

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STYLES IN MEXICAN HIGH-SCHOOL STUDENTS



Psychology

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ABSTRACT

In order to contribute to the discussion on emotional intelligence and conflict management in adolescence in the school context, this paper analyses the relationships between three key aspects of perceived emotional intelligence (emotional attention, clarity and repair) and three conflict management message styles (self-oriented, other-oriented, and issue-oriented), in a sample (N = 171) of Mexican high-school students, aged 15 to 19 years old. The participants answered the Spanish modified version of the Trait Meta-Mood Scale (TMMS) and the Conflict Management Message Style Instrument (CMMS). In the results, the self-oriented and the other-oriented styles correlated positively with attention and repair. In turn, the issue-oriented style correlated positively with all aspects of perceived emotional intelligence.

The analysis of the relationship between emotional intelligence and conflict management is an important object of study to understand how adolescents develop their capacity for constructive conflict management; however, there are only a few studies which have analyzed this issue in adolescent samples in the school context. Because of this, and in order to contribute to the discussion on this issue, the present study aimed to analyze the relationships between the perceived emotional intelligence and the conflict management styles in a sample of Mexican high school students.

The conflict management style can be defined as "the way a person most commonly deals with conflict" (Rubin, Pruitt & Kim, 1994, p. 31). Ross and DeWine (1988) proposed to evaluate these styles through verbal messages used by individuals to manage conflict situations. In this way, these authors identified three conflict management message styles: a) the issue-oriented style maintains that the problem can be solved without jeopardizing the relationship and emphasizes that both parties must deal with the problem; b) the other-oriented style emphasizes overlooking the problem and keeping the other party happy; and, c) the self-oriented style reflects an emphasis on the speaker's personal interest.

Some recent studies in Mexico have contributed to conceptualize conflict management styles of Mexican adolescents into Ross-DeWine theoretical framework. These studies have analyzing, on the one hand, the psychometric properties of the *Ross-DeWine Conflict Management Message Style Instrument* (Luna & Laca, 2014); and, on the other hand, have studying their relations with important variables such as aggression, family communication, and decision making patterns (Luna, 2014, 2016; Luna and De Gante, 2015; Luna, Laca & Cedillo, 2012). In this context, the present study aimed to further develop this line of research studying the relationships of the three conflict management message styles proposed by Ross and DeWine and the perceived emotional intelligence proposed by Mayer and Salovey (1997).

According to Mayer and Salovey (1997), emotional intelligence can be defined as "the ability to perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotion knowledge, and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual growth" (p. 5). In order to evaluate the perceived emotional intelligence, Salovey, Mayer, Goldman, Turvey and Palfai (1995) developed the *Trait Meta-Mood Scale* (TMMS). The TMMS is a self-report measure designed to assess three key aspects of perceived emotional intelligence: attention, clarity, and repair. First, attention conveys to what extent individuals tend to observe and think about their feelings and moods. Second, clarity, evaluates the understanding of one's emotional states. Finally, in third place, repair refers to the individuals' beliefs about ability to regulate their feelings.

Previous studies have found statistically significant correlations

between emotional intelligence and conflict management styles in samples of youths and adults (e.g., Abas, 2010; Henderson, 2006; Rahim *et al.*, 2002; Yu, Sardesai & Lu, 2006); however, there are only a few studies which have analyzed this issue in adolescent samples in the school context. In this framework, the main antecedent of the present research is the study of Garaigordobil, Machimberrena and Maganto (2016) which analyses (among others important variables) the relationship between the conflict management message styles and perceived emotional intelligence in a sample (N = 2283) of Spaniard adolescents, aged 12 to 17 years. In their results, the self-oriented style correlated negatively with repair; while, the issue-oriented and the other-oriented styles correlated positively with all aspects of perceived emotional intelligence.

METHOD

Participants

The sample (N = 171) was composed of high school students from the city of Guadalajara, Mexico, with age-range 15 to 19 years (M = 16.70, DS = 0.94). 80 (46.8%) of the participants were males and 91 (53.2%) females.

Instruments

Conflict Management Message Style instrument. This questionnaire consists of 18 items distributed in three subscales according to the model of Ross and DeWine (1988): a) self-oriented, b) issue-oriented, and c) other-oriented. The instrument was originally created for Ross and DeWine (1988). Mejía and Laca (2006) and Laca, Mejía and Mayoral (2011) made the translation into Spanish on samples of Mexican and Spanish university students. Later, Luna and Laca (2014) realized a validation study on a sample (N = 1074) of Mexican students, age-range 11 to 25. The coefficient of reliability Cronbach's alpha reported by Luna and Laca (2014) were of .68, .72 and .83 for the self-oriented, other-oriented, and issue-oriented styles, respectively.

Spanish modified version of the Trait Meta-Mood Scale. The original instrument by Salovey *et al.* (1995) is composed of 48 items. Fernández-Berrocal, Extremera and Ramos (2004) conducted a study in which the translation of the TMMS into Spanish was made by two authors (one of whom did not know the original English text). The authors fixed the final translation by consensus and conducted a study on a sample of 292 Spaniards undergraduates. In this study, the authors subjected the 48 items to a principal components analysis with a varimax rotation. Items with loadings equal to or less than .40 were removed, thereby reducing the total number of items from 48 to 24. Their analysis showed a three-factor solution with Attention (alpha .90), Clarity (alpha .90), and Repair (alpha .86) as dimensions of perceived emotional intelligence.

Procedure

Collaboration of school authorities was obtained. Students were invited to participate in the classroom in a completely voluntary and anonymous way. They were guaranteed confidential handling of

information and its exclusive use for scientific purposes. Participants answered a battery consisting of various psychometric scales in one session lasting approximately an hour; as a part of a larger study on *Correlates and predictors of conflict management styles in teenagers*. In this paper the correspondent results of the relationships between emotional intelligence and conflict management are reported.

RESULTS

According the aim of this study, a Pearson's correlational analysis was realized. As it can be seen in Table 1, the following correlations were statistically significant. First, the self-oriented and the other-oriented styles correlated positively with attention and repair. In turn, the issue-oriented style correlated positively with all aspects of perceived emotional intelligence.

Table 1. Pearson correlations between perceived emotional intelligence and conflict management message styles

	Attention	Clarity	Repair
Self-oriented	.174*	.035	.216**
Other-oriented	.260**	.077	.225**
Issue-oriented	.344**	.296**	.288**

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

DISCUSSION

In general, the findings of this study show a positive moderate relationship between perceived emotional intelligence and conflict management styles among Mexican adolescent high school students. According to Rahim (2001), each of the conflict management styles may be appropriate depending on the situation. Thus, emotional intelligence could be a ability that would help the individual to choose the most appropriate style for handling conflict in each specific situation. Furthermore, according to Henderson (2006), "the ability to monitor and control one's emotional state helps to facilitate communication in conflict situations" (p. 3). Thus, emotional intelligence could also be a skill that would help the individual to choose the most appropriate conflict management message style in each specific situation.

Only clarity didn't show significant correlations with self-oriented and other-oriented styles. It is possible that teens who used an issue-oriented style have higher ability for analyzing and understanding their emotional states, while adolescents wick have less developed this ability probably tend to choose only between a competitive style (self-oriented) and an accommodating style (other-oriented) when faced with a conflict.

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