

Impact of Conflict Management Styles to Innovative Behavior Through Trust, Commitment and Knowledge Management Behavior

by

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Abstract

The research question catered in this study is the factors linking the conflict management styles and innovative behavior. This research used quantitative methodology, by using causal analysis of structural equation model analysis. The samples size consisted of 557 employees from five commercial and government banks in Thailand by using multi- stage sampling. The research found that the structural equation model has the goodness of fit indexes as the following; $\chi^2 = 515.074$, $df = 146$, $CFI=0.961$, $TLI=0.950$, $RMSEA=0.067$, $SRMR=0.050$ and also there were positive linkages between knowledge management behavior and innovative behavior; trust and knowledge management behavior as well as commitment and knowledge management behavior. There were also positive linkages between conflict management and trust as well as commitment.

Keywords: Conflict Management, Innovative Behavior, Knowledge Management, Trust, Commitment

1. Introduction

Conflicts happen in every layer of society or in every organization, even in families (Schneewind & Gerhard, 2002), between friends or colleagues (Gamero, Gonzalez-Roma, & Peiro, 2008; Shah & Jehn, 1993), between teams in working places(Gamero et al., 2008; Shah & Jehn, 1993), between domestic or international organizations, between countries (Ben-Meir, 2009; Posthuma, 2011; Tocci, 2008) , or even between regions of the globe (Djalal, 2011). Conflicts are incidents that are common in every society. Conflicts happen partly due to differences in personality (Barbuto Jr, Phipps, & Xu, 2010; Ejaz, Iqbal, & Ara, 2012; H. Park & Antonioni, 2007; Wood & Bell, 2008), differences between cultures (Ayoko & Konrad, 2012; Chao & Tian, 2013; Doucet, Jehn, Weldon, Chen, & Wang, 2009; Posthuma, White III, Dworkin, Ya'nez, & Swift, 2006; Yuan, 2010), differences between occupations and other factors. In the past, conflicts were considered as threats, a counterproductive measure leading to mistust therefore it was considered something to be avoided. Resolutions to conflicts were to look for behaviors that caused conflicts, and tried to control and suppress those behavriors or persons who had those behaviors (Robbins & Judge, 2013). The resolutions praticed in the past are now obsolete because at present, there are a number of researches showing that appropriate conflict management can lead to positive results (Zarankin, 2008), such as

innovation (X.-H. Chen, Zhao, Liu, & Wu, 2012), knowledge management (Rahim, 2001), work performance (Alper, Tjosvold, & Law, 2000; X.-H. Chen et al., 2012; Tjosvold, Law, & Sun, 2006).

Innovation is essential to all kinds of organization (Trott, 2005). If any organization desiring to survive, needs to have strategies to create innovation (Zhuang, Williamson, & Carter, 1999). Organizations failing to adjust themselves to innovation tend to face failure, as observed that giants from the past had to shut down their businesses, failing to cope up with the dynamic nature of the change and innovation. A prudent example of such a company is Kodak. Every organization needs to develop an ability to adjust to new innovation coming from the outside such as, information technology. On the other hand every organization needs to create its own innovation in order to compete and survive. One of the factors, essential to innovation is human resource in the organization. Personnel in an organization who have innovative behaviors tend to create innovation in the organization (Kleysen & Street, 2001) regardless of limitations of other factors, such as finance, system to create innovation, etc. Due to the fact that the origin of innovation is people, therefore innovative behaviors are necessary to creating innovations in the organization (Taghipour & Dezfuli, 2013). However, instilling innovation in organizations through workforce development is not an easy task. A research found that conflicts lead to innovation (He, Ding, & Yang, 2014) therefore if there are appropriate conflict management, they can lead to innovation (X.-H. Chen et al., 2012; Desivilya, Somech, & Lidgoster, 2010; Schulze, Stade, & Netzel, 2014; Song, Dyer, & Thieme, 2006).

Objective of the paper

This study is to fill in the existing gap of studies of factors linking between conflict management and innovative behavior.

2. Literature Review

Conflicts and conflict management strategies

Due to the fact that academics from a variety of disciplines have given definitions to conflict therefore, there are different definitions of conflict (Fink, 1968). However, according to M. Afzalur Rahim, conflict is an interactive process which shows that there are some inconsistencies, disagreeability, uncompromising within any group or society or between groups or societies (Rahim, 2001). This definition is in line with that of Kenneth E. Boulding who defined conflict as a situation which is not in harmony with the desire of either party (Boulding, 1962). While Kenneth W. Thomas' view is in agreement with those of Rahim and Boulding, that conflict is a process that a party's perception of the other party causes them to be unsatisfied (K. W. Thomas, 1992). In summary, factors leading to conflicts are 1) two conflicting parties, which can be persons, groups of persons or organizations; 2) conflicting parties' perception of the inconsistencies or obstacles to their satisfactions; 3) conflict as a process.

There are three kinds of conflicts illustrated as follows: 1) relationship conflict which arrives from inconsistencies in personality causing tension, irritation, offence, and it is similar to affective conflict (Amason & Sapienza, 1997); 2) task conflict which arises from differences in perspectives or objectives of work. This concept is similar to cognitive conflict (Amason & Sapienza, 1997); and 3) process conflict which occurs due to differences in perspectives and approaches as to how the work should be done or the working process to achieve the work, the delegation of resources or

responsibilities (Jehn & Mannix, 2001). This paper will emphasize on work and process related conflicts.

There are a number of conflict management strategies, for example; two-type resolutions, such as cooperation and competition (Deutsch, 1949), engagement and avoidance (Knudson, Sommers, & Golding, 1980). Three-type resolutions are such as those of Punam and Wilson comprising of; solution-orientation, non-confrontation and control. This concept is in line with Lawrence and Lorsch comprising of confrontation, smoothing and forcing (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967). Similar, to the concept of Hocker and Wilmot which is composed of competitive, avoidance and collaborative approach. The other concepts of conflict management strategies which are different are such as that of Rands, Levinger, and Mellinger which is comprised of attack, avoid and compromise (Rands, Levinger, & Mellinger, 1981). Billingham and Sack proposed the conflict management strategies that include reasoning, verbal aggression and violence (Billingham & Sack, 1987). The concepts that offer four types of resolutions are such as Pruitt's which comprises of problem solving, yielding, inaction and contending. These four types come from two underlying analysis, 1) self-interest and 2) interest of other's. The two dimensions can vary on case by case analysis (Pruitt,1983). This concept is comparable to Kurdek's concept which comprises of problem solving, compliance, withdrawal and engagement (Kurdek, 1994). The last group of concepts on conflict management strategies offers 5 types of approaches; first Blake and Mouton's which comprises of forcing, withdrawing, smoothing, compromising and problem solving. The second one is of Kilmann and Thomas' (1977) offering resolutions that are developed from that of Blake and Mouton's work. Their approaches are derived from two dimensions; assertiveness and cooperativeness, resulting in five types of strategies which are competition (high assertiveness and low cooperativeness), accommodation (low assertiveness and high cooperativeness), compromise (moderate assertiveness and moderate cooperativeness), collaboration (high assertiveness and high cooperativeness) and avoidance (low assertiveness and low cooperativeness) (K. W. Thomas, 1992). Kilmann and Thomas' concept on conflict management strategy is similar to Rahim's concept whose approaches are based on two dimensions, concern for self and concern for others (Rahim, 2001, 2002).

Innovation is important to comparative competitiveness and it becomes a part of an organization culture (Trott, 2005). Innovation is using new knowledge for presenting new products and services to customers thus it combines inventions with commercial feasibility. In another word, innovation is to adjust new ideas in an organization to produce new products or services (Afuah,2003). Innovations can be classified to be 1) technical Innovation which is innovations that are developed to become products, services or processes in order to meet customer's needs. When it is an innovative process, it yields new processes, new management that results in new products and services in the long run. 2) Administrative innovation is new organization structures or new administrative processes which may or may not effect technical innovation (Afuah, 2003). Some scholars suggest that this type of innovation is made of three types of innovation; 1) product-type innovation 2) organization-type innovation and 3) process-type innovation (Bullinger, 2008).

Trust, commitment and knowledge management process

There are different definitions of trust (Hosmer, 1995) however, there are keywords in definitions given by scholars. The most frequently used is "willingness to be vulnerable", for example, a definition of trust is the willingness of one party to take the risk if the other party's action, based on the expectation that the other party would do what is needed without needing to monitor or control (Mayer, Davis, & SchoormanSource, 1995). So academics use the phrase like "willingness to rely", apart from some other keywords that are used to explain the word trust, such as

confidence or positive expectation. In other words, the definition of trust can be said as “the willingness to take the risk with a positive expectation or intentions or actions of the other person (Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998) which is in line with study of Hosmer (1995) who defined trust as an individual expectation. According to the aforementioned definitions and key words, it can be observed that trust relates to risk and interdependence. Risk is the acknowledgement of the possibility of loss. Risk thus leads to the deliberation of trust. In other words, trust is not needed if there is certainty or no risk. Interdependence occurs when either party or both parties will successfully trust the other party. Therefore, trust is the willingness to take risk under the condition of interdependence. Trust itself is not an action but it holds a significant basis for underlying actions or results of actions.

A variety of disciplines study the concept of commitment, for example, sociology uses the concept of commitment to explain the situation when persons commit themselves to some actions or political ideologies. Commitment is also used in organization management such as to explain the rationales behind the situation when people are willing to work in an organization and do not resign even when there are offers that economically more advantageous to them; or to explain the consistent behaviors regardless of situations (Becker, 1960). Apart from that, there are other explanations about commitment such as loyalty, faith in the value of the organization, involvement in the organization, willingness to make efforts for the organization, desire to be a member of the organization, having conforming goals and values to the organization's, having a strong self identification to the organization (Porter, Steers, & Mowday, 1974) and an emotional commitment to the organization. In reviewing literatures, it is found that commitment to an organization relates somewhat to conflict factors (Hrebiniak & Alutto, 1972). There are two aspects of commitment; attitude aspect and behaviour aspect. Attitude aspect focuses on conditions leading to behavioral commitment. Behavioral commitment focuses on explicit expressions of commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991; Mowday & Steers, 1979).

The synthesised concept from relevant literatures suggests that the knowledge management comprises of 1) knowledge acquisition, 2) knowledge recording 3) knowledge sharing and dissemination and 4) knowledge application. This synthesized concept is in line with the concept of Marquardt's (2002).

3. Conceptual Proposal

Relation conflict and work conflict have negative effects on trust (Peterson & Behfar, 2003). This is in line with the study of Ayoko and Pekerti (2008), that is the relation conflict and the process conflict have negative effects on trust. There are other studies indicated that work conflict had negative effects on trust, such as the work of Rispens, Greer, and Jehn (2007) or the work of Tidd, McIntyre, and Friedman (2004). Therefore, it can be concluded that conflicts have negative effects on trust and thus if conflicts are resolved, then trust can be cultivated. For example, the study using Rahim's conflict management styles, found that integrating styles, ie. obliging or accommodating and compromising style have positive effects on trust (Ndubisi, 2011), which is in line with the study of Hempel, Zhang, and Tjosvold (2009) which found that cooperation within the group rendered positive effect on affect-based trust.

Proposal 1: Conflict management correlates positively with trust

Conflicts have negative effects on commitment (Shafer, 2009) or relation conflict has negative effects on commitment (Bouckennooghe, Clercq, & Deprez, 2014) which is in line with the study of J. L. Thomas, Bliese, and Jex (2005), who studied personnels who were at the level of supervisors and managers, found that inter-personal conflict had negative effects on affective commitment and continuance commitment. Therefore, it can be concluded that conflicts have negative relation to commitment and if conflicts could be resolved, there could be commitment. The study used Rahim's conflict management styles and found that the regression analysis showed that integrating conflict management styles, ie. obliging or accommodating and compromising style have positive effects on commitment (Ndubisi, 2011).

Proposal 2: Conflict management correlates positively with commitment

Trust correlates to knowledge management, which are knowledge creation (Sankowska, 2013), knowledge transfer (Ko, 2014; Sankowska, 2013), knowledge acquisition (Boussouara & Deakins, 2000; Politis, 2003), knowledge sharing (Lin, 2012; Holste & Fields, 2010; Jain, Sandhu, & Goh, 2015; Kuo, 2013; Pangil & Chan, 2014; J.-G. Park & Lee, 2014; Wang, Tseng, & Yen, 2012; Wickramasinghe & Widyaratne, 2012). Trust also leads to knowledge transfer, especially the transferring of knowledge within a team and between teams (Renzl, 2008). Trust can cause members in an organization to acquire new knowledge and make efforts to seek new knowledge for the organization. Acquisition of new knowledge then leads to the transfer and sharing of knowledge, especially the transfer of knowledge that requires trust because the transferring party must be certain that the act of transferring knowledge will not have any backlash or negative consequences to him/her (Patrick, Rourke, & Phillips, 2000). The studies of Bakker, Leenders, Gabbay, Kratzer, and Engelen (2006) and Boussouara and Deakins (2000) have compiled the opinions of academics on knowledge management and found that trust correlates to knowledge management.

Proposal 3: Trust correlates positively with knowledge management

Commitment correlates with knowledge management because employees that have commitment to the organization would not resign from the organization but would have intention to and are motivated to share knowledge to the organization (Hislop, 2003). Furthermore, there are studies which found that affective commitment and value commitment correlate with knowledge management (Cardoso, Meireles, & Marques, n.d.). This is in agreement with the study by Matzler, Renzl, Mooradian, Krogh, and Mueller (2011) which found that affective commitment correlates with knowledge sharing behavior and also the study done by Camelo-Ordaz, Garcí'a-Cruz, Sousa-Ginel, and Valle-Cabrera (2011) which found that affective commitment correlates with knowledge sharing which is one of the behaviors in knowledge management process. Another study by Rocha, Cardoso, and Tordera (2008) who synthesized studies on the relationship between commitment and knowledge management and also did an empirical study found that employees' commitment to their organization correlates with knowledge management. Other studies on commitment of teams in an organization correlates with knowledge management (Liu, Keller, & Shih, 2011; Muneer, Khan, & Long, 2014).

Proposal 4: Commitment correlates positively with knowledge management

Studies found that knowledge management correlated positively with innovation (Huang & Li, 2009; Liao & Wu, 2010). Knowledge creation, either at individual or organization level is a behavior or a process of knowledge management which is essential to innovation (Diakoulakis,

Georgopoulos, Koulouriotis, & Emiris, 2004). This study is in line with empirical studies, which found that knowledge acquisition (C.-J. Chen & Huang, 2009), knowledge dissemination, knowledge responses have positive effects on innovation (Darroch, 2005). While other studies found that knowledge dissemination (Camelo-Ordaz et al., 2011; C.-J. Chen & Huang, 2009; Li, Liu, Wang, Li, & Guo, 2009), knowledge application (C.-J. Chen & Huang, 2009; Donate & Pablo, 2014; Li et al., 2009), knowledge storage and knowledge dissemination (Lai, Hsu, Lin, Chen, & Lin, 2014), and knowledge creation (Donate & Pablo, 2014) have positive effects on innovation. Therefore studies show that all steps of knowledge management process could lead to innovation. Furthermore, studies show that not only knowledge management triggers innovation in organizations (McAdam, 2000) but also drives innovation as well as supports innovation process (Grimaldi & Rippa, 2011). Empirical studies found that knowledge management has a direct correlation with innovation (Al-Hakim&Hassan,2013; Darroch, 2005; Huang & Li, 2009; Ju, Li, & Lee, 2006; Lin, Che, & Ting, 2012; Taherparvar, Esmailpour, &Dostar, 2014).

Proposal 5: Knowledge management correlates with innovation

From the above five proposals, it can be seen that structural correlations exist between conflict management and innovation with trust, commitment and knowledge management as the mediators, as shown in Figure 1.

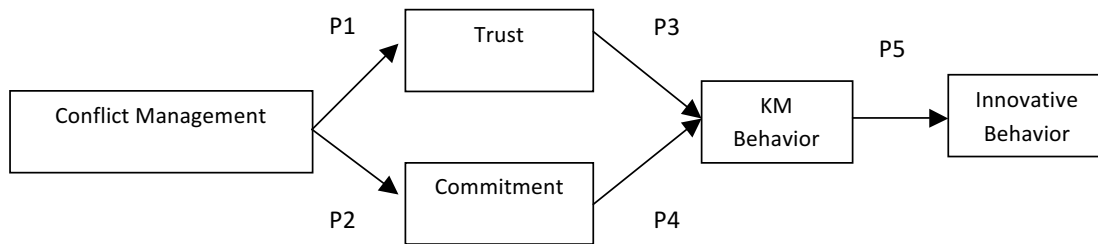


Figure 1 Structural Correlations between Conflict Management and Innovation

4. Research Methodology

This research study used quantitative methodology, emphasising on causal analysis by using structural equation analysis. The samples size consisted of 557 employees from the Bangkok Bank Public Company Limited, Kiatnakin Bank Public Company Limited, Krung Thai Bank Public Company Limited, Government Savings Bank and Bank of Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives by using multi- stage sampling.

The questionnaire comprised of seven segments, has been tested on index of item-objective congruence (IOC) of the scores between 0.8 – 1.0. The construct validity has also been tested by Confirmatory Factor Analysis with the factor loading of latent variables as shown in Table 1 and with the Cronbach’s Alpha of 0.972.

Table 1 Test of Construct Validity by Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Observed variables	Latent construct	Standardized Coefficients	Standard Error
Integrating CM	Conflict Management	0.999**	0.011
Obliging CM		0.853**	0.022
Dominating CM		0.134**	0.042
Avoiding CM		0.440**	0.039
Compromising CM		0.855**	0.014
Ability	Trust	0.880**	0.013
Benevolent		0.929**	0.011
Integrity		0.925**	0.009
Openness		0.917**	0.011
Affective	Commitment	0.952**	0.020
Continuance		0.598**	0.031
Normative		0.806**	0.022
Acquisition	Knowledge Management	0.925**	0.026
Recording		0.845**	0.030
Sharing	Behavior	0.889**	0.017
Application		0.845**	0.018
Idea Exploration	Innovative Behavior	0.760**	0.024
Idea Generation		0.853**	0.020
Idea Promotion		0.871**	0.020
Idea Realization		0.906**	0.019

**Significant Level of 0.01

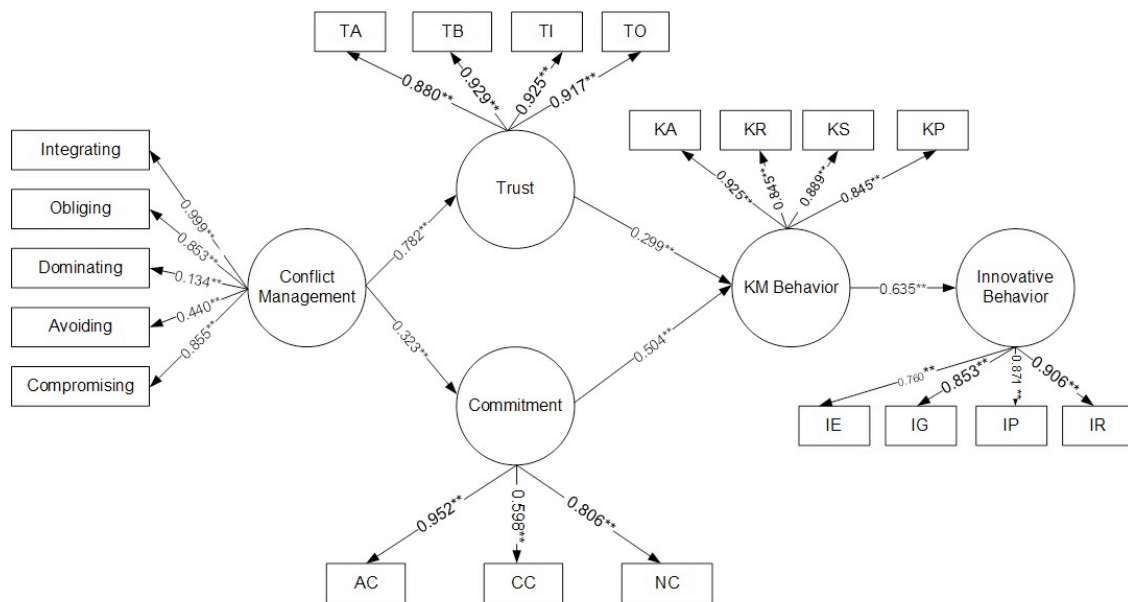
Results

The research found that the structural equation model has the fairness of fit indexes as the following; Chi-square/df = 3.528, CFI = 0.961, TLI = 0.950, RMSEA = 0.067, SRMR = 0.050. It can be concluded that the structural equation model is consistent with the empirical data (Schreiber, Nora, Stage, Barlow, & King, 2006), with the regression weight of the direct effect and indirect effect and total effect as shown in Table 2 and also in Figure 2 of the Structural Equation Model.

Table 2 The Regression Weight of Direct Effects, Indirect Effects and Total Effects

	Innovative Behavior	Knowledge Management Behavior	Commitment	Trust
Direct effect				
Conflict Management	-	-	0.323**	0.782**
Trust	-	0.299**	-	-
Commitment	-	0.504**	-	-
Knowledge Management Behavior	0.635**	-	-	-
Indirect effect				
Conflict Management	0.252**	0.397**	-	-
Trust	0.190**	-	-	-
Commitment	0.320**	-	-	-
Total effect				
Conflict Management	0.252**	0.397**	0.323**	0.782**
Trust	0.190**	0.299**	-	-
Commitment	0.320**	0.504**	-	-
Knowledge Management Behavior	0.635**	-	-	-

** Significant Level of 0.01



$\chi^2 = 515.074$, $df = 146$, $p\text{-value} = 0.00$, $CFI = 0.961$, $TLI = 0.950$, $RMSEA = 0.067$, $SRMR = 0.050$

Figure 2 The Structural Equation Model

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Knowledge behavior has a positive effect on innovative behavior because effective knowledge behavior enhances innovative behavior, resulting in the creation of innovation in an organization. The elements of knowledge management behavior which are the acquisition of knowledge, storing of knowledge, sharing of knowledge and application of knowledge contribute to the stock of knowledge. These behaviors thus, have a positive effect on innovative behavior and also the innovation process of an organization. Any organization that has employees who have the complete knowledge management behavior tend to have innovative behavior as well and thus, will lead to the creation of value-added knowledge and also new products (Darroch & McNaughton, 2002). The result of knowledge management behavior is knowledge embodiment in the organization and thus, trigger the creation of innovation (McAdam, 2000). Learning will lead to innovative thinking, that are creativity and flexibility that lead to practical applications (Basadur & Gelade, 2006) and expressed out as innovative behavior. Trust has positive effect on knowledge management because trust enhances the process of cooperation in knowledge acquisition and knowledge sharing among members of a team and among employees of an organization (J.-G. Park & Lee, 2014; Renzl, 2008). If the knowledge recipient trusts in the knowledge giver then, the knowledge transfer process will be effective (Boussouara & Deakins, 2000). Trust enables the intention to share knowledge (Ding, Ng, & Wang, 2013b) because the knowledge sharer must believe that the knowledge he/her will share will not become a backlash to himself/herself (Patrick et al., 2000).

In other words, trust lowers the fear of sharing knowledge with others (Renzl, 2008). Commitment has positive effect on knowledge management behavior because the people who have commitment to the organization usually intend to share their knowledge to the organization, have the desire to participate in the process of knowledge management of the organization (Camelo-Ordaz et al., 2011; Hislop, 2003) as well as, are willing to relate to other members of the organization in order to share their knowledge to them (Chiang, Han, & Chuang, 2011). Furthermore, Thay, Othman, Siong, and Lim (2013) and Wasti (2002) found that the turn over rate of committed people were low and they had long years of working experience thus, they would share knowledge to others in proportion to their duration of employment. Conflict management has positive effect on trust because whenever, conflicts occur and appropriate conflict management is implemented than it leads to trust between concerned conflicting parties. However, conflict management can be conducted in different styles which are strategically appropriate to different situations and contexts. One style of conflict management may be suitable for a situation and may not be suitable otherwise. Conflict management styles that have positive effect on commitment has the rationale similar to trust because when conflicts occur, appropriate conflict management styles will lead to commitment of employees to their organization.

6. Recommendation

Recommendations for future researches are the followings: due to the fact that sampling data are from employees of each department of the sampling banks, the structure of the data is hierarchical therefore, in order to make the analysis more accurate, multi-level structural equation model should be used in order to analyse the influence at individual, team and department level.

Recommendations in the area of organizational development are that 1) to add the index of creating and developing knowledge management behavior as KPIs in the area of promotion of learning and organization growth 2) to create an inventory of conflict management styles strategically suitable for different situations and contexts such as the nature of conflict, level of

intensity of conflict, relationship between parties concerned, procedures or protocols relating to the conflict, etc. so that, there will be guidelines to manage conflicts appropriately leading to trust, commitment and knowledge management behavior and eventually, innovative behavior in the organization.

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