998; Driscoll, 1996; Jabnoun, 2005; Jones and Melcher, 1982).

In addition, the leader has to evaluate his/her attitude as it may be harmful to other team members. He/she has to recognize the source of conflict, the factors that promoted it, and the facts of the conflict to find a potential solution. Feedback should be specific for the conflict. In other words, leaders should review the facts, investigate the issue, remain rational, create an emotional gap between them and individuals, and do not describe emotional situation or characterizations throughout the debate (Driscoll, 1996; Harolds and Wood, 2006; Gulbranson, 1998; Blum and Wall, 1997; DeChurch and Marks, 2001; Jabnoun, 2005).

Dealing with conflict in construction sector is a daily common practice due to the involvement of several stakeholders with different goals in a single project. In addition, the construction business environment which has moved towards partnering contracts in recent years. Partnering approach is a suitable environment for conflict. A struggling environment can be noticed from the number of construction claims which continues to rise.

Taking into consideration the major damages results from destructive conflicts in the construction sector due to delays, cost overruns, and low productivity. The construction sector requires developing conflict management strategies or approaches that can be capable of handling successfully the large number of conflicts (Gardiner and Simmons, 1995; Kassab et al, 2006; Thamhain and Wilemon, 1975; Gardiner and Simmons, 1992; Ng et al, 2007). Among the key sources of conflict in construction sector is the change due to unclear documents, shortage or late supply of special materials, and technical

problems due to uncertainty and low experience (Gardiner and Simmons, 1995; Kassab et al, 2006; Ng et al, 2007; Thamhain and Wilemon, 1975; Gardiner and Simmons, 1992).

Most western project managers in the region depend on western models to deal with workplace conflicts. Therefore, by applying methods inspired from the region overwhelming culture-Islamic Culture-such as the proactive, SALAM and the Shura, Nassiha, Tawaun (S.N.T) models described by Ahmed (2007) and Unus (1998) a positive output is expected when dealing with conflicts. The three models are dealing with conflict as enrichment for any discussion or debate. Yet, both Islamic and Western models identically share the same definition, sources and types of conflict.

1.2. Problem Statement and Purpose of Study

The increasing need for project managers to implement conflict management techniques to manage conflicts arising from different sources such as change, employees diversity, and to maintain organizations' efficiency and competency in the multi-cultural environment requires new models originated from the region's culture. Such models necessitate a clear understanding of conflict's nature and sources by project managers.

This study illustrates the Islamic perspective in managing conflict by introducing the Islamic conflict management styles to western project managers working in the region. These styles are the proactive model, the SALAM, and the S.N.T.; these models will be described in the literature review chapter. The outcome could reshape the western opinion about Islam and its contribution to project management discipline.

1.3. Research Question

The problem statement proposes three questions for the research: a) is there an Islamic conflict management model exists for project managers to implement in their

workplace? b) is this model constructive model or destructive? c) Is such model beneficial and can be implemented by western project managers and individuals?

1.4. Aims

The aim of this study is to examine the aforementioned Islamic conflict management styles and find out the best practice approach to handle interpersonal and intergroup conflicts in UAE organizations.

1.5. Objectives

This research is based on The Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory-II (ROCI-II) (1983) in conjunction with Ahmed (2007) S.N.T and SALAM models to demonstrate different conflict management styles. In addition, this study explores the sources and types of conflict and tries to find the best practice approach which can be implemented in the region.

In order to acheive such objectives the study consists of:

1. Conflict definition

2. Analyze the basic types of conflict.

3. Define the main sources of conflict.

4. Assess conflict resultants.

5. Examine western conflict management styles.

6. Examine the Islamic conflict management styles.

2. Literature Review

This review of the literature is related to the concept of conflict management styles and is based on the theoretical framework of The Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory-II (ROCI-II) (1983) in conjunction with the Islamic conflict management styles, more specifically the SALAM and S.N.T models, as a conflict management tools. The literature presents four areas of focus: (a) brief overview of conflict definition, (b) types of conflict, (c) sources of conflict, and (d) Islamic and Western styles related to managing conflict in the workplace.

2.1. Conflict Definition

Ahmed (2007) defined conflict as "A perceived difference between two or more parties resulting in mutual opposition". Another definition by Wall and Callister (1995) "Conflict is a process in which one party perceives that its interests are being opposed or negatively affected by another party". In a simple way conflict arises when anyone considers that his/her own benefit or interest cannot be achieved simultaneously with another party's benefit or interest (DeChurch and Marks, 2001, Jones and Melcher, 1982).

From these definitions it can be concluded that interests could vary between personal aspirations, aims, roles, or goals. It is obvious that conflict is inevitable as each party has its own history, character, gender, culture, values, beliefs, and behaviors which influence its actions and motivation towards conflict. The aforesaid manifestations illustrate the diversity of perspectives between parties. Such diversity could be considered as enrichment to any discussion if managed properly (Fisher et al, 2000; Farmer and Roth, 1998; Gulbranson, 1998; Jabnoun, 2005).

However, Tjosvold (2006) argued that not every conflict is based on deviation of interests or goals. For instance, group members may have the same target, although they have conflict about the process, or how they can achieve this target. Such conflict if managed in a proper way can be useful and constructive.

Gardiner and Simmons (1992) defined conflict in construction sector as "any divergence of interests, objectives or priorities between individuals, groups, or organizations; or nonconformance to requirements of a task, activity or process". Aritzeta and Ayestaran (2005) underlined three basic facets that can formulate conflict definition in construction industry. The first facet is that conflict arises when parties involved in any argument perceive it as a conflict. Secondly, there is a degree of interdependence between the involved parties which allows for mutual influence. The third facet is the scarce resources such as budget, and human resources. These three major facets provoke conflict between different parties in construction sector.

Conflict for many individuals has a potential destructive intention. However, it should be viewed as an opportunity which can be used to evaluate current business practices, examine numerous perspectives, and allow employees to put across their opinions and contribute to the main goal. To establish a constructive conflict culture, top management should concede that conflict is inevitable and it may be used as an affirmative means. Conflict management has an enormous impact on project or organization success if precautionary steps take place to ensure the constructive outcome of conflict. Manifesting the bright side of conflict will encourage employees to face conflicts and manage it, raise communication efficiency, increase commitment and loyalty (Jameson, 1999; Jabnoun, 2005; Gulbranson, 1998; Hatfield and Hatfield, 1996; Farmer and Roth, 1998; Thamhain and Wilemon, 1975).

2.2. Types of Conflict

Conflict has been classified into Interpersonal, Intergroup, Inter-organizational, and International conflicts as stated by Wall and Callister (1995), Harolds and Wood (2006), Fisher et al (2000), Driscoll (1996), Ahmed (2007), Jones and Melcher (1982), DeChurch and Marks (2001), Brown (1992), Elsayed-Ekhouly and Buda (1996), Jameson (1999), Worchel (2005), Farmer and Roth (1998), Jones and Deckro (1993), and Bodtker and Jameson (2001).

In the Intra-personal or Intergroup conflict, the conflict occurs between individuals as role conflict which can take place between colleagues when their values, beliefs, or benefits contradict. Or it can arise when individuals have different roles and these roles requirements cannot meet concurrently.

The Intra-group conflicts begin when groups interests or tasks opposes. Conflict is widespread in construction industry as a result of scarce resources, change in priorities, administrative procedures, schedules, cost overrun, technical difficulties, and personal attributes (Thamhain and Wilemon, 1975; Ng *et al*, 2007).

The inter-organizational conflict arises between organizations due to high market competition, in construction industry inter-organizational conflict is currently common between contractors and clients as a result of many economic factors (i.e. inflation, and material prices fluctuation) particularly in projects with long execution durations.

The International conflict arises between nations and it is common from early decades.

This paper will examine interpersonal and intergroup conflict management. However, the following conflict management styles can be implemented for the other conflict types.

2.3. Sources of Conflict

There are some factors that promote conflict. Scholars determined these factors as communication, change, emotions, values, organization structure, workgroup diversity, and personal experience. If we return to the definition of conflict, it seems to specify several reasonable groupings of sources. Since a party and other are involved in the conflict, some of the sources would stem from the characteristics of each (Antonioni, 1995; Jones and Melcher, 1982; Fine et al, 1990; Wall and Callister, 1995; Driscoll, 1996; Sitkin and Bies, 1993; Worchel, 2005; Jones and Deckro, 1993; Kozan, 1997; Jabnoun, 2005; Snavely, 1993; Brewer et al, 2002; Tjosvold and Su, 2007).

It can be expected that any working groups regularly face relationship conflicts during their day to day activities. Such conflicts could be increased tremendously if the working group consists of individuals from various cultures background, and/or demographic characteristics such as age, race and gender. In other words, these aforementioned elements are called diversity (Desivilya and Yagil, 2005; Jameson, 1999; Polkinghorn and Byrne, 2001; Snavely, 1993; Jones and Deckro, 1993; Dant and Schul, 1992; Jameson, 1999; Ayoko et al, 2002; Farmer and Roth, 1998; Elsayed-Ekhouly and Buda, 1996).

2.3.1. Communication

Unsuccessful communication represents failure as communicators in handling multifaceted subjects or psychologically charged situations. Even though people think that they have communicated satisfactorily, they may fail to understand the

imprecision of interpretation that took place due cultural backgrounds and primary language differences.

In order to maintain effective communication channels, it is critical to consider the environment where the communication is established, as everyone is expected to listen and appreciate the communication that takes place in the same way (Desivilya and Yagil, 2005; Tjosvold and Su, 2007; Jones and Melcher, 1982; Ayoko et al, 2002; Harolds and Wood, 2006; Jameson, 1999; Sitkin and Bies, 1993; Driscoll, 1996; Jabnoun, 2005; Snavely, 1993; Dant and Schul, 1992; Jones and Deckro, 1993; Brewer *et al*, 2002; Antonioni, 1995; Polkinghorn and Byrne, 2001; Fine *et al*, 1990; Elsayed-Ekhouly and Buda, 1996; Wall and Callister, 1995; Worchel, 2005; Kozan, 1997; Farmer and Roth, 1998).

2.3.2. Change

Most employees have pessimistic attitudes towards perceptions of change. There a notion that change means losing a job, position, and/or an extra work load. For these reasons the first reactions will be frustration and rejection of change, if the change is seen as opportunity or chance for improvement such attitudes can be altered. If there is complete information about why change is required and how this change will be implemented employees can react differently (Marshak, 1993; Al-Buraey, 2001; Gardiner and Simmons 1992; Recklies, 2001; Dant and Schul, 1992; Snavely, 1993; Sitkin and Bies, 1993; Gardiner and Simmons, 1995; Marshak, 1993).

As defined by Gardiner and Simmons (1992) in their research about conflict in a construction sector change can be defined as "any alteration by modification, omission or addition to a project document, design, process, or method previously approved or accepted". Therefore, conflict management is an important objective for

the success in construction projects. Construction organizations wishing to develop their market share, their position, and in the meantime commit a world class service to their clients will need to plan ahead for project conflicts arising from change and to acknowledge that conflict for whatever reason is always predictable to happen, and to start handling simultaneously both change and conflict (Gardiner and Simmons, 1995; Ng et al, 2007; Thamhain and Wilemon, 1975).

Project managers need to bear in mind the negative attitudes towards change during implementation in order to achieve the positive expected results. Such results require the participation of all their employees in one way or another to eliminate conflicts. Yet, this is an additional responsibility and stress for them.

Among the reasons for change in construction industry is Organizational Development which is the more regular and evolutionary. In this type, managers assume that it is possible to fulfill both corporate objectives and individual employees' objectives. In practice, this is unlikely to occur. Another reason is Organization Reengineering; this is known as corporate transformation or organization transformation. It is the more radical form of change since it challenges all elements of processes or structures that have developed over time (Recklies, 2001; Dant and Schul, 1992; Marshak, 1993).

In order to manage conflict arising from change successfully, it is necessary to understand the change phases. Project managers need to be familiar with each phase, they have to anticipate what types of situations and problems causing conflict may arise. Most effective project managers are those that are able to adapt themselves and their team members to any new environment responsively. This necessitates designed learning processes that guide them on dealing with conflict to improve organizational effectiveness (Marshak, 1993; Recklies, 2001).

Recklies (2001) suggests seven phases for change which are shock, refusal, rational understanding, emotional acceptance, exercising, realization, and integration (**Figure 1**).

Figure 1 Change Phases adopted from Recklies (2001)

Change in organizations should not be for the sake of change but to bring the organization or workgroup as much as possible closer to the surrounding business environment and to cope with national and international variables (Marshak, 1993; Al-Buraey, 2001).

2.3.3. Emotions

Another factor is emotions, without emotion human conflict does not exist. Emotion like anger can function as motivators to the conflict as they direct behaviors. Thus, conflicts necessitate attention to the emotional content of the dispute in order to facilitate the management (Tjosvold and Su, 2007; Dant and Schul, 1992; Polkinghorn and Byrne, 2001; Driscoll, 1996; Sitkin and Bies, 1993; Jones and Deckro, 1993; Jabnoun, 2005; Bodtker and Jameson, 2001).

2.3.4. Personal Values

Values represent our personal beliefs of what is true and what is false. In addition, they formulate our ethics that control and direct our decisions. Conflicts concerning values become difficult to manage as people describe themselves profoundly by their values which are hard to compromise. Individuals in various cultures value conflict in a different way. Some view it as a beneficial part and others feel that conflict is bad and should be avoided (Harolds and Wood, 2006; Farmer and Roth, 1998; Desivilya and Yagil, 2005; Jones and Deckro, 1993; Snavely, 1993).

2.3.5. Organization Structure

Organization structure is the environment that may include human resources, decisions, communication paths, and the different roles of people. It is likely that when the structure elements need to be restructured as part of development process conflict may arise (Sitkin and Bies, 1993; Jones and Deckro, 1993; Dant and Schul, 1992; Harolds and Wood, 2006; Abusin, 1999; Polkinghorn and Byrne, 2001).

2.3.6. Personal Experience

Personal experience relates to the background and perceptions of the parties involved in a dispute, desired goals both for parties and organizations, and the atmosphere in which the conflict occurs (Desivilya and Yagil, 2005; Gulbranson, 1998; Dant and Schul, 1992; Ayoko *et al*, 2002; Jones and Deckro, 1993; Farmer and Roth, 1998; Elsayed-Ekhouly and Buda, 1996; Driscoll, 1996; Snavely, 1993; Worchel, 2005; Polkinghorn and Byrne, 2001; Kozan, 1997).

2.4. Conflict Outcomes

The resultants of unmanaged conflicts have enormous potential impacts. For instance, affected parties may become persuaded that their interests or needs are not

worthwhile, consequently become less productive, stimulated, and determining unilateral and biased decisions (Elsayed-Ekhouly and Buda, 1996; Ayoko et al, 2002; Wall and Callister, 1995; Harolds and Wood, 2006; Jones and Melcher, 1982; Jones and Deckro, 1993; Aritzeta et al, 2005; Jameson, 1999; Farmer and Roth, 1998; Dant and Schul, 1992; Jones and Melcher, 1982; Polkinghorn and Byrne, 2001; Desivilya and Yagil, 2005; Brewer et al, 2002).

Furthermore, communication and teamwork environment can be eroded, and valuable members could withdraw from organization thus competency will definitely decline. The aforementioned results can be translated into financial costs (Jones and Deckro, 1993; Jameson, 1999; Ayoko et al, 2002; Elsayed-Ekhouly and Buda, 1996; Polkinghorn and Byrne, 2001; Desivilya and Yagil, 2005; Harolds and Wood, 2006; Farmer and Roth, 1998; Aritzeta et al, 2005; Brewer et al, 2002; Jones and Melcher, 1982).

2.5. Management of Conflict

Rahim (2002) provided a very unique interpretation to distinguish between conflict resolution and conflict management. He argued that conflict resolution involves reduction, elimination, or termination of conflict. In other words, conflict resolution considers conflict as a destructive phenomenon. On the other hand, conflict management implies developing efficient strategies to reduce the destructive facet of conflict and enhance positive roles of conflict in order to promote knowledge and effectiveness in organizations.

Among the factors that determine the complexity of managing a conflict are the source, size, number of individuals or groups involved, and the type whether it is an interpersonal, intergroup, or inter-organizational conflict (Jameson, 1999; Tjosvold and

Sun, 2002; Jones and Melcher, 1982; Harolds and Wood, 2006; Gulbranson, 1998; Dant and Schul, 1992; Underwood, 1995; Farmer and Roth, 1998; Tjosvold, 2006).

Conflict arising from any decision is fed from anticipated loss of control, fear from restructuring, and uncertainty. Such resistance could be defeated by an official assertion to employees of the possibility of conflict and the reason for the decision (proactive approach). This eliminates the potentiality of hidden agendas, and informal groups (Underwood, 1995; Dant and Schul, 1992; Farmer and Roth, 1998; Gulbranson, 1998; Jones and Melcher, 1982; Tjosvold, 2006; Jameson, 1999; Tjosvold and Sun, 2002).

Project managers in both the private and public sectors are frequently faced with conflicts, indeed, spend a huge part of their time managing conflicts of various sorts. Even though some conflicts are quite simple, cause slight harm, and can be dealt with by the opposing parties themselves or through regular management practices, many others are multifaceted and can have serious impacts on productivity, group and organizational environment, and morale (Tjosvold, 2006; Nugent, 2002).

In some complex cases Nugent (2002) proposed the possibility of third party intervention to ensure that the conflict is handled effectively. It is quite evident that the earliest the developing conflict is discovered, the easier to resolve it and avoid its destructive impact.

To understand conflict, it is important to realize conflict phases. For instance, conflict arising from any decision will start as a dispute. Initially, the conflict is anticipated before the decision is declared. Secondly, a rumor about the decision starts and the conflict is perceived but not expressed (latent conflict). Thirdly, quiet discussions commence. Then arguments begin to formulate and feelings erupt. The last phase is the open conflict when groups take committed perspective. Unfortunately, most leaders intervene merely in the

last phase (Farmer and Roth, 1998; Jameson, 1999; Tjosvold, 2006; Harolds and Wood, 2006; Fisher et al, 2000; Dant and Schul, 1992; Underwood, 1995; Jones and Melcher, 1982).

Constructive conflict management can be reached easily if employees from different departments consider that their goals are mutual rather than independent, they discuss their differences openly and constructively and use the results to serve the organization goals and objectives (Harolds and Wood, 2006; Fisher et al, 2000; Tjosvold et al, 1992; Dant and Schul, 1992; Farmer and Roth, 1998; Barrier, 1998; Underwood, 1995; Tjosvold, 2006; Jones and Melcher, 1982).

Moreover, managing conflict successfully is fundamental not only because conflict is inevitable, but also it may lead to an exploration of major potential issues, and the creation of solution that fit organization problems (Underwood, 1995; Tjosvold *et al*, 1992; Jones and Melcher, 1982; Harolds and Wood, 2006; Dant and Schul, 1992; Tjosvold, 2006; Fisher *et al*, 2000; Jameson, 1999; Farmer and Roth, 1998).

Song et al (2006) split conflict management styles into two groups. The first group is the *Cooperative conflict-handling strategies* which handle conflict as a constructive and healthy process. The cooperative group includes Integrating, accommodating, and compromising styles in which the conflict participants show moderate to high levels of concern for the requirements of the other party in the management of a conflict (Tjosvold, 2006).

The second group is the *Competitive conflict-handling strategies* as a destructive conflict management styles. This group includes forcing and avoiding approaches in which conflict participants show a low level of concern for others in the management of a conflict (Tjosvold, 2006). However, in some cases forcing may be used to apply change

to the benefit of any organization even if the implementation to be evaluated in later stage (Rahim, 1983).

In constructive or cooperative conflict management, employees consider their aims are positively linked so that as one moves toward goal attainment, others tend to move toward reaching their goal. In other words, they can be successful together. Those employees tend to discuss problems and controversies openly and constructively. They incorporate the most reliable information and ideas to create an appropriate decision they are keen to implement (Jameson, 1999; Jones and Melcher, 1982; Underwood, 1995; Harolds and Wood, 2006; Farmer and Roth, 1998; Tjosvold, 2006; Gulbranson, 1998; Aritzeta *et al*, 2005; Tjosvold *et al*, 1992).

In contrast, employees in destructive or competitive conflict management consider their goals and objectives negatively correlated so that the goal achievement of one makes others less likely to reach their goals. Those employees are closed minded, reject the opposing situation and the employee arguing it, refuse to integrate other ideas into their own decision making and are unsuccessful to reach an agreement. This approach results in avoidance, and low productivity (Jones and Melcher, 1982; Harolds and Wood, 2006; Gulbranson, 1998; Farmer and Roth, 1998; Tjosvold and Sun, 2002; Aritzeta *et al*, 2005; Tjosvold *et al*, 1992; Underwood, 1995; Tjosvold, 2006).

A win-win approach is appropriate to handle intractable conflicts. Project managers can employ innovative approach by inviting voluntarily the conflicting groups to an open debate to reach mutual satisfaction, the way or style in which conflict is managed can workgroups performance and productivity (Harolds and Wood, 2006; Gulbranson, 1998; Aritzeta *et al*, 2005; Tjosvold, 2006; Dant and Schul, 1992; Underwood, 1995; Jones and Melcher, 1982).

As a project manager each conflict provides an occasion for development and a chance to enrich organization relationships if managed properly. Disagreement gives employees an opportunity to express feelings and opinions that create new ideas. Instead of dealing with conflict as a personal attack manage it through open discussions (Myers, 1995; Underwood, 1995; Jones and Melcher, 1982).

2.6. The Islamic Model

2.6.1. Introduction

Nearly all the literature concerning Islamic conflict management not only considers conflict as inevitable but as a part of the human nature. In addition, conflict is considered as mercy and enrichment to any debate if managed properly (Abusin, 1999; Jabnoun, 2005; Ahmed, 2007; Unus, 1998; Abdalla, 2001; Al-Buraey, 2001; Khadra, 1990; Yousef, 2000).

The Islamic approach to conflict management is derived from the major principles and values of Islam as a religion such as justice, equality, freedom, positive critics and goal oriented thinking (Kamali, 2006; Abdalla, 2001; Yousef, 2000; Al-Buraey, 2001; Khadra, 1990; Rehman, 2003).

Leadership has a vital impact on conflict management. Among the roles of the leader (Project Manager) is to resolve conflicts; such a role requires belief and trust of the followers (Employees) (Khadra, 1990). The nature of Islam as an adaptive method of thinking allows individuals to implement several techniques to cope with conflict even if such techniques are imported from western cultures unless such styles contradict with Islamic values and principles (Abdalla, 2001; Rehman, 2003; Yousef, 2000; Kamali, 2006; Al-Buraey, 2001; Khadra, 1990).

Ali (1996) argues that in Islamic schools of thought destructive conflict is an attribute of an unhealthy condition as it is considered as a risk to conformity and cohesiveness of the group. Conflict can be managed constructively by the integrity in handling subjects, and by expressing concerns through strong-willed debate. Thus, consensus can be become settled. Furthermore, he stated that debating issues raising constructive conflict is necessary for group benefit and that differences in ideas should be respected. Conflict can become a foundation for positive change, and can direct to the voicing of concerns to promote awareness which is important to avoid stagnation.

Change as a source for conflict from the Islamic perspective is neither cyclical nor linear. In other words, no change is planned without a target or objective. Change is usually goal oriented and is a normal process. It reflects the internal and external situations, moves from one phase to another when it is required and can be applicable. Nevertheless, balance should be maintained to avoid any disharmony (Ali, 1996; Al-Buraey, 2001).

In the Islamic religion, conflict is a common fact. There are different forces that provoke it, when the surrounding environment cannot handle it. It is time for leaders to take action. Leaders, however, are not considered passive actors; rather leaders are proactive in handling conflict in a way that serves their own ambition and their organization's interests (Ali, 1996; Al-Buraey, 2001).

2.6.2. The Proactive model

The aim of this approach is to preserve equilibrium between different parties. Therefore, conflict should be managed, and monitored by all stakeholders (Ali, 1996; Al-Buraey, 2001).

The Islamic proactive model is appropriate for dealing with any conflict arising from different perspectives to any required decision, or any other source of conflict. Noor (2002) described a Proactive model which stemmed from the Prophet Mohammed's PBUH leadership paragon and consists of progression steps which are survey, approach, diagnose, plan, act, appraise, and institutionalize (**Figure 2**).

Before introducing any decision or task and to eliminate any destructive conflict, a survey for surrounding environment including the cultural diversity of all stakeholders, the communication paths, and expected behavior against such decision or task should be conducted.
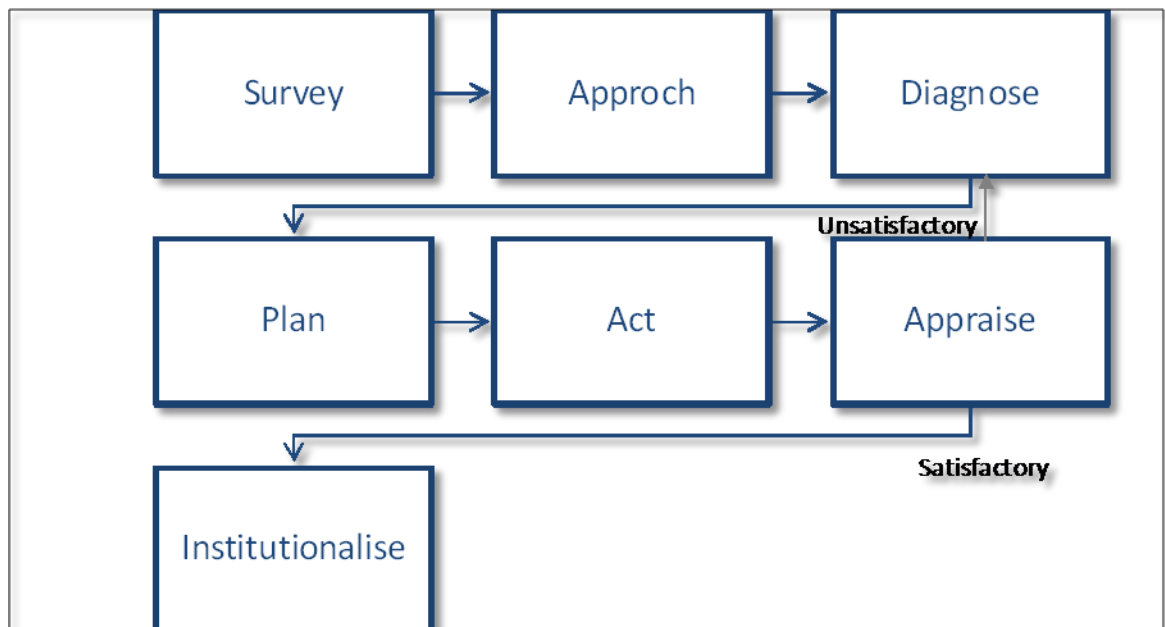
Figure 2 the Proactive model by Noor (2002)

The second step in this stage is based on the survey, a limited constructive debate between experienced parties and companions to be held to discuss the findings and propose solution to the expected opposition. Then diagnosis and contingency plans are set to cope with the anticipated outcomes of the conflict due

to the decision or the new task. Consequently detailed planning for the implementation sequence of the task is set deliberately (Noor, 2002).

Subsequently the task is introduced and implemented. A conflict management team is developed; this team consists of the experience parties and companions who participated in the approach or early stage as an arbitrator to any arising conflicts. Afterward a deliberate appraisal to the task or decision impacts on stakeholders' and the workplace environment will be held. If the appraisal outcome is satisfactory the task or decision will be institutionalized in the organization. However, if the outcomes are unsatisfactory, the management team can return to the planning steps to revise it and continue the sequential steps (Noor, 2002).

However, conflict may arise, in such a case The SALAM conflict management style in conjunction with the S.N.T pre-conflict model described by Ahmed (2007) and Unus (1998) can be implemented.

2.6.3. The SALAM model

Figure 3 illustrates the SALAM model which starts by "Stating" the conflict view (S), which means that the disagreement is defined apparently to all parties participating in such conflict. In other words, the conflict nature, source, and size are to be stated clearly.

Subsequently, the participating parties should "Agree" (A) that a disagreement exists without making any judgment and disregarding any personal bias. Then a "Listen and Learn" (L) process takes place between parties which is the hard part of the model. Most parties listen to others to respond, however, in this model parties listen to other points of view to learn about the disagreement.

An excellent listens and learns process can be practiced through switching the positions. In other words each party adopts the other position and defends the idea in a consulting environment.

Such conflict environment will foster "Advising" (A) one another by finding a common area that both are sharing as a ground for conflict management. In addition, after agreement about the intervention one party may propose to assist others in a proactive behavior that facilitates implementing the intervention and foster collaboration environment. After that by "Minimizing" (M) aspects of conflict as possible through a proactive debate, destructive conflict sources could be dried (Ahmed, 2007; Unus, 1998).

- **S** • Stating the conflict view
- **A** • Agreeing that conflict exists
- **L** • Listeningfor and learning the difference
- **A** • Advising one another
- **M** • Minimising areas of disagreement that could lead to aggression or withdrawal
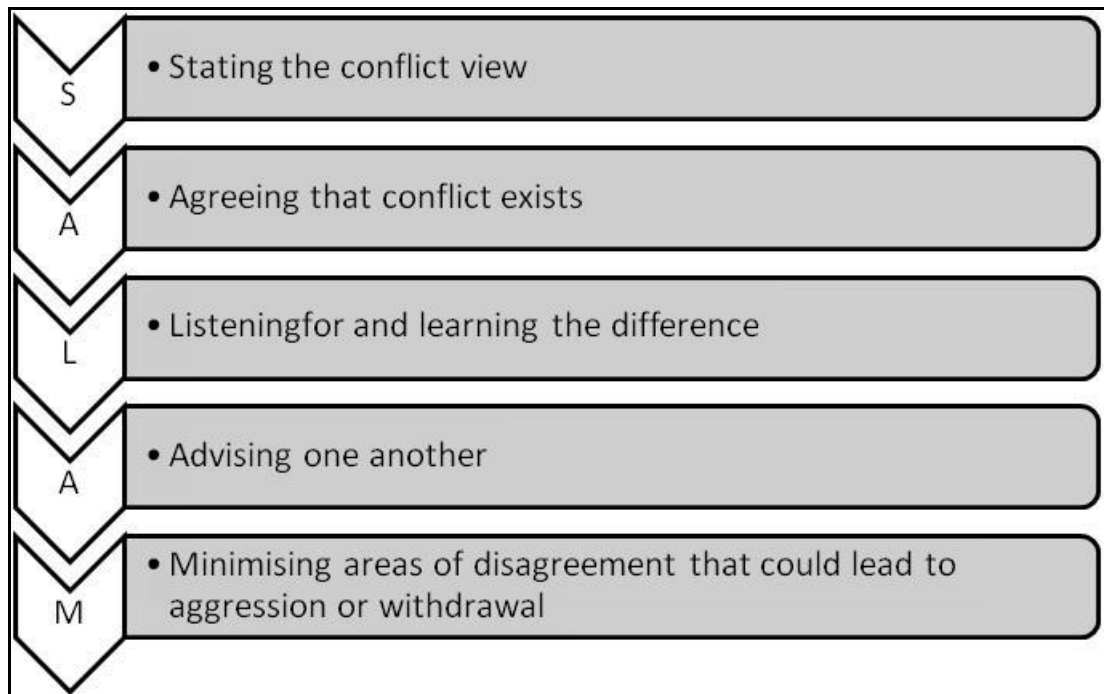
Figure 3 the SALAM model Ahmed (2007) and Unus (1998)

2.6.4. The S.N.T formula

Figure 4 illustrates the S.N.T formula which is a proactive process that fosters constructive conflicts. Avoiding conflict in the S.N.T formula does not

refer to conflict ignorance; it stands for ways to enrich favorable and constructive conflicts. The "S" stands for a significant principle in the Islamic religion which is "Shura". It means consultation, consulting others before implementing any task that will have impact on them. Such approach will diminish disagreement between parties and create a supportive environment for that task (Driscoll, 1996; Ahmed, 2007; Unus, 1998)
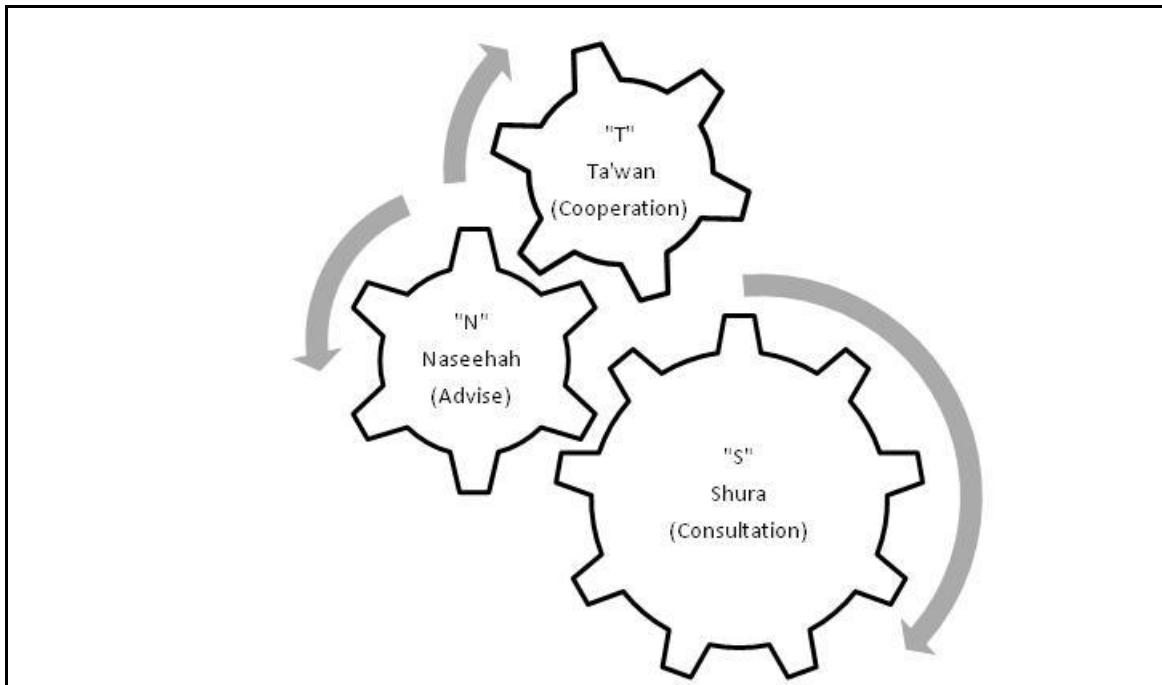
Figure 4 the S.N.T formula Ahmed (2007) and Unus (1998)

The second principle is "Naseeha (N)" which means advice. Advice can be offered to all stakeholders from leader to labors, a feedback to management will provide clear outline about the task or decision effects. A truthful guidance between parties fosters common understanding of their consequences and reasons.

The last element "Ta'wun (T)" indicates to cooperation which is essential to any task and between working groups or departments. Such attitude will promote healthy communication, reduce task opponents, and eliminate hostile workplace environment (Ahmed, 2007; Unus, 1998).

2.7. The Western Model

2.7.1. Introduction

The expression *Conflict Management Strategy* is used to demonstrate any action used by a disputant or third party to attempt to handle or resolve a conflict. Such strategies may include formal mechanisms for managing conflict such as negotiation, arbitration, or mediation (Jameson, 1999; Nugent, 2002; Euwema et al, 2003). Therefore, these strategies can be defined as conflict resolution strategies (Rahim, 2002).

On the other hand, informal mechanisms are described by most scholars in the field of conflict management strategies and techniques as the five basic behaviors or styles to deal with conflict. The five basic styles are *Avoiding*, *Accommodating*, *Forcing*, *Collaborating*, and *Compromising*. These strategies are explained below. Conflict style refers to particular behavioral practices that individual prefers to use when facing conflict situation (Rahim *et al*, 1999a; Ritov and Drory, 1996; Euwema *et al*, 2003; Munduate *et al*, 1999; Brown, 1992; Kozan, 1997; Elsayed-Ekhouly and Buda, 1996; Farmer and Roth, 1998; Wall and Callister, 1995; Moberg, 2001; Harolds and Wood, 2006; Fisher *et al*, 2000; Jones and Melcher, 1982; Rahim *et al*, 1999b; Aritzeta *et al*, 2005; Gross and Guerrero, 2000; Jameson, 1999; Dant and Schul, 1992; Kurtzberg and Mueller, 2005; Sitkin and Bies, 1993; Drory and Ritov, 1997; Jones and Melcher, 1982).

The main concept of these styles is how the individual concerned is directed towards his needs or others needs according to two scale high and low (Moberg, 2001; Ritov and Drory, 1996; Munduate *et al*, 1999; Brown, 1992; Kozan, 1997; Wall and Callister, 1995; Rahim *et al*, 1999b; Harolds and Wood, 2006; Elsayed-

Ekhouly and Buda, 1996; Fisher *et al*, 2000; Jones and Melcher, 1982; Rahim *et al*, 1999; Aritzeta *et al*, 2005; Gross and Guerrero, 2000; Kurtzberg and Mueller, 2005; Farmer and Roth, 1998; Sitkin and Bies, 1993; Drory and Ritov, 1997; Dant and Schul, 1992; Jones and Melcher, 1982). (**Figure 5**)
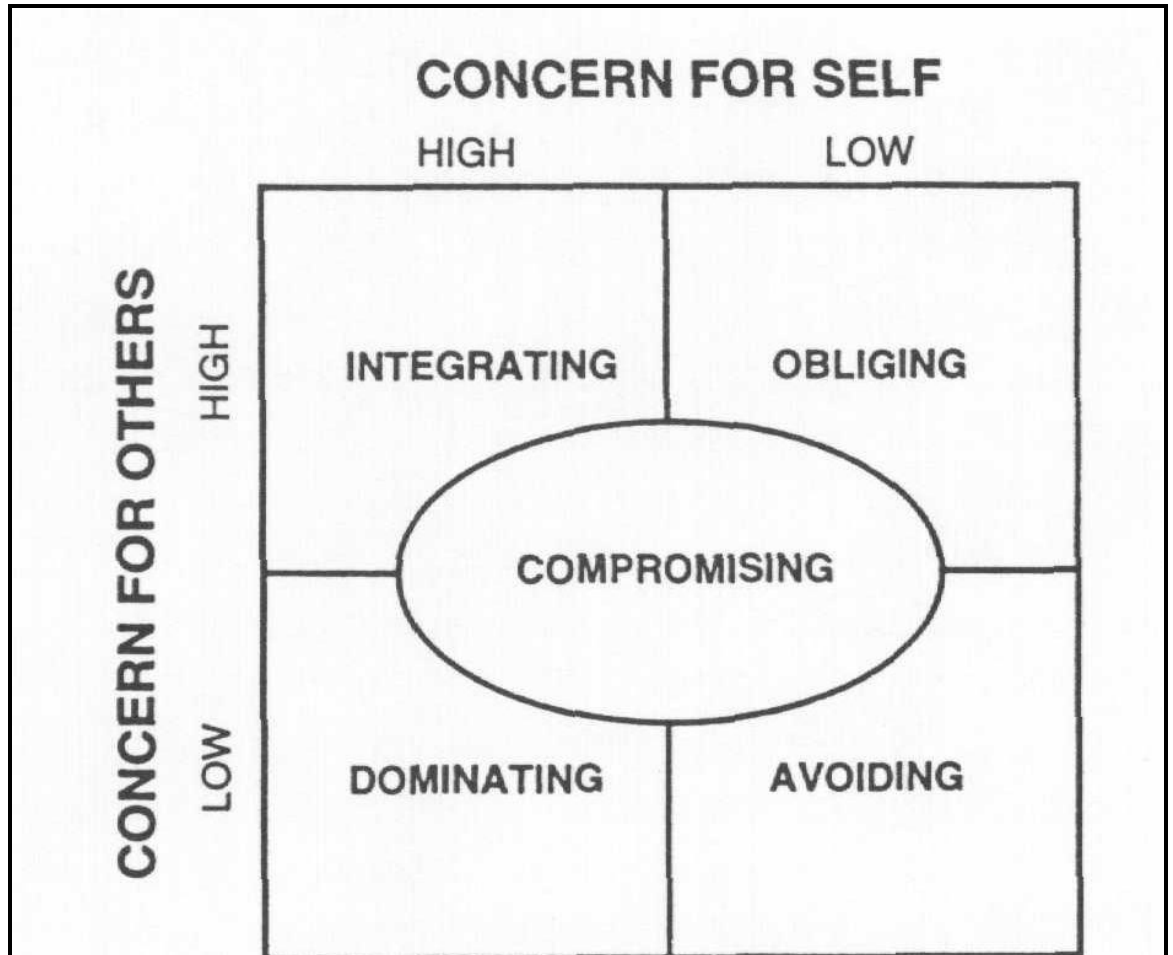
Figure 5 Conflict Management Styles adapted from Rahim et al, 1999

2.7.2. Avoiding:

Some researchers refer to it as *Withdrawing*. In this method we try to avoid pursuing the own interests and to postpone the conflict until a better time. Avoidance could be applied when coping with minor conflicts or not directly relevant to organization objectives. However, such minor conflicts could alter into major ones in a long term period.

Consequently it is unwise to neglect them. Avoidance may take different patterns such as denial, ignoring the problem, appointing others to tackle the conflict, and acceptance of temporary superficial remedy to a severe problem. The leader personality plays a vital role in deciding the approach to remedy the conflict.

A short tempered leader with a poor work experience, and/or demonstrating bias, and denying the responsibility for errors may go for avoidance as a prime choice for conflict management (Tjosvold and Sun, 2002; Rahim *et al*, 1999; Elsayed-Ekhouly and Buda, 1996; Jones and Melcher, 1982; Ritov and Drory, 1996; Munduate *et al*, 1999; Euwema *et al*, 2003; Brown, 1992; Kozan, 1997; Wall and Callister, 1995; Farmer and Roth, 1998; Sitkin and Bies, 1993; Harolds and Wood, 2006; Fisher *et al*, 2000; Moberg, 2001; Fine *et al*, 1990; Driscoll, 1996; Worchel, 2005; Kozan, 1997; Jones and Melcher, 1982; Aritzeta *et al*, 2005; Gross and Guerrero, 2000; Kurtzberg and Mueller, 2005; Drory and Ritov, 1997).

2.7.3. Accommodating:

The accommodating conflict-handling strategy is also known as non-confrontation. In this approach, a low concern for self and a high concern for others and is often related with an emphasis on issues held in common.

In such a model one of the parties satisfies the others concerns and expectations and disregards his/her own interests. The main goal of this strategy is to meet the needs of the other party. Information tends to run in one direction only (Munduate et al, 1999; Brown, 1992; Sitkin and Bies, 1993; Kozan, 1997; Jones and Melcher, 1982; Farmer and Roth, 1998; Wall and Callister, 1995; Harolds and

Wood, 2006; Fisher et al, 2000; Euwema et al, 2003; Rahim et al, 1999; Elsayed-Ekhouly and Buda, 1996; Song et al, 2006; Moberg, 2001; Drory and Ritov, 1997; Aritzeta et al, 2005; Gross and Guerrero, 2000; Kurtzberg and Mueller, 2005).

2.7.4. Forcing:

also known as *Competing* or *Dominating* in this approach the conflict participant does whatever is needed to make sure that his/her ideas dominate, thus demonstrating high concern for self and low concern for others involved in the dispute. For instance, the party in a powerful position may use their power, via authority, relationships, or other power sources, to force subordinates to accept solutions and to ensure their obedience.

This approach has little two-way communication and often results in compliance, not commitment. The powerful party utilizes whatever authority and means it has, such as influence, situation, and relations in the organization to win the dispute at the other person expense disregarding his/her concerns.

This approach can be implemented through penalization of offenders, or isolating those who hold opposing opinions so they interact as little as possible. However, such a remedy can lead to frustration and eliminate the healthy facet of conflict (Jones and Melcher, 1982; Song *et al*, 2006; Sitkin and Bies, 1993; Ritov and Drory, 1996; Moberg, 2001; Munduate *et al*, 1999; Brown, 1992; Kozan, 1997; Euwema *et al*, 2003; Tjosvold *et al*, 1992; Elsayed-Ekhouly and Buda, 1996; Wall and Callister, 1995; Harolds and Wood, 2006; Fisher *et al*, 2000; Jones and Melcher, 1982; Farmer and Roth, 1998; Drory and Ritov, 1997; Aritzeta *et al*, 2005; Gross and Guerrero, 2000; Kurtzberg and Mueller, 2005; Rahim *et al*, 1999).

2.7.5. Integrating:

In some research known as *Collaborating*, all parties work with each other to find some creative ideas which will fully satisfy the concerns, interests, and combine the goals of them all. In such a method, the leader brings latent or anticipated conflicts to the surface to achieve a wide open solution to the issue (Jones and Melcher, 1982; Harolds and Wood, 2006; Gulbranson, 1998; Wall and Callister, 1995; Driscoll, 1996; Sitkin and Bies, 1993; Rahim et al, 1999; Worchel, 2005; Euwema et al, 2003; Moberg, 2001; Kozan, 1997; Elsayed-Ekhouly and Buda, 1996; Jones and Melcher, 1982; Drory and Ritov, 1997; Farmer and Roth, 1998; Aritzeta et al, 2005; Song et al, 2006; Gross and Guerrero, 2000; Kurtzberg and Mueller, 2005).

2.7.6. Compromising:

parties negotiate with each other to reach mutually acceptable solutions which partially satisfy all parties assuming that all will abandon some of their interests (Ritov and Drory, 1996; Munduate et al, 1999; Brown, 1992; Drory and Ritov, 1997; Kozan, 1997; Sitkin and Bies, 1993; Wall and Callister, 1995; Jones and Melcher, 1982; Harolds and Wood, 2006; Rahim et al, 1999; Fisher et al, 2000; Fine et al, 1990; Elsayed-Ekhouly and Buda, 1996; Euwema et al, 2003; Driscoll, 1996; Worchel, 2005; Kozan, 1997; Jones and Melcher, 1982; Song et al, 2006; Aritzeta et al, 2005; Gross and Guerrero, 2000; Farmer and Roth, 1998; Kurtzberg and Mueller, 2005; Moberg, 2001).

2.8. Literature Review Summary

The literature review described the conflict definitions, types, sources and conflict outcomes. This shows that the Islamic and Western schools of thought share the same concepts regarding the aforementioned conflict characteristics.

In addition, both the three Islamic conflict management styles the Proactive, the SALAM, and SNT models and the five basic western conflict management styles were also explained thoroughly.

3. Research Hypothesis

H_{01}:   There is no relationship between Islamic conflict management styles and the Cooperative conflict-handling strategies.

H_{02}:   There is a no correlation between Islamic conflict management styles and individuals' demographic characteristics (Gender & Nationality).

H_{03}:   There is a no correlation between Islamic conflict management styles and individuals' age.

H_{04}:   There is a no correlation between Islamic conflict management styles and individual managerial position (Decision Maker, or Influencer).

H_{05}:   There is a no correlation between Islamic conflict management styles and individuals' level of Education.

H_{06}:   There is a no correlation between Islamic conflict management styles and the availability of conflict management policy in any organization.

4. Methodology

4.1. Description of the Research Design

In this research, the relationship between the demographic characteristics of the participants and the independent conflict management style were examined. The responses to the research instrument-survey questionnaire-from the sample provided an empirical explanation of the results. This technique was chosen because it can be valuable in describing characteristics of a large population. Standardized questionnaires can assist strengthen the measurement factors explored in this research. Survey research usually is high in reliability (Blaikie, 2003; Balnaves and Caputi, 2001). Reliability is significant in this research because the questionnaire can be used in future studies. Using a survey for this research was proper as surveys are very useful in describing the characteristics of large populations (Blaikie, 2003; Balnaves and Caputi, 2001).

In order to get appropriate questionnaire to this research, the Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory-II (Rahim, 1983) was applied to suit the research purpose. For measuring the Islamic conflict management styles an 8-item scale questions developed by the researcher was added to the main instrument. The wording of the questionnaire is important to minimize bias, for such reason the Islamic and Western conflict management styles were mentioned as methods (method 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6) (**Appendix A**). It was expected that the questionnaire would have high reliability and validity.

The relation of the tested variables is a correlation relationship rather than a causal relationship. Correlation is an empirical link between two variables such that changes in one are linked with changes in the other. However, correlation alone does not form a

causal relationship between two variables but is one measure of a causal relationship (Blaikie, 2003; Balnaves and Caputi, 2001).

4.2. Target Population

The population examined is all employees from different organizations working for the Construction Industry in the UAE. The target population of this research is project managers working for both government and private sections in UAE.

4.3. Sample

The sample consists of a diverse group of employees who have various job responsibilities, genders, ethnic backgrounds, and education level in the UAE. Gays' (1996) formula was used to select the sample size. Gays's (1996) guidelines are as follows:

1. For small populations (N<100), there is little point in sampling. Survey the entire population.

2. If the population size is around 500, 50% of the population should be sampled.

3. If the population is around 1,500, 20% should be sampled.

4. Beyond a certain point (at approximately N=5,000), the population size is almost irrelevant, and a sample size of 400 will be adequate.

4.4. Instrument

There are 36 questions in this instrument. Demographic information is collected from the questionnaire using the first seven questions. Twenty questions are used to measure the Western conflict management style and eight questions for measuring the Islamic conflict management styles. The survey questionnaire was typed in English language only. All the 28 questions uses a 5-point Likert scale, the scale is set up as follows: (1)

strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neither agree or disagree, (4) agree, and (5) strongly agree. The last question is used to determine the best practice in handling conflict (**Appendix A**).

4.5. Data Collection Procedures

The participants received and returned the questionnaire via e-mail addresses, or by hand. The questionnaires were e-mailed or distributed upon acceptance of the research proposal. It was e-mailed or delivered to a random sample size of 450 individuals working for construction sector and its supporting services industry in UAE.

Data were gathered over 5 months, 381 replies were collected with a reply rate of nearly 81%. There was an explanation introduction indicating the purpose of the study and assuring the respondents that their feedback is confidential. Those respondents who did not return the questionnaire in 14 days were sent a second e-mail encouraging a reply to the survey. A reminder did follow the second e-mail approximately 4 weeks later. It was the target of the research to achieve a response rate of 70% or higher, which is considered a good return rate (Blaikie, 2003; Balnaves and Caputi, 2001).

5. Data Analysis

This research study consisted of the integrated data gathered from the 36 questions. This data was analyzed using the *Statistical Package for the Social Sciences* (SPSS). The tests which were implemented were reliability tests, correlation tests, regression analysis tests, a significance test of the variables (t test), the R-squared statistic, which shows how the independent variables are explained in the model, the adjusted R-squared, which indicates the percent of error in the model, the significant F change, which indicates if there is no correlation between the variables, and an ANOVA test that shows an F statistic, at a .05 confidence level, which again indicates the relationship of the variables. (**Appendix C**)

Results of the data analysis are discussed in two primary sections: a) Descriptive statistics, and b) Inferential Statistics. Testing of the hypothesis was based on correlations between Islamic conflict management styles, Cooperative conflict management styles, and Demographic elements.

5.1. Descriptive Statistics

5.1.1. Summary Statistics

Of the 470 surveys that were distributed by either E-mails or personally, 381 were returned, for a response rate of 81%. Such response rate can be considered high and significant (Blaikie, 2003; Balnaves and Caputi, 2001). Five surveys were eliminated due to incomplete responses and 19 due to their location outside UAE. The data from the remaining 357 usable surveys that were returned indicated that approximately 41.2% of the respondents were female, nearly 47% were decision makers, almost 32% were between 31 to 40 years old and 37% are between 25 to 30 years old, 72% were from the Middle East region, approximately 57% were not having a conflict

management policy in their organizations, and about 31% were holding a Master degree (**Appendix B**).

In summary, it appears that the sample mostly comprised older males with much project management experience, holding a postgraduate degree, and who work in managerial position that allows him to take decisions. **Table I** provides a complete summary of the above.

Table I

Demographic Summary of
Respondents

Demographic Variables	Position Frequency	Position Percent	Gender Frequency	Gender Percent	Age Frequency	Age Percent	Nationality Frequency	Nationality Percent	Education Frequency	Education Percent	Availability of Conflict Management Policy Frequency	Availability of Conflict Management Policy Percent
Decision Maker	168	47.10%										
Influencer	189	52.90%										
Male			210	58.80%								
Female			147	41.20%								
<25					62	17.40%						
25_30					133	37.30%						
31_40					113	31.70%						
41_50					21	5.90%						
>50					28	7.80%						
Middle East & Arabian Gulf Countries							258	72.30%				
East Asia Countries							43	12.00%				
Europe & North America Countries							56	15.70%				
BE									35	9.80%		
B.Sc.									210	58.80%		
M.Sc.									112	31.40%		
Yes											153	42.90%
No											204	57.10%
Total	357	100%	357	100%	357	100%	357	100%	357	100%	357	100%

5.1.2. Means and Standard Deviations for Measurement Variables

Mean scores and standard deviations for the conflict management styles are reported in **Table II**. The respondents indicate high levels of Cooperative (Integrating, Accommodating, and Compromising) (4.01) and SNT & SALAM styles (3.98) of conflict management handling. The least frequently used conflict management styles were the Competitive styles (Forcing and Avoiding) (2.53).

Table II

Means and Standard Deviations Conflict Management Styles

Conflict Management Style	M	SD
SNT & SALAM	3.98	0.438
Cooperative Conflict Handling Strategies	4.01	0.406
Competitive Conflict Handling Strategies	2.53	0.719

Mean scores, standard deviations, and median for the respondents demographic elements are reported in **Table III**.

Table III

Means and Standard Deviations Demographic Elements

Conflict Management Style	M	SD
Position	1.530	0.500
Gender	1.410	0.493
Age	2.500	1.090
Nationality	1.430	0.749
Education	2.220	0.605
Availability of Conflict Management Policy	1.570	0.496

5.1.3. Measurement Scale Reliabilities

Tables IV summarize scale internal consistency reliabilities, based on Cronbach's alpha, for each of the measurement scales. As the table shows, the alpha values for study measures ranged between 0.770 and 0.852 with an average rate of 0.802. Provided that alpha values over 0.60 are generally acceptable, it can be concluded that the scales used in this study are highly reliable. The reliabilities appear to be satisfactory and consistent (Blaikie, 2003).

Table IV

Internal Consistency Reliabilities-Conflict Management Style Scale

Conflict Management Style	Cronbach's Alpha
SNT & SALAM	0.770
Cooperative Conflict Handling Strategies	0.785
Competitive Conflict Handling Strategies	0.852
Average	0.802

5.2. Inferential Statistics

5.2.1. Hypotheses Tests

The respondents' demographic elements and the conflict management styles were correlated to test the hypotheses. Correlations are reported in **Table V**.

Table V

Pearson Correlations: Demographic Elements and Conflict Management Styles

	SNT & SALAM	Cooperative Conflict Handling Strategies	Competitive Conflict Handling Strategies
Position	0.227**	0.282**	0.039
Gender	0.002	-0.021	0.390**
Age	0.137**	0.170**	-0.233**
Nationality	-0.062	-0.012	-0.264**
Education	0.057	0.016	-0.056
Availability of Conflict Management Policy	0.046	-0.115*	-.0164**
Competitive conflict handling strategies	-0.241**	-0.305**	
Cooperative conflict handling strategies	0.261**		

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

5.2.2. Evaluation of Hypotheses

<u>Hypothesis 1</u>

H_{01}: There is no correlation between Islamic conflict management styles and the *Cooperative conflict-handling strategies*.

Results in **Table V** and **Table VI** indicate that there is a weak, positive, and significant correlation at $p<.01$ between an Islamic style of conflict management and the Cooperative conflict handling strategies ($r = .261$). In addition, t calculated (5.093) > t distribution (1.96) at $p=.05$, thus the null hypothesis H01 can be rejected.

Such positive correlation supports the idea that the Islamic conflict management styles can be considered as a constructive method for handling conflict. In summary, results indicate some support for the first hypothesis. Based on the results of the first hypothesis test, the theoretical framework is as shown in **Figure 6**.

Table VI

Regression Analysis: Demographic Elements and Conflict Management Styles

Variable	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	t calculated	p- Value
Cooperative Conflict Handling Strategies - SNT & SALAM	0.261**	0.068	0.065	5.093	0.00
Gender & Nationality - SNT & SALAM	0.066	0.004	-0.001	-1.244	0.21
Age - SNT & SALAM	0.137**	0.019	0.016	2.603	0.01
Managerial Position- SNT & SALAM	0.227**	0.051	0.049	4.39	0.00
Education Level - SNT & SALAM	0.057	0.003	0.000	1.072	0.29
Availability of Conflict Management Policy - SNT & SALAM	0.046	0.002	0.000	0.867	0.39

 **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
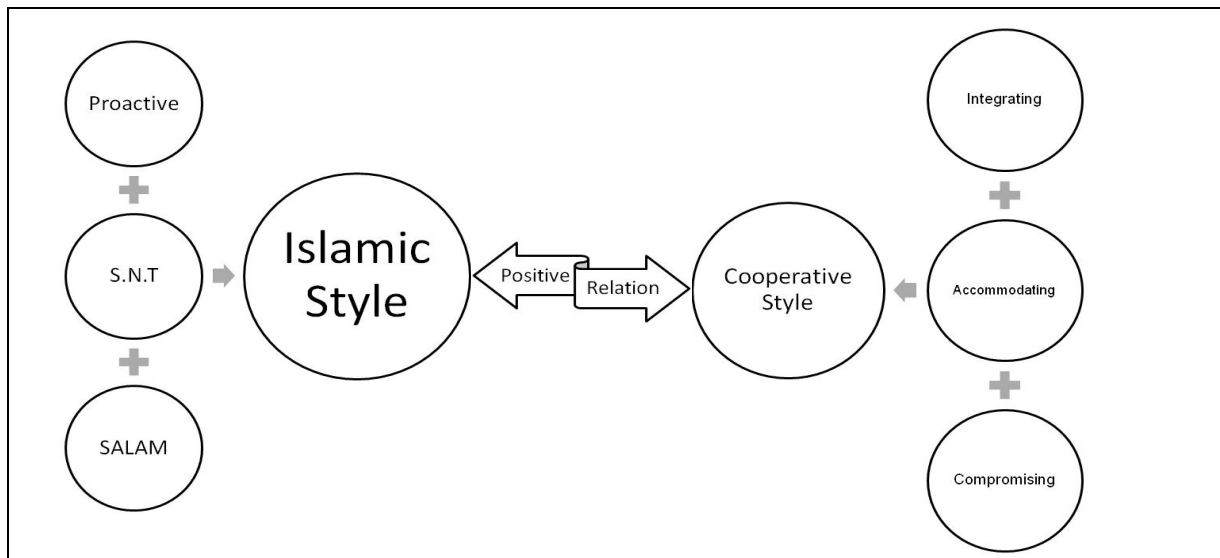
Figure 6 Correlation between Islamic and Cooperative styles

Hypothesis 2

H_{02}:   There is a no correlation between Islamic style of conflict management and the Demographic elements (Gender & Nationality).

Results in **Table V** and **Table VI** indicate a non significant correlation between an Islamic style of conflict management and Demographic elements (Gender & Nationality)

(r = 0.066). In addition, t calculated (1.244) < t distribution (1.96) at p=.05, thus the null hypothesis H02 cannot be rejected.

Such relationship supports the null hypothesis and the idea that any project manager can implement Islamic conflict management style regardless of his/her Nationality and Gender.

Hypothesis 3

H_{03}:   There is a no correlation between Islamic style of conflict management and the Age.

Results in **Table V** and **Table VI** demonstrate a weak, positive, and significant relationship at $p < .01$ between Islamic style of conflict management and the Age of individuals ($r = 0.137$) and adjusted R2 value (0.016) which means that the age of individuals has a significant influence on implementing Islamic conflict management styles. It explained 1.6% of variance in Islamic models. In addition, t calculated (2.603) >t distribution (1.96) at $p = .05$. In summary, the null hypothesis H03 can be rejected.

Hypothesis 4

H_{04}:   There is a no correlation between Islamic style of conflict management and the managerial position (Decision Maker, or Influencer).

Results in **Table V** and **Table VI** indicate a weak, positive, and significant relationship at $p < .01$ between Islamic style of conflict management and the Managerial Position of individuals ($r = 0.227$). The adjusted R2 value (0.049) means that the managerial position of individuals has a significant influence on implementing Islamic conflict management styles. It explained 4.9% of variance in Islamic models. In addition, t calculated (4.390) > t distribution (1.96) at ($p = .05$). In summary, the null hypothesis H04 can be rejected.

Hypothesis 5

H_{05}:   There is a no correlation between Islamic style of conflict management and the level of Education.

Results in **Table V** and **Table VI** illustrate a non significant correlation between Islamic styles of conflict management and individuals level of education ($r = 0.057$). In addition, t calculated (1.072) < t distribution (1.96) at $p = .05$, thus the null hypothesis H05 cannot be rejected.

<u>Hypothesis 6</u>

H$_{06}$:   There is a no correlation between Islamic style of conflict management and the availability of conflict management policy in any organization.

Results in **Table V** and **Table VI** indicate a non significant correlation between Islamic styles of conflict management and the availability of conflict management policy in individuals organization (r = 0.046). In addition, t calculated (0.867) < t distribution (1.96) at p=.05, thus the null hypothesis H06 cannot be rejected.

6. Discussion and Recommendations

6.1. Research Questions

The proposed questions were a) is there an Islamic conflict management model exists for project managers to implement in their workplace? b) Can this model be considered as a constructive model? c) Is such model beneficial and can be implemented by western project managers and individuals?

The literature review have answered and supported the first and second research questions. The Islamic styles such as the proactive, S.N.T, and SALAM are pure Islamic approaches to handle conflict. In addition, the research results suggest that there is a positive correlation between Islamic conflict management styles and Cooperative Conflict Handling. Thus, Islamic conflict management styles can be considered as a constructive conflict handling style (H_{01a} the alternative hypothesis).

Regarding the research third question, the results suggest that the nationality and/or gender of individuals have no significant influence on implementing Islamic conflict management styles. Therefore, western project managers will not feel uncomfortable if they decided to implement the Islamic approach inside their workplace.

General conclusions can be made with regard to the Islamic conflict management styles to manage interpersonal and intergroup conflict.

6.2. Discussion

Islamic conflict management styles are closely related to the mechanisms shown to reduce intergroup and interpersonal conflicts. For example, the Proactive model appraises activities that enhance communication between multiple groups through

relationship building. In addition, activities that increase the exchange of understanding and information of others' interests can support Islamic conflict management styles.

Results reflect that Islamic conflict management styles are Cooperating style, and those styles are related to the position and age of the individuals. Furthermore, **Table VII** interprets the participants' vision against the Best Practice style to manage conflict. Almost 50% of Decision Makers preferred the Islamic conflict management styles. Such trend is supported by the fourth hypothesis H04 (**Figure 7**)
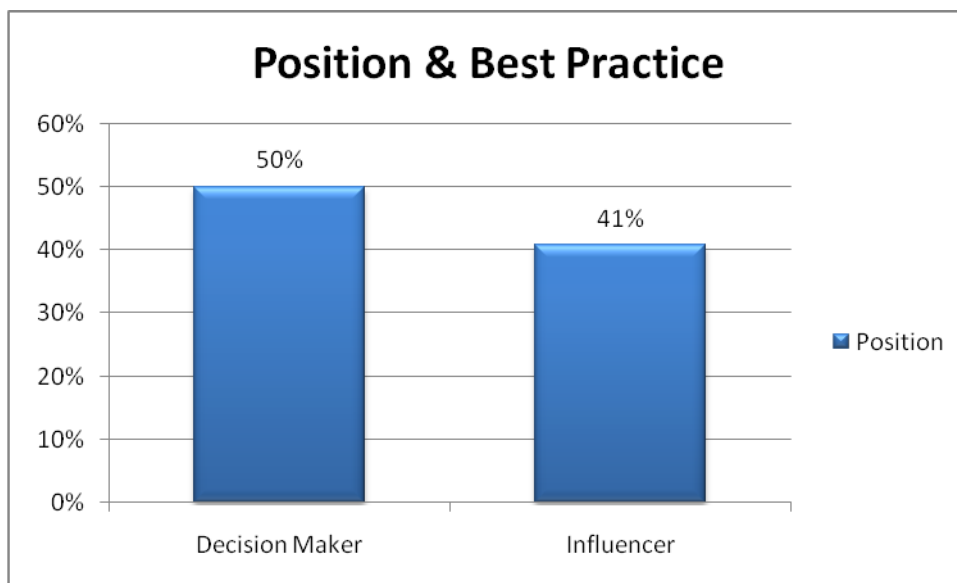
**Figure 7** Managerial Positions and Best Practice

Table VII

Frequencies of Best Practice against Demographic Summary of Respondents

| Demographic Variables	Position		Gender		Age		Nationality		Education		Availability of Conflict Management Policy	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Decision Maker	84	50%										
Influencer	77	41%										
Male			84	40%								
Female			77	44%								
<25					41	66%						
25_30					56	42%						
31_40					36	32%						
41_50					14	67%						
>50					14	50.0%						
Middle East & Arabian Gulf Countries							111	43%				
East Asia Countries							36	84%				
Europe & North America Countries							14	25%				
BE									7	20%		
B.Sc.									112	53%		
M.Sc.									42	38%		
Yes											62	41%
No											99	49%

In addition, 44% of Females choose the Islamic conflict management styles (**Figure 8**). Nevertheless, the second hypothesis H_{02} rejects that there is correlation between gender and the Islamic conflict management styles. Almost 67% of participants' age 31 to 40 and 50 % age over 50 favored Islamic conflict management styles (**Figure 9**). Again such path is supported by the third hypothesis H_{03}.

These findings point that older and high managerial level employees showed higher level of preferring Islamic conflict management styles than low managerial level employees. Such approach can be explained as older and high managerial level employees are likely to be experienced and working in senior positions and consequently their ability to handle the different sources that may raise conflicts is likely to be higher than those who are less experienced and occupying less position.
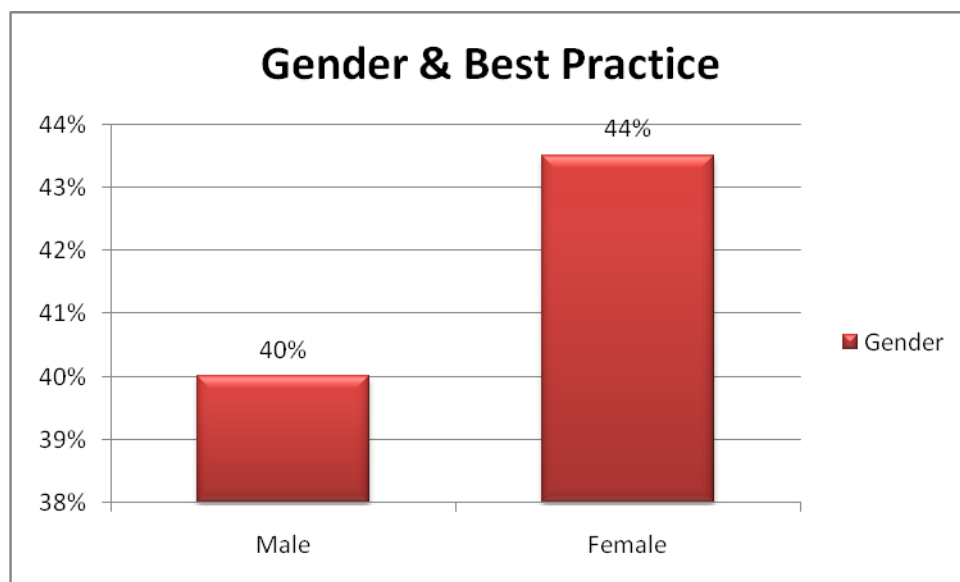
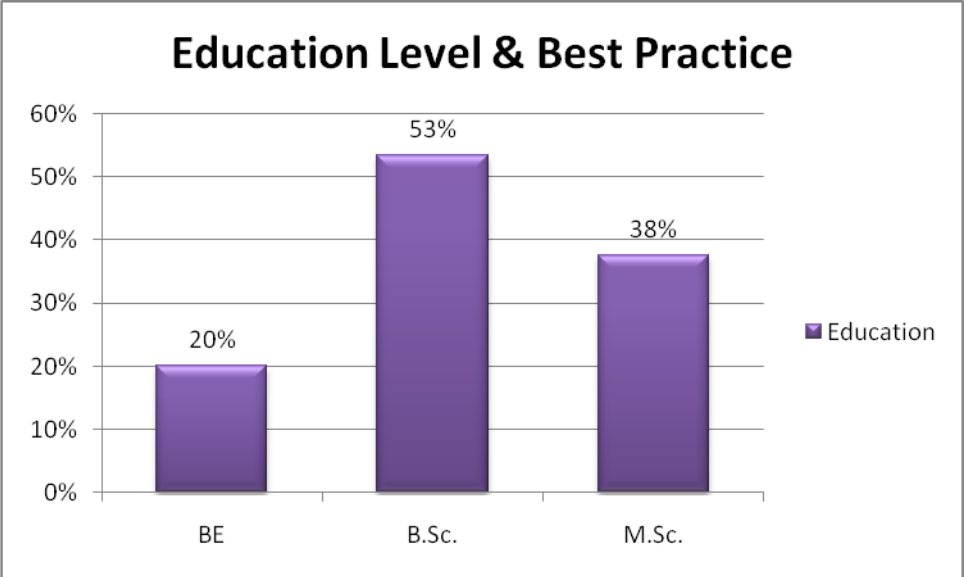**Figure 8** Gender and Best Practice

Nationality and education are not having significant influence on implementing Islamic conflict management styles as per the second H_{02} and fifth H_{05} hypothesis. Nevertheless, 25% of the European and North American (**Figure 10**), and 38% of Master degree holder participants preferred Islamic conflict management styles (**Figure 11**). These findings support that the Islamic approach can be implemented successfully by western project managers.
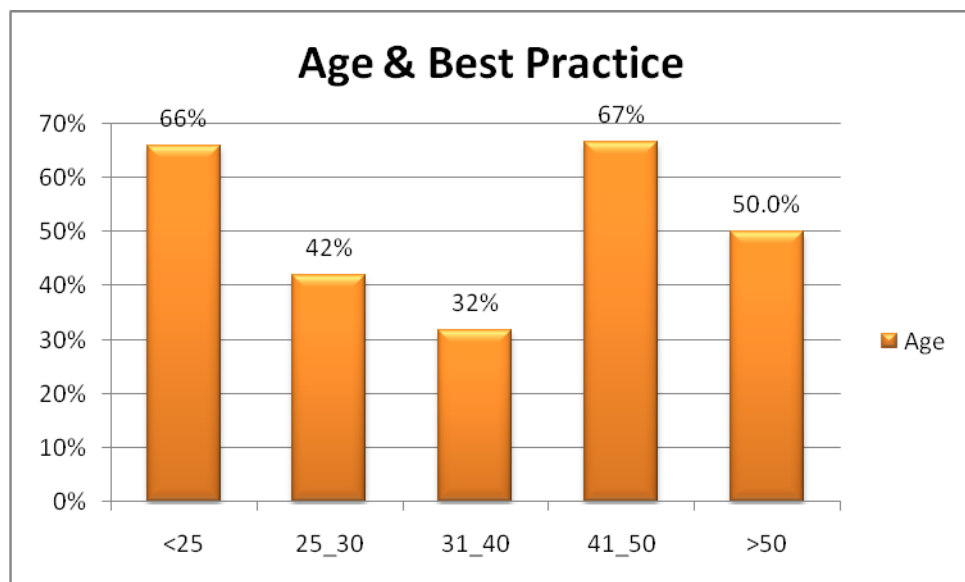
Figure 9 Ages and Best Practice

Figure 10 Nationality and Best Practice

Figure 11 Education Level and Best Practice

6.3. Conclusion

This study elaborated the concept of the Islamic conflict management styles and how it is linked to constructive conflict handling methods. In addition, the study examined the correlation between individuals' demographic characters and the Islamic conflict management styles.

The study outcomes revealed considerable distinctions between participants – depending on their demographic backgrounds, e.g. gender, age, educations and managerial position – in the perception of implementing Islamic conflict management styles. Employees with higher managerial positions tended to prefer Islamic conflict management styles. The age of employees have significant effect on preferring to implement Islamic styles.

Furthermore, the level of education does not have any significance on implementing Islamic styles. However, such result may require further investigation. The nationality and gender of participants were not having any influence on implementing Islamic styles. These results support the idea that Islamic styles can be realized and accepted by western expatriate working in the Arab world.

This research study is both a reproduction and an addition of the empirical work by other researchers. In this research some support was found for three of the seven study hypotheses. All of the significant correlations reported in this research study were low and thus each coefficient explains all but a small amount of the variance in conflict management style preference. These low correlation coefficients, on the other hand, should be considered with concern. Personal attitudes and behaviors are multifaceted human phenomena which have

usually rejected either complex or simple explanations. Accordingly, these research results, similar to most research studies using personality variables, enhance our understanding of attitudes and behaviors by only a little amount. The results, nevertheless, are preservative.

6.4. Recommendations for Future Research

6.4.1. Recommendation for practicing

Many recommendations for future research also emerge from the aforementioned results. Repeating the same study with different organizational positions (i.e. all levels of employees not only decision makers and influencers) may improve the understanding of the relationship between the conflict management styles and the position of individuals. Furthermore, the Islamic conflict management styles should be evaluated practically, which means that the system needs to be implemented and monitored for a long period in one department. In the same period, other conflict managements' styles either Cooperative or Competitive should be implemented in other different departments.

During this period the number of conflicts arising and handled in each department need to be monitored. A comparison between departments will appraise the best practice which needs to be applied throughout the organization. However, the number of conflict aroused and handled will not be the only criteria to appraise the best practice. Other criteria need also to be monitored such as employees' productivity, loyalty, and innovation.

6.4.2. Recommendation for researchers

It is recommended that further studies are required in the conflict management field particularly in Arab world. Such studies should be conducted before achieving some general conclusions involving the implementation of Islamic conflict management models and realizing how it

might affect work outcomes. These studies may need to investigate the effect of such implementation on other types of conflict such as intra- organizational conflict.

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Appendix A

The British University in Dubai الجامعة البريطانية في دبي

MSc Project Management

Questionnaire: Best Conflict Management Practice

Dear, please help us in the project by reading this questionnaire through and answering its questions carefully. The information you will provide is confidential and will be used for scientific research only. Most people are able to complete the questionnaire in less than 30 minutes. After the results are tabulated and compiled, we will issue a report. Please return the completed questionnaire to us by 15 May 2008 using the same email address (awsam85@yahoo.com)

Thank you for taking time to participate in the survey your responses will only be used for the purpose of this study only.

Regards,

Personal Information	
Decision-maker or influencer?	○ Decision Maker ○ Influencer
Location:	○ UAE ○ Other
Gender:	○ Male ○ Female
Age:	○ < 25 ○ 25-30 ○ 31-40 ○ 41-50 ○ > 50
Nationality:	
Education:	Select...
Do you have Conflict Management Policy in your company or organization?	○ Yes ○ No

I am interested in your perceptions of behavior during conflicts. The following statements describe 6 methods on how you may manage in general during conflicts or disagreements between two parties.

To what extent do you disagree or agree with the behaviors or approaches described in each of the following descriptions. You

Method 1

1. Bring all issues into the open in order to resolve them in the best way.	○ Strongly Disagree ○ Disagree ○ Neither Agree or Disagree ○ Agree ○ Strongly Agree
2. Encourage others to express their feelings and views fully.	○ Strongly Disagree ○ Disagree ○ Neither Agree or Disagree ○ Agree ○ Strongly Agree
3. Work hard to thoroughly, jointly learn about the issues.	○ Strongly Disagree ○ Disagree ○ Neither Agree or Disagree ○ Agree ○ Strongly Agree
4. Openly share concerns and issues.	○ Strongly Disagree ○ Disagree ○ Neither Agree or Disagree ○ Agree ○ Strongly Agree

Method 2

1. Satisfy the expectations of others.	○ Strongly Disagree ○ Disagree ○ Neither Agree or Disagree ○ Agree ○ Strongly Agree
2. Try to help others not "lose face" when there is a disagreement.	○ Strongly Disagree ○ Disagree ○ Neither Agree or Disagree ○ Agree ○ Strongly Agree
3. Go the "extra mile" to get along with each other.	○ Strongly Disagree ○ Disagree ○ Neither Agree or Disagree ○ Agree ○ Strongly Agree
4. Try to meet each other's schedules whenever we can.	○ Strongly Disagree ○ Disagree ○ Neither Agree or Disagree ○ Agree ○ Strongly Agree

Method 3

1. Try to investigate an issue in order to find a solution agreeable to us both.	○ Strongly Disagree ○ Disagree ○ Neither Agree or Disagree ○ Agree ○ Strongly Agree
2. Look for middle ground to resolve disagreements.	○ Strongly Disagree ○ Disagree ○ Neither Agree or Disagree ○ Agree ○ Strongly Agree
3. Arrive at compromises that both areas can accept.	○ Strongly Disagree ○ Disagree ○ Neither Agree or Disagree ○ Agree ○ Strongly Agree
4. Propose compromises in order to end deadlocks.	○ Strongly Disagree ○ Disagree ○ Neither Agree or Disagree ○ Agree ○ Strongly Agree

Method 4

1. Try to put a single area's needs first.	○ Strongly Disagree ○ Disagree ○ Neither Agree or Disagree ○ Agree ○ Strongly Agree
2. Tenaciously argue the merit of initial positions when disagreements occur. (You Stick to your position, authority, or power when conflict arises)	○ Strongly Disagree ○ Disagree ○ Neither Agree or Disagree ○ Agree ○ Strongly Agree
3. Want the other to make concessions, but don't want to make concessions ourselves.	○ Strongly Disagree ○ Disagree ○ Neither Agree or Disagree ○ Agree ○ Strongly Agree
4. Treat issues in conflict as a win-lose contest.	○ Strongly Disagree ○ Disagree ○ Neither Agree or Disagree ○ Agree ○ Strongly Agree

Method 5

1. Try to keep differences of opinion quiet.	○ Strongly Disagree ○ Disagree ○ Neither Agree or Disagree ○ Agree ○ Strongly Agree
2. Avoid openly discussing disputed issues.	○ Strongly Disagree ○ Disagree ○ Neither Agree or Disagree ○ Agree ○ Strongly Agree
3. Smooth over conflicts by trying to ignore them.	○ Strongly Disagree ○ Disagree ○ Neither Agree or Disagree ○ Agree ○ Strongly Agree
4. Avoid being "put on the spot" by keeping conflict to ourselves.	○ Strongly Disagree ○ Disagree ○ Neither Agree or Disagree ○ Agree ○ Strongly Agree

Method 6a: You think that

|	
1. Consultation before decision making will eliminate destructive conflict.	○ Strongly Disagree ○ Disagree ○ Neither Agree or Disagree ○ Agree ○ Strongly Agree
2. Promoting sincere advice as a normal behavior of inter-personal and inter-group minimize the potential of conflict.	○ Strongly Disagree ○ Disagree ○ Neither Agree or Disagree ○ Agree ○ Strongly Agree
3. Cooperation between parties will reduce dysfunctional conflict.	○ Strongly Disagree ○ Disagree ○ Neither Agree or Disagree ○ Agree ○ Strongly Agree

Method 6b: You think that

1. Stating a conflict content or what is about without any judgment is the first step for resolution.	◯ Strongly Disagree ◯ Disagree ◯ Neither Agree or Disagree ◯ Agree ◯ Strongly Agree
2. Agreeing that a conflict exists and detaching issues from personalities is the second step for resolution.	◯ Strongly Disagree ◯ Disagree ◯ Neither Agree or Disagree ◯ Agree ◯ Strongly Agree
3. Listening to other party to learn not to respond, and consulting each other on how to tackle the issue of conflict will direct destructive conflict into constructive one.	◯ Strongly Disagree ◯ Disagree ◯ Neither Agree or Disagree ◯ Agree ◯ Strongly Agree
4. Advising one another to reach to a common ground and recognizing that the advisor is not always right will help to reach a compromise resolution.	◯ Strongly Disagree ◯ Disagree ◯ Neither Agree or Disagree ◯ Agree ◯ Strongly Agree
5. Minimizing areas of disagreement between parties will prevent aggression and withdrawal of one party.	◯ Strongly Disagree ◯ Disagree ◯ Neither Agree or Disagree ◯ Agree ◯ Strongly Agree
I am interested in your perception of Best Conflict Resolution Practice.	
Which of the aforementioned Methods do you think is the best conflict resolution practice.	◯ Method 1 ◯ Method 2 ◯ Method 3 ◯ Method 4 ◯ Method 5 ◯ Method 6a & 6b

Appendix B
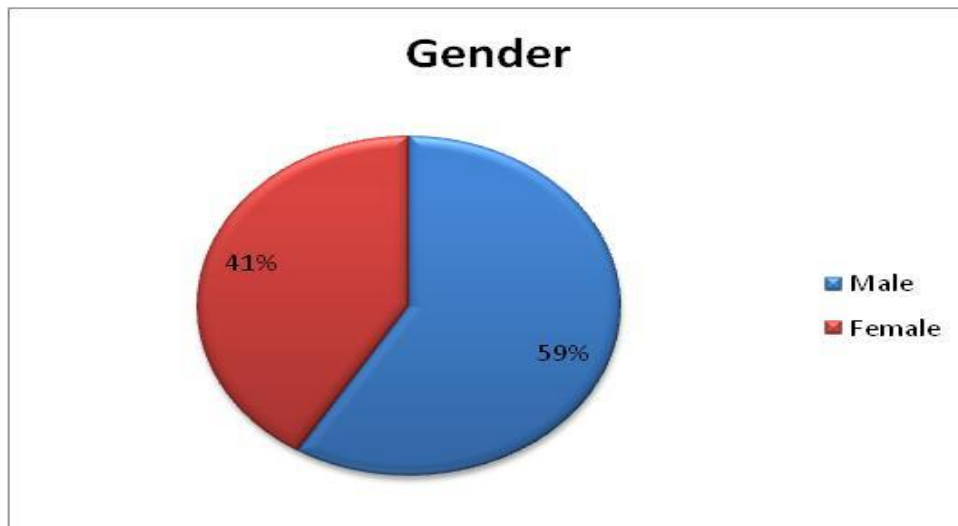
Gender Distribution
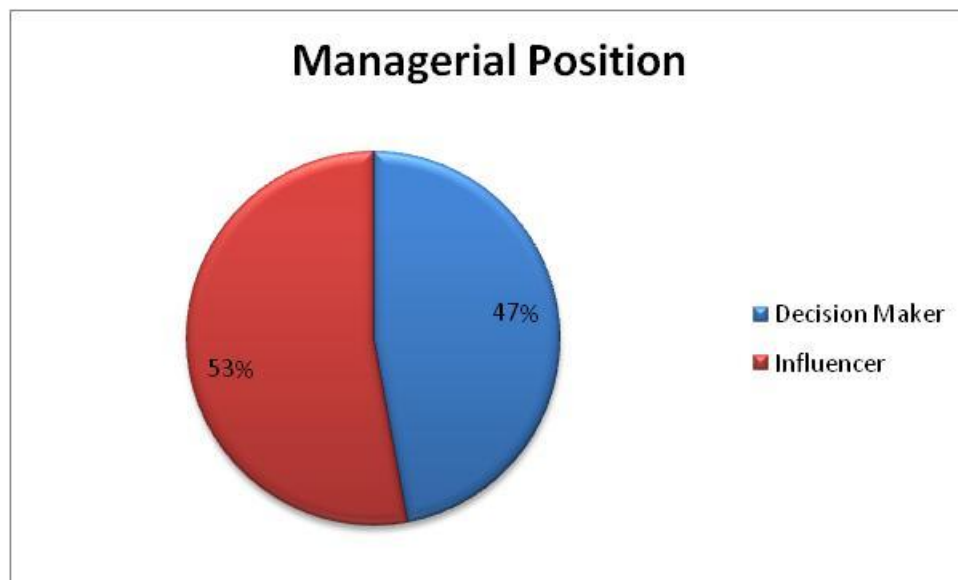
Managerial Position Distributions

Appendix B
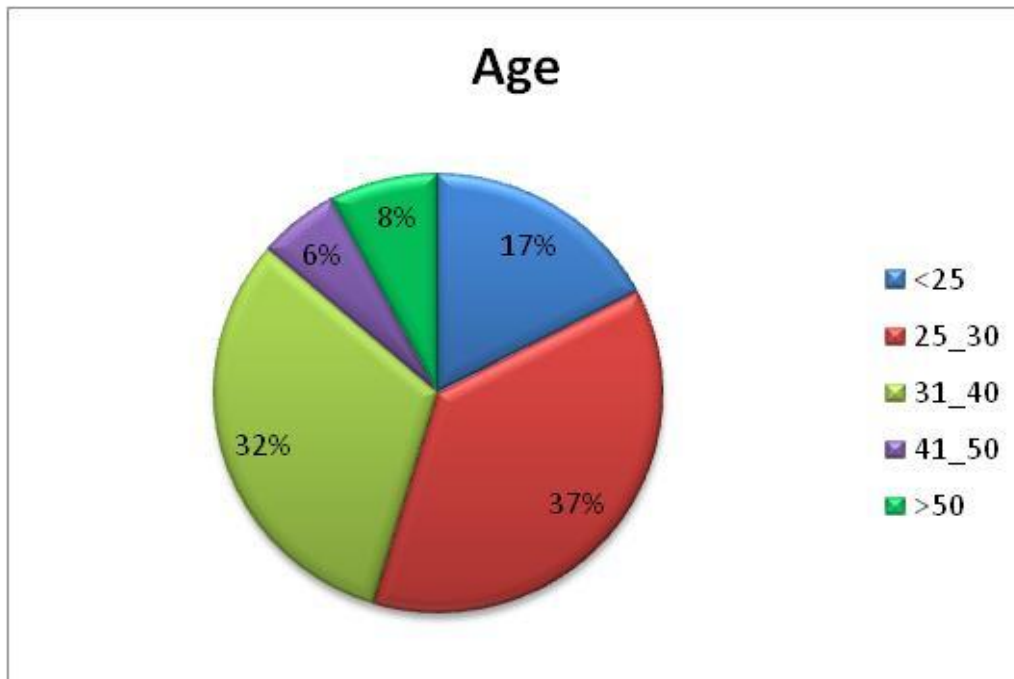
Age Distribution
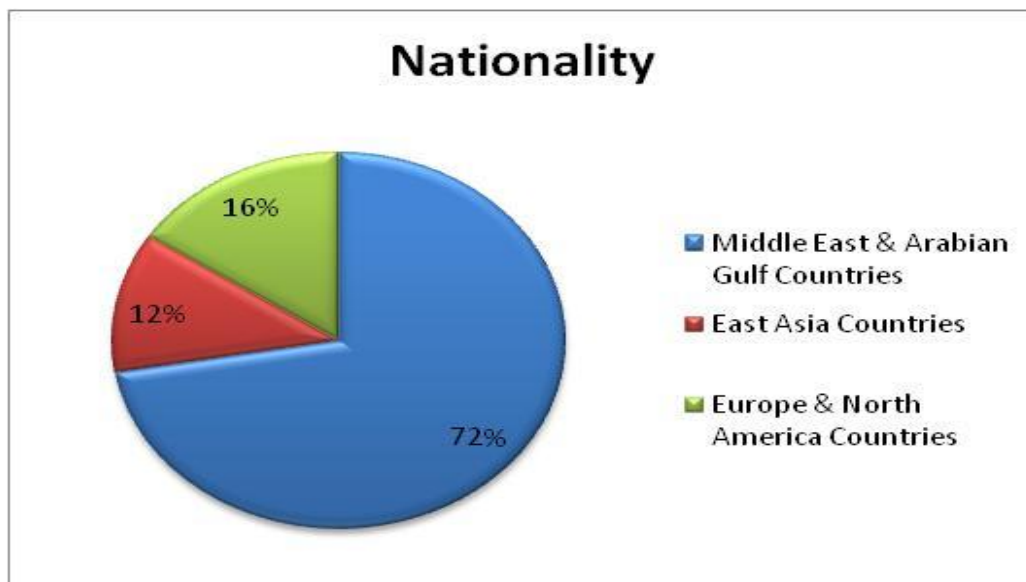
Nationality Distribution

Appendix B

Do you have Conflict Management Policy in your Organization?

43%

57%

■ Yes
■ No

Availability of Conflict Management Policy Distribution

Education Level

10%

31%

59%

■ BE
■ BSc
■ MSc
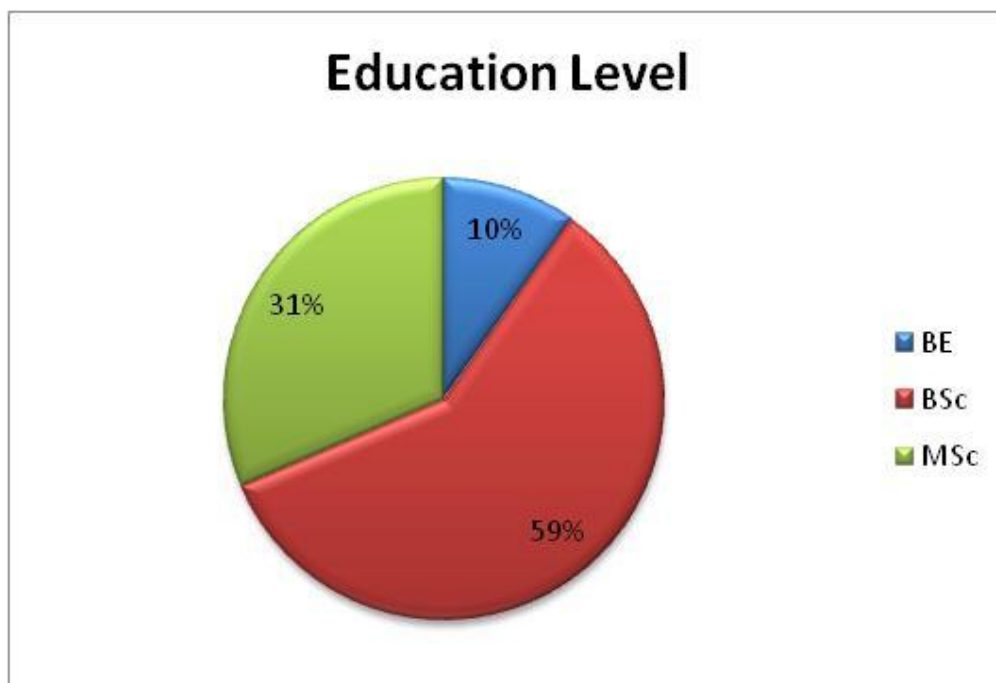
Education Distribution

Appendix C

Frequency Table

Position

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Decision Maker	168	47.1	47.1	47.1
	Influencer	189	52.9	52.9	100.0
	Total	357	100.0	100.0	

Gender

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	210	58.8	58.8	58.8
	Female	147	41.2	41.2	100.0
	Total	357	100.0	100.0	

Age

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	<25	62	17.4	17.4	17.4
	25_30	133	37.3	37.3	54.6
	31_40	113	31.7	31.7	86.3
	41_50	21	5.9	5.9	92.2
	>50	28	7.8	7.8	100.0
	Total	357	100.0	100.0	

Nationality

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Middle East & Arabian Gulf Countries	258	72.3	72.3	72.3
	East Asia Countries	43	12.0	12.0	84.3
	Europe & North America Countries	56	15.7	15.7	100.0
	Total	357	100.0	100.0	

Education

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	BE	35	9.8	9.8	9.8
	BSc	210	58.8	58.8	68.6
	MSc	112	31.4	31.4	100.0
	Total	357	100.0	100.0	

Conflict Management Policy

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	153	42.9	42.9	42.9
	No	204	57.1	57.1	100.0
	Total	357	100.0	100.0	

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
SNT_SALAM	357	3.98	.438
Cooperative conflict handling strategies	357	4.01	.406
Competitive conflict handling strategies	357	2.53	.719
Valid N (list wise)	357		

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Position	357	1.53	.500
Gender	357	1.41	.493
Age	357	2.50	1.090
Nationality	357	1.43	.749
Education	357	2.22	.605
Conflict Management Policy	357	1.57	.496
Valid N (list wise)	357		

Correlations

		Position	Gender	Age	Nationality	Education	Conflict Management Policy	SNT & SALAM	Cooperative conflict handling strategies	Competitive conflict handling strategies
Position	Pearson Correlation	1.000	.150**	-.086	-.143**	.206**	-.034	.227**	.282**	.039
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.004	.104	.007	.000	.522	.000	.000	.466
	N	357.000	357	357	357	357	357	357	357	357
Gender	Pearson Correlation	.150**	1.000	-.444**	-.372**	.031	-.230**	.002	-.021	.390**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.004		.000	.000	.559	.000	.966	.695	.000
	N	357	357.000	357	357	357	357	357	357	357
Age	Pearson Correlation	-.086	-.444**	1.000	.437**	.016	.280**	.137**	.170**	-.233**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.104	.000		.000	.759	.000	.010	.001	.000
	N	357	357	357.000	357	357	357	357	357	357
Nationality	Pearson Correlation	-.143**	-.372**	.437**	1.000	-.164**	.185**	-.062	-.012	-.264**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.007	.000	.000		.002	.000	.242	.828	.000
	N	357	357	357	357.000	357	357	357	357	357
Education	Pearson Correlation	.206**	.031	.016	-.164**	1.000	.178**	.057	.016	-.056
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.559	.759	.002		.001	.285	.766	.288
	N	357	357	357	357	357.000	357	357	357	357
Conflict Management Policy	Pearson Correlation	-.034	-.230**	.280**	.185**	.178**	1.000	.046	-.115*	-.164**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.522	.000	.000	.000	.001		.386	.029	.002
	N	357	357	357	357	357	357.000	357	357	357
SNT & SALAM	Pearson Correlation	.227**	.002	.137**	-.062	.057	.046	1.000	.261**	-.241**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.966	.010	.242	.285	.386		.000	.000
	N	357	357	357	357	357	357	357.000	357	357
Cooperative conflict handling strategies	Pearson Correlation	.282**	-.021	.170**	-.012	.016	-.115*	.261**	1.000	-.305**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.695	.001	.828	.766	.029	.000		.000
	N	357	357	357	357	357	357	357	357.000	357
Competitive conflict handling strategies	Pearson Correlation	.039	.390**	-.233**	-.264**	-.056	-.164**	-.241**	-.305**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.466	.000	.000	.000	.288	.002	.000	.000	
	N	357	357	357	357	357	357	357	357	357.000

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.408[a]	.166	.147	.405

a. Predictors: (Constant), Competitive conflict handling strategies, Position, Conflict Management Policy, Education, Age, Cooperative conflict handling strategies, Nationality, Gender

ANOVA[b]

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	11.353	8	1.419	8.666	.000[a]
	Residual	56.986	348	.164		
	Total	68.338	356			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Competitive conflict handling strategies, Position, Conflict Management Policy, Education, Age, Cooperative conflict handling strategies, Nationality, Gender

b. Dependent Variable: SNT & SALAM

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.491	.313		11.144	.000
	Position	.170	.047	.194	3.643	.000
	Gender	.095	.053	.107	1.795	.074
	Age	.074	.024	.183	3.014	.003
	Nationality	-.089	.034	-.152	-2.622	.009
	Education	-.026	.038	-.036	-.689	.491
	Conflict Management Policy	.027	.047	.031	.571	.568
	Cooperative conflict handling strategies	.110	.061	.102	1.797	.073
	Competitive conflict handling strategies	-.155	.035	-.254	-4.395	.000

a. Dependent Variable: SNT & SALAM

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.227[a]	.051	.049	.487

a. Predictors: (Constant), SNT_SALAM

ANOVA[b]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	4.580	1	4.580	19.272	.000[a]
	Residual	84.361	355	.238		
	Total	88.941	356			

a. Predictors: (Constant), SNT_SALAM

b. Dependent Variable: Position

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.500	.236		2.121	.035
	SNT_SALAM	.259	.059	.227	4.390	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Position

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.227[a]	.051	.049	.487

a. Predictors: (Constant), SNT_SALAM

ANOVA[b]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	4.580	1	4.580	19.272	.000[a]
	Residual	84.361	355	.238		
	Total	88.941	356			

a. Predictors: (Constant), SNT_SALAM

b. Dependent Variable: Position

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.500	.236		2.121	.035
	SNT_SALAM	.259	.059	.227	4.390	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Position

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.137[a]	.019	.016	1.082

a. Predictors: (Constant), SNT_SALAM

ANOVA[b]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	7.928	1	7.928	6.777	.010[a]
	Residual	415.316	355	1.170		
	Total	423.244	356			

a. Predictors: (Constant), SNT_SALAM

b. Dependent Variable: Age

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.142	.523		2.181	.030
	SNT_SALAM	.341	.131	.137	2.603	.010

a. Dependent Variable: Age