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RELATIONSHIP QUALITY MEDIATE THE RELATIONSHIP  
BETWEEN PERSONALITY TRAITS AND CONFLICT  
MANAGEMENT STYLES AT PEJABAT SETIAUSAHA  
KERAJAAN NEGERI PAHANG

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**Abstract:**

This research will investigate the relationship between personality traits, relationship quality, and conflict management style among employees during the pandemic at the Secretary of Pahang State Government. The purpose of this research determines how variables in the extended Theory of the Five-factor of Personality Traits and the mediating relationship quality can be tested as a predictor of the conflict management style. The researcher specifically expected that conflict management style would be related to extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and neuroticism, which are the five-factor model of personality traits as well as the relationship quality. The researcher also looked at how relationship quality mediated the relationship between personality traits and conflict management style. To better understand the relationship, this study developed a framework and analyzed how well the model fits the data using the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) method. A total of 214 respondents from the departments and units in the State of Secretary of Pahang State Government were selected to complete a questionnaire to provide the empirical data for the analysis. All hypotheses were supported in this research with the presence of the mediator showing that personality traits were significantly related to Conflict Management Style. The limitation of this research in terms of scope of research covers only focusing on the government sector during the pandemic.

**Keywords:**

Conflict Management Styles, Personality Traits, Relationship Quality

**Introduction**

There is evidence that when the situation such as action taken by the government are related to levels of psychological wellness (Qiu et al., 2020), and the novelty of this situation invites an understanding of individual differences in how people cope with the pandemic. For example, nowadays, the world has turned into remote working or work from home concept wherever possible due to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) an infectious disease caused by a severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) (Elengoe, 2020). When the pandemic outbreak happened back in the year 2020, the government and the policymakers took preventive steps and directive measures to sustain social movement and infection among the citizens (Alifuddin, 2021). Common action that has been taken globally was the implementation of lockdown. Since the World Health Organization (WHO) proclaimed COVID-19 a pandemic on March 11, 2020, the cases of coronavirus have surpassed millions, which has spread fast to more than 200 countries and territories worldwide. Countries in the Southeast Asia region are not inevitable from this pandemic. It not only poses issues to public health but also affects the government sector.

The COVID-19 epidemic has caused a crisis on a grand scale, with far-reaching social, economic, and environmental consequences (Bapuji et al., 2020). For most organizations in the government sector, the effects of this pandemic in the most impacted countries are numerous and of unprecedented intensity. These uncertainties are much more challenging to handle for organizations because there has been little in-depth research on the subject, and the information provided is scant, fragmentary, and conflicting (Boiral et al., 2021). Furthermore, the pandemic in Malaysia has created an endemic situation of uncertainty and confusion about the risks to employees, the measures and best practices that organizations should implement, stakeholder pressures, recovery plans including assistance to the most affected companies and the possibility of new waves of contamination and the government shutdown (Bryce et al., 2020; Isabella and Carnevale, 2020; Oehmen et al., 2020). As a result of the government's movement restriction order requiring all employees to work from home, this became the first experience for the employees at State of Secretary of Pahang State Government in dealing with the pandemic. Conversely, it gives the impact to employees such as pressure on the use of new technology due to a variety of circumstances such as employees who lack skills in using the new medium due to age factors and low internet access. It will also cause a conflict at an early stage while working at home, and then when returning to the work session in the office, even if the employee is not 100 % present in the office, the employees will be more cautious and distance themselves from their colleagues. It will also cause conflict among employees when they must consider how to maintain mixing and work layout during a pandemic.

Since of the COVID-19 pandemic, individual personality will influence everyday behaviour (Cooper et al., 2019; Sherman et al., 2015) and health behaviors (Jones et al., 2017). Individual differences reflect differences in behaviour to cope with the pandemic. How individuals behave depends on his or her personality. Therefore, the researcher expected that conflict management style will play a role in employees' personality traits and the quality of the relationship between the employees engaged in such conflict issues during a pandemic. There is no single conflict

management style considered as the most appropriate across every negotiation. It will be influenced by the top management's point of view on conflict and employee personality type. One consistent style across all persons and situations may reflect personality rather than the appropriate choice of style. According to McKibben (2017), differing conflict management styles among employees and situations may represent a suitable style selection. Other than that, the choice of conflict management style is also impacted by many factors (Dziwinski, 2020). Miller & Poston (2020) mentioned that satisfying one's needs or interests is an important outcome in the conflict resolution process. This becomes a challenge when parties in the conflict want opposing needs or interests satisfied. However, personality does seem to play an important role in determining conflict behaviours. According to Zhou et al. (2017), people's personalities will first have an impact on their relationship satisfaction. A good relationship is typically associated with higher levels of relationship expectation and satisfaction, as well as a longer relationship duration. According to Hannis Ansah et al. (2018), a peaceful workplace is just one of the numerous benefits of excellent employee connections, and confrontations hinder productivity and cause discord, and the energy devoted to conflict resolution could be better spent working.

Conflict management style is the degree to which a group's members differ regarding a particular individual conflict management style. Kilmann (2020) has identified five conflict management styles each of which has its consequences. These styles are collaborating, accommodating, compromising, competing, and avoiding. The Collaborating approach entails trying to work with the other individual to search for a solution that fully addresses the issue at hand, satisfying all the involved parties. It includes the identification of the underlying concerns of one's opponent and finding alternative for meeting the interests of each party. The Accommodating style accommodates concerns of 'others first' instead of giving one's interests top priority. This technique is appropriate when it is crucial to provide a relief that is temporal from conflict or when the problem is not meaningful to one person compared to others. Compromising style is a conflict managing approach aimed at finding a solution that is mutually acceptable and expedient and partially satisfies both the involved parties. Fourth style of conflict management is competing. Adopting a competing approach entail pushing one's opinion at the expense of others and maintaining active resistance to the action of the other person. The forcing technique is used in situations whereby one needs to fight for one's rights or opinion, resisting pressure or aggression. Avoidance is a managing conflict style whereby an individual fails in or avoids adequately addressing a conflict but instead postpones, withdraws, or sidesteps. In most cases, individuals will tend to avoid conflict due to fear of getting involved in the dispute or they may lack confidence in their managing conflict skills (Chandolia and Anastasiou, 2020; Thomas et al., 2008).

In general, personality refers to individual differences in the way he or she feels, think, and behave. Thus, it is the unique combination of characteristics and qualities that makes employees across situations and contexts (Vedel & Poropat, 2017). According to Abdullah et al. (2016), personality can be defined as a collection of intrinsic and extrinsic traits that may affect the behaviour of an individual. Parks-Leduc et al. (2015) indicated that personality traits are typically defined as descriptions of people in terms of relatively stable patterns of behaviour, thoughts, and emotions. MentalHel (2020) indicated that the big five major personality traits are neuroticism, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience. Neuroticism is a tendency to easily experience unpleasant emotions such as anxiety, anger, or depression. Extraversion captures the energy, urgency, and tendency to seek stimulation and the company of others. Agreeableness is a tendency to be

compassionate and cooperative rather than suspicious and antagonistic towards others. Conscientiousness is a tendency to show self-discipline, act dutifully, and aim for achievement. Openness to experience is an appreciation for art, emotion, adventure, and unusual ideas; imaginative and curious.

Therefore, the researcher specifically expected that conflict management style would be related to extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and neuroticism, which are the five-factor model of personality traits, as well as relationship quality, based on the conflict management style definitions.

### ***Statement of the Problem***

Conflict situations in the work environment among employees during pandemic situations can have different consequences. It became worse when the pandemic occurred whereby employees at State of Secretary of Pahang State Government could not communicate with each other. Because of that, when the employees are unable to communicate well with each other, miscommunication might occur, and conflict may arise. When conflict arises, it will ruin the relationship between employees. According to Türk & Ceylan (2020) and Gulec & Alkis (2004), in this situation, the employees need to be well-versed in human behaviors in order to manage their colleague's behaviors. Besides, it should be accepted that the conflicts that arise in work environment by means of the employees are the part of the organizations. Thus, instead of ignoring the conflict situations, it will be useful to understand the nature of the conflicts and to determine the solution to improve the quality in relationship and job stress. There is visible conflict and job stress among the employees at State of Secretary of Pahang State Government because of the pandemic. The pandemic's impact in Malaysia revealed that employees at State of Secretary of Pahang State Government are concerned about their physical safety and mental wellbeing.

Nowadays, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, employees in Secretary of Pahang State Government face the pressures of the new norm of work from home (WFH) hence workplace conflict can be more complex because of role overload and family distraction (Hussin, 2021). Employees will experience job stress because work gets disturbed because of the multiple roles as father, mother, husband, or wife. WFH also will have the challenge of family distraction because of sudden sickness, family visitors, or being a teacher for the kids who need to do their home-based teaching and learning activities (PdPR). Moreover, the employees have been managing the psychological challenge of the changes to their working lives with the competing demands of family. Anwar et al. (2021) has proved that WFH deprives employees of their growth opportunities and communications with their colleagues, which can contribute to their psychological. However, the stay-at-home recommendation during the MCO hampered people from making physical contact with other family members, friends, and colleagues, which in turn may have led to feelings of isolation and depression (Tay et al., 2021) and some might feel stress and anxiety to the employees at State of Secretary of Pahang State Government. When it comes to stress and anxiety, many employees are continuing to feel that they may have a significant impact on them, both physically and mentally. Based on Scott (2020), stress can affect their thinking and behaviour, making employees more likely to get into conflict situations. In turn, conflict can cause significant anxiety, which further affects their health and wellbeing. It is critical to assist employees to manage conflict. The problem can be resolved swiftly, informally, and collaboratively if the top management at State of Secretary of Pahang State Government understands the abilities that need to be developed and supports their employees with training on how to manage stress while WFH during pandemic.

According to Hussin (2021), employees at State of Secretary of Pahang State Government will decide to work at risk if the workplace's support system is in a good working order. Employee emotions and job performance will diminish if there is no good support structure in workplace. Very important is a mutual respect attitude toward one another because, from the perspective of challenges throughout the MCO, they do not realize that each of their colleagues has their challenges and problems, for example, some lost family members due to death, and there will be grief. It will affect conflict management if employees do not understand the situation of other colleagues and will indirectly affect the attitude of employees themselves due to emotional instability.

To be able to cope with this situation or to reduce the negative effects of conflict on employees, and to turn it into a positive outcome, the employee who has a conflict with other employees or team members or manager, should utilize the right conflict management style to tackle the difficulties stated. However, it is considered that one of the reasons behind these decisions is the personality traits of the employees themselves. The way an employee chooses to use conflict management style and personality traits determine whether they wish to sustain or damage the relationship. Based on researcher knowledge, there is limited research on conflict management in organizations during the pandemic because it rarely occurs in Malaysia. Therefore, the researcher has decided to conduct a study on the conflict management during the pandemic at Secretary of Pahang State Government. This research aims to bridge the gap between the relationship among personality traits, relationship quality, and conflict management style among employees during the pandemic at Secretary of Pahang State Government. To examine the relationship, this study will come out with the framework and testing how the model will fit with the data.

### ***Research Objectives***

The general objective of this research is to investigate the relationship between personality traits, relationship quality, and conflict management styles. Beside the general purpose of the research, the following are the specific objectives:

- 1) To identify the relationship between five-factor of personality traits and conflict management styles.
- 2) To examine the relationship between five-factor of personality traits and relationship quality.
- 3) To measure the relationship between relationship quality and conflict management styles.
- 4) To investigate mediating effect of relationship quality on five-factor of personality traits and conflict management styles.

### ***Research Questions***

Based on the research objectives, the research questions for the objectives are:

- 1) Which type of five-factor personality traits will have a relationship with conflict management styles?
- 2) Is there any relationship between personality traits and relationship quality?
- 3) Is there any relationship between relationship quality and conflict management style?
- 4) Does relationship quality mediate the relationship between personality traits and conflict management style?

## Literature Review

### *Conflict Management Style*

According to Ren & Kim (2017) and Kilmann & Thomas (1977), conflict management styles can be defined as individual patterns of behavioural predisposition that evolve individual behaviors and reactions. Raykova et al. (2020) proposed that conflict is a common feature of group activities and inherent to a wide range of interactions of team members (Jehn & Bendersky, 2018; Jehn & Mannix, 2001). Stress and anxiety to reach an agreement (Robert, 1988), power differences (Zartman & Touval, 1985), complexity of the task (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967), culture and leadership models employed by team leaders (Kozan, 1989) all affect how conflict ought to handle.

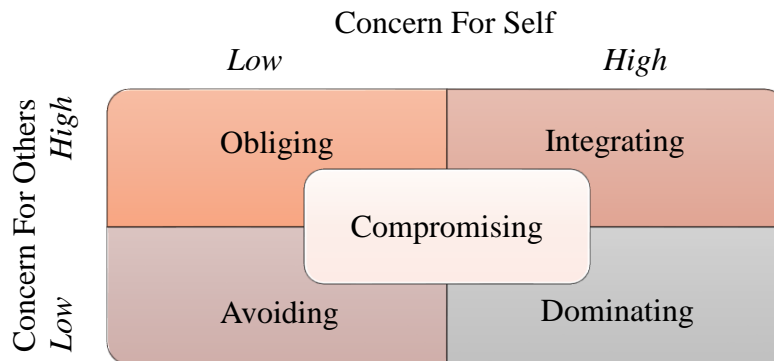
Conflict management refers to the strategies followed by both the parties to cope with a conflicting situation. According to Rahim (2012), conflict management refers to the process of eliminating the negative aspects of conflict, while escalating the positive aspects of conflict. The aim is to improve learning and group outcomes, including effectiveness or performance in an organizational setting. Thomas & Schmidt (2014) suggested the five modes there are avoiding, dominating, obliging, integrating, and compromising. Avoiding style neglects the conflict or denies the availability of conflict rather than finding a solution to the problem one seeks for neither own concerns nor others. Dominating style neglects personal concerns to persuade the concerns of the opposite parties. It is a form of self-sacrificing kindness that is followed by the fulfilment of others' wishes when one would prefer not to do. The people look for their own concerns at the cost of other's concerns by applying all suitable authority to succeed the location and protect something that is believed to be correct in obliging style. In integrating style, detection of all concerns of both parties through a solution that gratifies both parties totally because of attempts to find alternatives to satisfy needs of all of them. Compromising style search for a mutually suitable clarification that persuade both the parties moderately via taking into consideration some concerns of both parties and neglecting others by exchanging concessions and finding a middle ground position (Rani, 2018).

Summary of the work and the development of conflict management style studies show a strong basis for researchers to continue to delve into aspects of conflict management style where such studies are still too few in developing countries such as Malaysia as well as in Secretary of Pahang State Government. The researcher relies on underpinning theories that support how and why when choosing the five-factor of personality traits and relationship quality have a relationship with conflict management style.

### *Theory 1: Rahim Model of Conflict Management (1983)*

According to Rahim (1983), conflict is an interactive state manifested in compatibility, disagreement, or difference within or between social entities such as individual, group or organization. For the purpose of this study, Rahim's definition of conflict will be used as he conceptualized conflict as an interactive process, which is consistent with the views of others (Robert, 1990) and in order for conflict to exist, it is needs to be recognized by all the parties involved in it. Rahim & Bonoma (1979) have differentiated the styles of handling interpersonal conflict along two basic dimensions, there are concern for self and concern for others. Concern for self, as a dimension, explains the degree (high or low) to which individuals attempt to satisfy their own concerns. Whereas the second dimension is a concern for others, explains the degree (high or low) to which individuals want to satisfy the concerns of others. These dimensions portray the motivational orientations of a given individual during conflict. In situations such as

disagreement, chaos, disputes and incompatibility between individuals, individuals exhibit five different behaviors that are shown in Figure 1 which constitute “Conflict Management Approaches”.



**Figure 1: Conflict Management Approaches Rahim (1983). A Measure of Styles of Handling Interpersonal Conflict**

These two dimensions can be crossed to these five styles of conflict management which are integrating is a high concern for self and for others. Obliging is a low concern for self and high concern for others. Meanwhile, Compromising is an intermediate concern for self and others. Dominating is a high concern for self and low concern for others. Lastly, Avoiding is a low concern for self and for others.

For this study, the researcher has chosen Rahim (1983) model of conflict management based on a two-dimensional model labelled as concern for self and concern for others. Individuals who demonstrate a high concern for self will show a strong concern to fulfil their own needs, whereas individuals who show a high concern for others demonstrate a high level of interest in fulfilling the needs of the other party (Rahim & Bonoma, 1979). It is among the most popular styles of handling conflict used in research. The researcher has studied five different approaches to handling interpersonal conflict by using five styles of conflict management style. Five different styles are styles that one will use depending on the circumstances and situations faced by the management along with subordinates. Based on Antonioni (2008), some scholars have suggested a contingency approach to handling a conflict, meaning that the appropriateness of using a particular style depends on the conflict situation (Rahim et al., 1992).

### ***Personality Traits***

The big five personality trait model is the frequently used term for the model of personality which demonstrates five fundamental factors of personality (Dunlop et al., 2020). It combines the emotions, attitudes, and behaviour of the people. Based on Simha & Parboteeah (2019), the Big Five model of personality traits is the most widely accepted model of normal range variation in personality, positing five broad dimensions to account for individual differences in human behaviour, cognition, and emotion. According to Rothermich et al. (2021) & Antonioni (1998), each of the factors is bipolar and the binaries align as follows: extraversion-introversion, agreeableness-antagonism, conscientiousness-undisciplined, openness-closeness, and emotional stability-neuroticism. Personality traits are systemized from narrow and particular to broad and general traits and the researcher indicate the existence of five primary traits or factors of personality from (McCrae & Costa, 1989) that often referred as the Five-Factor Model of Personality.

The psychological and behavioural responses to the pandemic can be influenced by several factors, including a person's characteristics and resources (Gori et al., 2021; Crosta et al., 2020), as evidenced by previous research that has highlighted the significant influence of personality traits on reactions to stress (Oshio et al., 2018; Bibbey et al., 2013). In this field, the Five-factor Model of Personality by Costa and McCrae (McCrae & Costa, 1990) is one of the most frequently used, in which five dimensions (extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness) represent a coherent and basically stable set of aspects that influence the affects, thoughts, and behaviors of individuals in their different life experiences. Personality traits, therefore, can shape an individual's responses to life situations by influencing their cognitive assessments, the emotions associated with them, and the strategies used to regulate those affective activations (Afshar et al., 2015; Costa & McCrae, 2006). The personality traits of individuals are evident in individuals having different perspectives, showing different attitudes and different behaviors, accepting a situation or event as a conflict, and deciding the strategy for managing a conflict (Erdenk & Altuntaş, 2017; Turhan et al., 2012).

An individual's personality is the composite of intellectual characteristics that makes them exclusive from other individuals. If someone wants to understand the behaviour of employees in the organization, it would be helpful if one knew something about the personality of that individual. Personality is an individual's distinctive psychological and intellectual arrangements or a person's exclusive steady pattern of thinking, feeling, and acting. Personality traits hold specific components in an organizational structure and have dynamic features, which will react differently to the changes of the environment (Rani, 2018). The five-factor model of personality trait is the frequently used term for the model of personality which demonstrates five fundamental factors of personality. According to Ehrhart (2006) & Bozionelos (2004), extraversion encompasses characteristics that include sociability, affiliation, and gregariousness as well as the extent to which individuals are assertive, dominant, and experience positive affect. Openness to experience is related to technical and imaginative creativity, contradictory philosophy, and political liberalization. Agreeableness is the optimistic views which make them believe that all the people in the society are honest and cooperative. It involves attributes such as selflessness, collaboration, and affection. Conscientiousness is a propensity to demonstrate self-regulation and perform obediently. Conscientious individuals tend to have a sense of duty, be organized, and efficient. Neuroticism can be defined as the tendency to be concerned, suspicious, anxious, and ineffective. Due to lack of confidence, people always have a defensive attitude, feel fearful and insecure.

### ***Theory 2: McCrae and Costa's Five-Factor Model of Personality (1987)***

The Five-Factor Model of Personality by McCrae and Costa (1987) represents the dominant conceptualization of personality structure in the current literature. This model posits that the five personality factors of Extraversion, Openness to Experience, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Neuroticism reside at the highest level of the personality hierarchy, as well as encompassing the entire domain of more narrow personality traits that fall at lower levels of the hierarchy. The Five-Factor Model of Personality is considered by some as the most widely accepted model of personality structure (Ekehammar & Akrami, 2003). Therefore, this model is presumed to be a complete framework for organizing personality traits. Each of the five dimensions represents a broad domain comprising a variety of more discrete traits, or facets.



Individuals differ in the extent to which their personality style is made up of the five personality traits such as neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. Thus, individuals' personality styles will shape their interactions in their work environment. Those who score high on the extraversion scale will tend to be sociable and assertive and will prefer to work with other people. Those who score high on openness to experience will be prone to open-mindedness, active imagination, preference for variety, and independence of judgment. Individuals who score high on agreeableness will tend to be tolerant, trusting, accepting, and will value and respect other people's beliefs and conventions than those who score low on the same trait. Those who score high on conscientiousness will tend to distinguish themselves for their trustworthiness and their sense of purposefulness and of responsibility as they will tend to be strong-willed, task-focused, and achievement-oriented. Finally, individuals who score high on it tend to experience negative feelings such as embarrassment, guilt, pessimism, and low self-esteem.

### ***Relationship Quality***

Relationship quality has consistently been conceptualized as a multi-faceted, second-order construct consisting of trust and at least one more, distinct relational construct (Rusdi et al., 2016; Beatson, A, 2008). For example, Crosby et al. (1990) consider trust and satisfaction together as the primary indicator of relationship quality, while Dwyer et al. (1987) argue that commitment is an appropriate third facet of relationship quality. This study will demonstrate that stress affects both relationship quality, such as how good people subjectively consider their relationship to be and how employees deal with disagreement together (Lo et al., 2017). Relationship quality is, in turn, intimately related to many aspects of well-being, including psychological and physical health (Pieh et al., 2021).

There is no clear explanation of what relationship quality is. According to Purnasari & Yuliando (2015) and Morgan & Hunt (1994) have a general agreement that satisfaction, trust, and commitment are key aspects of relationship quality. Employees must possess these aspects of relationship quality to form strong bonds with one another. In addition, the level of concern on conflict management style will show how the employee views their conflict either in a negative or positive situation and at the same time to maintaining their relationship with the other parties.

### ***Relationship Between Personality Traits and Conflict Management Styles***

Big Five personality trait theory introduced a robust method to study personality quantitatively. Organizational research has also realized the importance of individual differences and the effects of personality characteristics. Along with individual differences, another inevitable group process is conflict. It takes two to tangle; that is, when two persons interact, they are likely to experience disagreements and incompatibilities. Personality traits can describe who is more likely to perceive conflict and how that conflict will be managed. Organizational studies, however, are yet to reach a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between personality and conflict. Although personality helps critically in determining interpersonal interactions (Barrick, 2005).

The five-factor of personality has contributed to a new way of looking at personality (Peabody & Goldberg, 1989; McCrae & Costa, 1987). The five factors of personality are extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness, and neuroticism which measure dispositional categories under which a variety of specific traits are subsumed. Digman (1990) concluded that the five factors of personality are a fundamental model for describing personality. This study

intends to determine whether strong relationships exist between dispositional categories and conflict management styles (Antonioni, 2008).

As people grow and develop, they also develop preferences and strategies for dealing with the world around them. Because conflict is an unavoidable part of life, at least one of these strategies must be to manage conflict. Scholars have determined that people typically have a preferred conflict style, and according to Kaimenyi (2014), these conflict style preferences develop because of a complex mix of history and personal traits which are nurture and nature. Although there have been many models utilized over the years to explain and describe conflict styles, the model that will be utilized in this discussion is the Rahim (1983) model. Many factors, both interpersonal and intrapersonal are believed to affect how employee will choose to manage conflict. It has even been observed that although employees have preferred styles, employee will typically vary their conflict style depending on the context of the conflict. For example, it is not unusual for employee to use one conflict style at home with their family members, and another at work with their colleagues. Use of varying conflict styles during a single conflict episode has even been observed. For example, a person may begin a conflict by avoiding, then transition to dominating, and end the conflict with an integrating style. One area that has been of interest to scholars is the role of intrapersonal attributes, one of which is personality in the choice of preferred conflict style. This discussion will explore the literature concerning personality traits and conflict management style. Of particular interest in this discussion is the role played by personality traits in preferred conflict management style (Patel, 2012).

Early studies on the interaction between personality traits and conflict management styles have produced inconsistent results. However, this does not necessarily mean that conflict management style cannot be predicted by personality traits or that no relationship exists between personality and conflict management style (Antonioni, 1998). A search of multiple databases resulted in four studies investigating the associations between Five-factor model of personality and conflict management style (Zaso et al., 2021; Ahmed et al., 2010), and four studies investigating the association between personality traits, conflict management style, and other factors (Aliakbari & Amiri, 2016; Barbuto et al., 2010). The four studies that investigated other factors still conducted analyses and produced results concerning the relationship between personality and conflict style.

Thus, the results of these studies are still relevant to this discussion. Antonioni (1998) study, which was the most comprehensive, advanced a hypothesis concerning how almost every personality attribute would predict each conflict management style. Antonioni argued that in order to successfully utilize a specific conflict management style, one would need to possess certain personal attributes or skills. For example, Antonioni believed that a requirement to use the integrating style was that people be able to work collaboratively to find solutions and solve problems in a manner that is satisfactory to all parties involved. However, those who prefer to avoid conflict may be quiet or timid and tend to prefer to maintain harmony. They may also tend to procrastinate when dealing with conflicts and may not be open to new ideas or compromise. Similarly, those who prefer the obliging style will also wish to maintain harmony, but unlike the avoider, the obligor demonstrates a high level of concern for the other's interests. Conversely, those who prefer a dominating style show a high level of concern for their own interests and low concern for the other's interests, thus they are more likely to be aggressive, persistent, closed-minded, and strategic. Antonioni stated that compromising, by its very nature as a blend between yielding and problem solving, is more difficult to predict. However, he

further states that some traits, such as flexibility, may play a role in preferring compromise as a conflict management strategy.

### ***Relationship Between Personality Traits and Relationship Quality***

According to Rainey & Petkari (2019) and Thibaut & Kelley (2017), within every relationship, everyone tries to maximize the rewards such as happiness, social status, pleasure and minimize the costs such as anxiety, negative emotions, and conflict. Hence, in the employee's relationship, the individuals expect their relationship to benefit them through social support (Shapiro & Martin, 2010), increased technical skills, individual and team success (Casper et al., 2007) although due to the competitive nature of the relationship on some occasion such interaction may be negative (Eime et al., 2013). Importantly, such relationships are the ones that can help the individual to manage stress, cultivate skill development, improve social relationships, prolong participation, and help the employees to reach their full mental and potential to enhance performance success (Jowett & Nezelek, 2012; Allen et al., 2011). Such perception is derived from three distinct facets of the social relationships which are social support, depth, and conflict (Uchino, 2006) which have a major influence on an employee's health and well-being. Social support is the perception of an interactive, interpersonal connectedness (Sarason & Sarason, 1985) and when received from peer employee, it is connected to increased self-motivation and less burnout (DeFreese & Smith, 2013). Relationship depth is the extent to which an individual perceives a relationship as important, positive, and secure, enhancing the sense of cohesion in the employee's peer relationships (Bosselut et al., 2012). The third facet of relationships, conflict refers to a struggle between two individuals with opposing values, needs, beliefs or goals (Vazou et al., 2005) and although very prominent in employee intra-group relationships it has been largely unexplored (Carron et al., 2014).

The role and significance of close relationships in people's growth and development have been extensively discussed in social psychology (Harvey, 1987). There has been extensive evidence demonstrating the effect that personality traits have on an individual's interpersonal and relational outcomes (Yang et al., 2015; Jackson et al., 2010;). Moreover, the links between people's personality and close relationships have been thought as a platform from which interpersonal behaviors and interactions occur and unfold (Cooper & Sheldon, 2002). Subsequently, personality and relationships together seem to form parts of a system that can help generate knowledge and understanding of the works of human behaviour. The significance of considering personality and relationships as part of an integrated system is reflected in its long research tradition. Each of these five factors influences on employee thought processes, behaviors, and social relationships (Allen & Laborde, 2014).

The Five-factor of personality comprises the five personality traits of extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness to experience (McCrae & Costa, 1987). Within relationship research, agreeableness has been associated with individuals whose personality is characterized by cooperation, trust, and understanding. Those people are more likely to perceive their relationships as more supportive, satisfying, committed, and nonconflictual (Cuperman & Ickes, 2009). Correspondingly, extroversion is a personality trait characterized by sociability and gregariousness, and extroverted people are more likely to perceive their relationships as positive, responsive, and close (Berry et al., 2000). Conscientious individuals whose personality is underlined by being reliable, disciplined, organized, and goal-oriented have been found to be more satisfied and committed to their relationships (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). In contrast, neurotic individuals tend to experience

negative affect. Therefore, they are more likely to perceive their relationships as stressing, conflictual, dissatisfying, and noncommittal which can lead to potential dissolution in relationships (White et al., 2004). Lastly, openness is a characteristic of individuals who are inclined to experiment and are in favor of creativity, innovation, and imagination such personality features have been found to be associated with relationships that are conversational in nature, accommodative, close, empathic, and satisfying (Berry et al., 2000; McCrae, 1996).

### ***Relationship Between Relationship Quality and Conflict Management Styles***

Resolving conflict properly is an effective way of improving the relationship quality between employees (Xu & Ren, 2010). Conflict management styles are important antecedents of relationship quality between employees. Failure to manage and control conflict between the two sides will cause the deterioration of the relationship quality and lead to further escalation of the conflict. Thus, conflict and relationship quality form a vicious cycle due to mismanagement of the conflict (Jelodar et al., 2015). Bearing this in mind, it is necessary to study the influence of different conflict management styles on relationship quality (Jelodar & Yiu, 2012). According to contingency theory, conflict must be managed effectively to ensure a positive outcome (Jehn & Bendersky, 2003). Existing research shows that the effectiveness of the specific conflict management style changes with different levels of conflict (Xie et al., 1998) that is, the extent of the positive effect of the specific conflict management style on the outcome variables will vary with the level of conflict. However, the influence of conflict in organizations is complex and may be positive or negative depending on the type of conflict and conflict management styles (Liu & Zhai, 2011). Conflict can be divided into two categories which are task conflict and relationship conflict. Task conflict includes task inconsistency and may promote the completion of the goal. In contrast, relationship conflict includes emotional or personal problems, which may have a bad effect on the relationship between the two sides (Li et al., 2015).

This study considers relationship quality between employees, which is the overall evaluation or perception of the state of the relationship between two sides (Lu & Wang, 2017). According to Jelodar & Yiu (2012), conflict management styles affect relationship quality between the two sides. This study adopts two-dimension model of Rahim (2017), in accordance with concern for self and concern for others. It includes five styles of conflict management which are integrating, obliging, compromising, dominating, and avoiding. The top-management must know the effective way of dealing with conflict in different situations. Also, different conflict management styles may be appropriate in different situations. If the style can enhance the effectiveness of individuals, groups, or organizations, it can be viewed as a win-win style (Rahim, 2017). Research on interpersonal conflict in the construction industry shows that avoiding and dominating styles are negatively related to the interpersonal relationship. Obliging is sometimes positively and sometimes negatively related to the interpersonal relationship. Only integrating is consistently related positively to the interpersonal relationship. What is more, compromising has no significant effect on the interpersonal relationship (Burke, 1970).

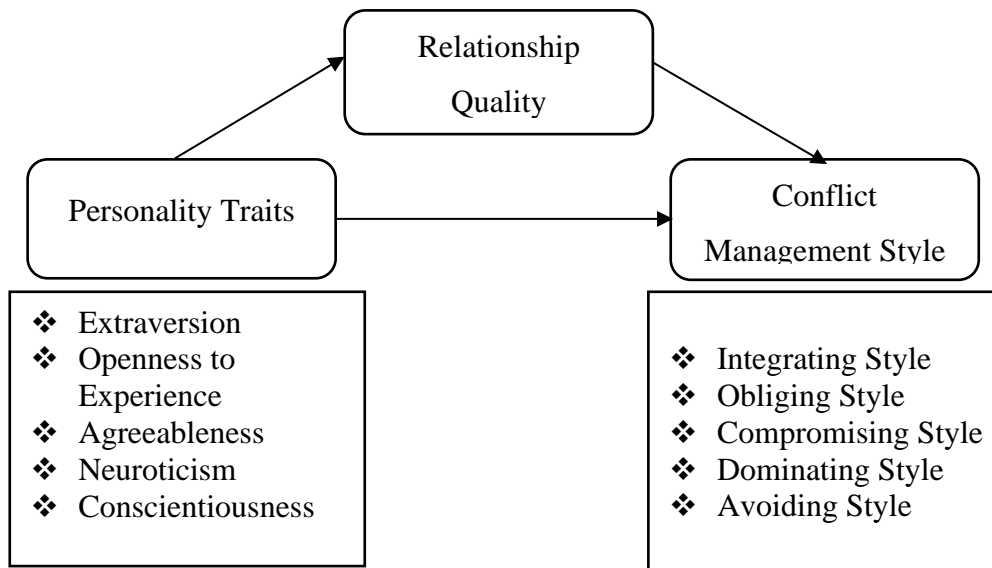
The more agreeable the conflict management style, the more effective it is in resolving conflicts and maximizing relationship quality (Dechurch & Marks, 2001). Existing studies show that the effectiveness of each conflict management style varies depending on the level of conflict (Xie et al., 1998). Research on interpersonal conflict shows that the most effective conflict management style for interpersonal relationships is integrating style, which is more effective particularly at a high level of conflict. The compromising and avoiding styles have a negative

effect on the interpersonal relationship at a low level of conflict but have a positive effect on the interpersonal relationship at a high level of conflict (Andrews & Tjosvold, 1983).

Conflict management styles will affect the relationship quality between the two parties involved in the conflict (Jelodar & Yiu, 2012). Integrating concerns about others and the self. The first step in achieving integration is to face the real problem, expose the conflict and make all things open (Kramer & Gray, 1990). Integrating is a win-win conflict management style, which some scholars consider the most appropriate and effective style because it focuses on reducing the pressure for both sides, consolidating commitment between the two parties, and improving employees job performance and satisfaction, which is beneficial for relationship quality. The obliging style represents high concern for others and low concern for the self and emphasizes meeting the needs of the other party at the expense of the needs of the self (Rahim, 2017). This implies self-sacrifice, making concessions to others and being faithful to others (Thammavijitdej & Horayangkura, 2016) and it also will be beneficial for relationship quality. The compromising style means giving up less than the obliging style, but it does not achieve a win-win situation (Rahim, 2017). It is a compromise between the two parties, and both will lose with respect to some of their interests (Sunindijo & Hadikusumo, 2014). The level of agreeableness of the compromising style is just above that of the dominating style in the five kinds of conflict management styles (Dechurch & Marks, 2001). Also, the compromising style is related to functional and dysfunctional results, thus, although compromising may not lead to further differences, it may be difficult to reduce the level of conflict (Cheung et al., 2006). Therefore, although compromising can enable the parties to reach middle ground, both sides will need to take a step back and sacrifice some of their own interests. Thus, compromising may not be the optimal style for resolving conflict (Shih & Susanto, 2010). The interests the parties sacrifice will give rise to some dissatisfaction, hence harming relationship quality. Dominating and avoiding are the styles which mean lower concern for others. Dominating entails one party imposing its own views on the other, leading to a win or lose situation in which one wins at the expense of the other's losses. Avoiding is also a rather negative response to the conflict, ignoring the considerations of all parties (Prieto-Remón et al., 2015). The use of the avoiding style will not resolve conflict in the early stage, which is harmful for relationship quality (Xie et al., 1998). Therefore, neither of these two styles can improve relationship quality.

### ***Conceptual Framework***

Based on the review of previous literature, the conceptual framework has been developed as shown in figure 2. Figure 2 has shown the mediated relationship between personality traits and conflict management style through relationship quality and the researcher was adopted and adapted the framework from Ayub et al. (2017), Lu & Wang (2017) and Holland & Roisman (2008) based on the relationship among the variables. There are three types of variables that have been applied in this study which are independent variable, mediating variable, and dependent variable. The researcher chooses five styles under conflict management that can be related to five types of personality traits and relationship quality. The framework of this study will present the relationship between personality traits, relationship quality, and conflict management style.



**Figure 2: The Conceptual Framework of the Mediated Relationship between Personality Traits and Conflict Management Style Through Relationship Quality**

### *Hypotheses*

Based on the various studies on the relationship between five-factor of personality traits, relationship quality, and conflict management styles available in the literature, the following hypotheses will formulate for the research.

***H<sub>1</sub>:*** *There is any significant relationship between five-factor of personality traits and conflict management style.*

**H<sub>1a</sub>:** Five-factor of personality traits have significant and positive relationship to integrating style.

***H<sub>1a1</sub>:*** *Extraversion has a significant and positive relationship to integrating style.*

***H<sub>1a2</sub>:*** *Openness to experience has a significant and positive relationship to integrating style.*

***H<sub>1a3</sub>:*** *Agreeableness has a significant and positive relationship to integrating style.*

***H<sub>1a4</sub>:*** *Conscientiousness has a significant and positive relationship to integrating style.*

***H<sub>1a5</sub>:*** *Neuroticism has a significant and positive relationship to integrating style.*

**H<sub>1b</sub>:** Five-factor of personality traits have significant and positive relationship to obliging style.

***H<sub>1b1</sub>:*** *Extraversion has a significant and positive relationship to obliging style.*

***H<sub>1b2</sub>:*** *Openness to experience has a significant and positive relationship to obliging style.*

***H<sub>1b3</sub>:*** *Agreeableness has a significant and positive relationship to obliging style.*

***H<sub>1b4</sub>:*** *Conscientiousness has a significant and positive relationship to obliging style.*

***H<sub>1b5</sub>:*** *Neuroticism has a significant and positive relationship to obliging style.*

**H<sub>1c</sub>:** Five-factor of personality traits have significant and positive relationship to dominating style.

**H<sub>1c1</sub>:** Extraversion has significant and positive relationship to dominating style.

***H<sub>1c2</sub>:*** *Openness to experience has a significant and positive relationship to dominating style.*

***H<sub>1c3</sub>:*** *Agreeableness has a significant and positive relationship to dominating style.*

***H<sub>1c4</sub>:*** *Conscientiousness has a significant and positive relationship to dominating style.*

- H<sub>1c5</sub>: Neuroticism has a significant and positive relationship to dominating style.*
- H<sub>1d</sub>: Five-factor of personality traits have significant and positive relationship to avoiding style.*
- H<sub>1d1</sub>: Extraversion has a significant and positive relationship to avoiding style.*
- H<sub>1d2</sub>: Openness to experience has a significant and positive relationship to avoiding style.*
- H<sub>1d3</sub>: Agreeableness has a significant and positive relationship to avoiding style.*
- H<sub>1d4</sub>: Conscientiousness has a significant and positive relationship to avoiding style.*
- H<sub>1d5</sub>: Neuroticism has a significant and positive relationship to avoiding style.*
- H<sub>1e</sub>: Five-factor of personality traits have significant and positive relationship to compromising style.*
- H<sub>1e1</sub>: Extraversion has a significant and positive relationship to compromising style.*
- H<sub>1e2</sub>: Openness to experience has a significant and positive relationship to compromising style.*
- H<sub>1e3</sub>: Agreeableness has a significant and positive relationship to compromising style.*
- H<sub>1e4</sub>: Conscientiousness has a significant and positive relationship to compromising style.*
- H<sub>1e5</sub>: Neuroticism has a significant and positive relationship to compromising style.*
- H<sub>2</sub>: There is any significant relationship between five-factor of personality traits and relationship quality.***
- H<sub>2a</sub>: Extraversion has a significant and positive relationship to relationship quality.*
- H<sub>2b</sub>: Openness to experience has a significant and positive relationship to relationship quality.*
- H<sub>2c</sub>: Agreeableness has a significant and positive relationship to relationship quality.*
- H<sub>2d</sub>: Conscientiousness has a significant and positive relationship to relationship quality.*
- H<sub>2e</sub>: Neuroticism has a significant and positive relationship to relationship quality.*
- H<sub>3</sub>: There is any significant relationship between relationship quality and conflict management.***
- H<sub>3a</sub>: There is a significant relationship of relationship quality to integrating style.*
- H<sub>3b</sub>: There is a significant relationship of relationship quality to obliging style.*
- H<sub>3c</sub>: There is a significant relationship of relationship quality to dominating style.*
- H<sub>3d</sub>: There is a significant relationship of relationship quality to avoiding style.*
- H<sub>3e</sub>: There is a significant relationship of relationship quality to compromising style.*
- H<sub>4</sub>: Relationship quality will mediate between five-factor of personality traits and conflict management style.***
- H<sub>4a</sub>: Relationship quality has a mediating effect on agreeableness and conflict management styles.*
- H<sub>4b</sub>: Relationship quality has a mediating effect on conscientiousness and conflict management styles.*
- H<sub>4c</sub>: Relationship quality has a mediating effect on extraversion and conflict management styles.*
- H<sub>4d</sub>: Relationship quality has a mediating effect on neuroticism and conflict management styles.*
- H<sub>4e</sub>: Relationship quality has a mediating effect on openness to experience and conflict management styles.*

## Materials and Methods

The sampling frame of this study will involve selected employees in the departments and units at State of Secretary of Pahang State Government. The list of employee's names was obtained from all departments and units with over 472 employees. The respondents will be selected based on the number of employees for each department and unit. 214 employees will be selected randomly to be respondents. The data collection processes were conducted for approximately 2 weeks and a total of 215 useable questionnaires were collected in April 2022. The questionnaire is all closed-ended questions which consist of four sections. The items used were adopted originally from previous study and some items were adapted to ensure that all the items suit the study. The Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) was used to analyze the data obtained from the questionnaire. According to Hair et al., (2013), the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) is a method of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) that allows estimating complex cause-effect relationship models with latent variables. The researcher used PLS-SEM to estimate complex models with many constructs, indicator variables and structural path without imposing distributional assumptions on the data. It is determines how well the model explains the target constructs of interest. The types of measurement model in Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) used in this study is reflective measurement scale.

## Data Analysis and Findings

The responses from the respondent were filled in the software and statistical analysis such as descriptive statistics and frequencies were measured. Furthermore, it allows the researcher to identify whether there is a possibility of missing data and potential errors in the responses. Any missing values with the responses were removed from the data entry. PLS-SEM purposely assesses the effectiveness of the measurement model which is to ensure both reliability and validity of the constructs. After the assessment of the measurement model was completed, the analysis continues with the evaluation of the structural model. The measurement model involves the measurement of the indicators, reliability, and validity. The indicators examined include the reflective measurement, their reliability, and validity. The structural model is the analysis of the results of the relationship among the latent variables or constructs. This analysis includes the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ), the path coefficients, the predictive relevance ( $Q^2$ ), and the direct and indirect effects (mediating effects). The structural model in the PLS-SEM represents the relationship among constructs.

### *Assessment of Measurement Model*

Assessment of measurement model focuses on measuring the relationship between indicators and the latent variables by using Smart PLS 3.9. Smart PLS 3.9 is used to assess the measurement and structural model (Ringle et al., 2018). This statistical software assesses the psychometric properties of the measurement model and estimated the parameters of the structural model. The purpose of the measurement model is to identify the quality of the model which we would like to have model fit with the data. Four main criteria need to be completed in the reflective measurement model which are internal consistency, indicator reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. The following sections present the results of all analyses to evaluate the validity and reliability of the measurement model.

### *Internal Consistency*

Reliability is concerned with the ability of the variables to provide a consistent measurement while validity measures to which extent the variables are measuring what is supposed to be measured (Tavakol and Dennick, 2011). Thus, due to Cronbach alpha's limitation, this study



uses composite reliability (CR) as an alternative to measuring internal consistency because it considers the loadings of all the items (David et al., 2000). A value of 0.7 is deemed to be acceptable. However, the values of composite reliability (CR) should be 0.8 or higher to have a good internal consistency (Sarstedt et al., 2011). Table 1 shows the CR value of each construct for this study ranges from 0.759 to 0.904. The CR values for all the items are CSM (0.904), PTA (0.807), PTC (0.864), PTE (0.759), PTN (0.859), PTO (0.851) and RQ (0.949). These results indicate that the items used to represent the constructs pose satisfactory internal consistency reliability.

### ***Indicator Reliability***

The indicator reliability of the measurement model is measured by examining the item's loadings. A measurement model is said to have satisfactory indicator reliability when each item's loading estimate is higher between 0.5 to 0.7 (Hair et al., 2010). Based on the analysis, all items in the measurement model exhibited loadings exceeding 0.5 ranging from a lower bound of 0.503 to an upper bound of 0.823. Table 1 shows that all the loadings for the respective items are more than 0.5 indicating an acceptable value. Thus, it means that all the loadings are consistent in measuring what it intends to measure and valid to be used as a measurement study.

**Table 1: Construct Reliability Analysis (Cronbach Alpha and Composite Reliability)**

	<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>	<b>Composite Reliability (CR)</b>
CMS	0.878	0.904
PTA	0.711	0.807
PTC	0.812	0.864
PTE	0.553	0.759
PTN	0.814	0.859
PTO	0.781	0.851
RQ	0.928	0.949

### ***Convergent Validity***

Hair et al. (2010) suggested several ways to estimate the convergent validity among item measures, such as factor loadings, average variance extracted (AVE), and composite reliability (CR). The loadings for all items should exceed the recommended value of 0.50 or higher (Hair et al., 2017). The average variance extracted (AVE), which is the mean-variance extracted for the items loading on a construct were all above the recommended value of 0.50 or higher (Hair et al., 2010), suggesting more than one half of the variances observed in the items were accounted by their hypothesized factors (Liao et al., 2014). Statistically using PLS-SEM, construct validity is established when there is satisfied convergent validity and discriminant validity. The AVE for this study is in the range of 0.503 and 0.823. Composite reliability, which indicates the degree to which the latent variables can be explained by the observed variables (Wong, 2013) is the range of 0.759 to 0.949, which exceeds the cut-off value of 0.6 (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988). Thus, this study ensured the existence of convergent validity. Table 2 summarizes the results of the measurement model, which shows that the constructs are all valid measures of their respective constructs. The result of the AVE for CSM (0.503), PTA (0.520), PTC (0.515), PTE (0.517), PTN (0.505), PTO (0.538) and RQ (0.823). All the items have an AVE score of more than 0.5 indicating that convergent validity is achieved.

**Table 2: Internal Consistency, Indicator Reliability and Convergent Validity**

Construct	Item	Loading	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Composite Reliability (CR)
<b>CMS</b>	CMSA5	0.331	0.503	0.904
	CMSC3	0.573		
	CMSD4	0.460		
	CMSI2	0.800		
	CMSI3	0.822		
	CMSI4	0.859		
	CMSI5	0.765		
	CMSI6	0.862		
	CMSI7	0.858		
	CMSO1	0.514		
<b>PTA</b>	PTA10	0.736	0.520	0.807
	PTA2	0.490		
	PTA3	0.768		
	PTA4	0.842		
<b>PTC</b>	PTC1	0.703	0.515	0.864
	PTC2	0.658		
	PTC4	0.631		
	PTC7	0.759		
	PTC8	0.817		
	PTC9	0.724		
<b>PTE</b>	PTE6	0.746	0.517	0.759
	PTE7	0.588		
	PTE8	0.805		
<b>PTN</b>	PTN1	0.703	0.505	0.859
	PTN3	0.763		
	PTN5	0.798		
	PTN6	0.674		
	PTN7	0.645		
	PTN8	0.668		
<b>PTO</b>	PTO	0.801	0.538	0.851
	PTO	0.573		
	PTO	0.650		
	PTO	0.825		
	PTO	0.787		
<b>RQ</b>	RQP1	0.899	0.823	0.949
	RQP2	0.896		
	RQP3	0.925		
	RQP4	0.908		

***Discriminant Validity***

The discriminant validity test was conducted after the convergent validity test. This verification was administrated to evaluate whether a specific variable interpreted a certain measurement. Instead, Henseler et al. (2015) proposed a Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT) correlation which is something more prevailing. The HTMT is defined as the mean value of item correlations across constructs relative to the mean (geometric) correlations for items measuring

the same construct. The discriminant validity problem is present when the HTMT value is high. In such a setting, an HTMT value above 0.90 would indicate that discriminant validity does not exist. By referring to table 4.8, it has shown the highest value of HTMT is 0.475. Based on table 3 shows that the HTMT values for all items are less than 0.90 which suggests that discriminant validity has been established and it can be concluded that the indicators are not measuring other constructs and only measure their construct.

**Table 3: Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio Correlation Result (HTMT)**

	CMS	PTA	PTC	PTE	PTN	PTO	RQ
Conflict Management Styles							
Personality Traits Agreeableness	0.475						
Personality Traits Conscientiousness	0.600	0.463					
Personality Traits Extraversion	0.219	0.296	0.422				
Personality Traits Neuroticism	0.191	0.148	0.180	0.193			
Personality Traits Openness to Experience	0.446	0.792	0.489	0.341	0.205		
Relationship Quality	0.453	0.401	0.490	0.314	0.265	0.413	

#### *Assessment of Structural Model*

Once the construct has been confirmed to be reliable and valid, the structural model can proceed. Hair et al. (2012) have suggested that the bootstrapping method of re-sampling techniques must be carried out before an experience was conducted to check the result of the hypothesis throughout the research and determination of its significance level. The evaluation of the structural model or hypotheses testing will show in the following section. There are five steps to evaluate the structural model in PLS-SEM which are assessment of collinearity, assessment of significance and relevance of the structural model, assessment of coefficient of determination known as  $R^2$ , and assessment of effect size known as ( $f^2$ ).

#### *Assessment of Collinearity*

In PLS, the assessment of collinearity can be confirmed through Variance Inflation Factor (VIF). VIF is a tool to measure how much variance is being inflated (Daoud, 2018). If the value of VIF is found to be less than 5, the multicollinearity issues are not a problem (Hair et al., 2012). Based on table 4, the Inner VIF values for all independent variables are less than 5, which indicates that multicollinearity is not an issue for this study. Thus, path coefficient assessment can proceed.

**Table 4: Literal Collinearity Assessment Result**

Construct	RQ (Inner VIF)
PT Agreeableness	1.598
PT Conscientiousness	1.365
PT Extraversion	1.114
PT Neuroticism	1.070
PT Openness to Experience	1.637

### Assessment of Coefficient of Determination ( $R^2$ )

R-square statistics explains the variance in the endogenous variable explained by the exogenous variables. Simply, it means how much change in the dependent variable can be accounted for by one or more independent variables. Based on table 5, the R-square value for this study is 0.176 which indicates a total of 17.6% variance of the dependent variable can explained for Conflict Management Styles, and 0.329 which indicates a total of 32.9% variance of the mediating variable that was explained for Relationship Quality. Falk & Miller (1992) recommended that  $R^2$  should be equal to or greater than 0.10 for the variance explained of a particular endogenous construct to be deemed adequate. Cohen (1998) suggest  $R^2$  values for endogenous latent variables based on 0.26 (substantial), 0.13 (moderate), 0.02 (weak).

**Table 5: Coefficient of Determination ( $R^2$ ) Result**

	R Square	R Square Adjusted
CMS	0.176	0.173
RQ	0.329	0.313

### Assessment of Effect Size ( $f^2$ )

The difference value of  $R^2$  was further used for the calculation of effect size ( $f^2$ ) which indicates the effect of an exogenous latent variable on an endogenous variable. Effect size is performed to determine the strength of the relationship between the independent variables and dependent variables. Cohen (1992) has suggested the effect size value of 0.02 is considered small, 0.15 as a medium, and 0.35 as a large effect size. The effect size ( $f^2$ ) of this study is 0.3442 which can be concluded as a medium following Cohen (1992).

### Hypothesis Testing

Table 6 and table 7 show the hypotheses result for direct and indirect relationships. The results show that H1a, H1b, H1c, H1d, and H1e have a strong relationship between personality traits and conflict management styles in the hypothesis direction ( $\beta=0.030$ ,  $p<0.028$ ;  $\beta=0.034$ ,  $p<0.004$ ;  $\beta=0.027$ ,  $p<0.022$ ;  $\beta=0.028$ ,  $p<0.000$ ;  $\beta=0.034$ ,  $p<0.039$ ). Meanwhile, H2a, H2b, H2c, H2d, and H2e also have a strong relationship between relationship quality and conflict management styles in the hypothesis direction ( $\beta=0.066$ ,  $p<0.015$ ;  $\beta=0.066$ ,  $p<0.000$ ;  $\beta=0.058$ ,  $p<0.012$ ;  $\beta=0.049$ ,  $p<0.000$ ;  $\beta=0.074$ ,  $p<0.024$ ). H3 has a significant relationship between relationship quality and conflict management styles and in the hypothesized direction ( $\beta=0.059$ ,  $p<0.000$ ). Therefore, hypotheses H1, H2, and H3 are supported.

**Table 6: Hypothesis Result Hypothesis 1**

H	Relationship	Path Coefficient	t-value	p-value	Decision
H1a	PTA -> CMS	0.030	2.200	0.028	Supported
H1b	PTC -> CMS	0.034	2.866	0.004	Supported
H1c	PTE -> CMS	0.027	2.292	0.022	Supported
H1d	PTN -> CMS	0.028	4.114	0.000	Supported
H1e	PTO -> CMS	0.034	2.066	0.039	Supported

**Table 7: Hypothesis Result Hypothesis 2 and Hypothesis 3**

H	Relationship	Path Coefficient	t-value	p-value	Decision
H2a	PTA -> RQ	0.066	2.422	0.015	Supported
H2b	PTC -> RQ	0.066	3.492	0.000	Supported

<b>H<sub>2c</sub></b>	PTE -> RQ	0.058	2.505	0.012	Supported
<b>H<sub>2d</sub></b>	PTN -> RQ	0.049	5.497	0.000	Supported
<b>H<sub>2e</sub></b>	PTO -> RQ	0.074	2.262	0.024	Supported
<b>H<sub>3</sub></b>	RQ -> CMS	0.059	7.136	0.000	Supported

### Mediation Analysis

Mediation analysis was performed to assess the mediating role of Relationship Quality (RQ) on the linkage between Personality Traits (PT) and Conflict Management Styles (CMS). This section discussed the mediation analysis used to test the hypotheses H1, H2, H3, H4, and H5. Preacher & Hayes (2008) described mediation analysis as mediation hypothesizing on how or what means the predictor (X) affects the outcome (Y) through a mediator (M). In this regard, the study sought to determine whether relationship quality mediates the relationship between personality traits and conflict management styles. Following recommendations from previous who have suggested using the bootstrapping method to assess the mediation effect (Preacher & Hayes, 2004), this study has employed bootstrapping analysis method by Preacher & Hayes (2008). The five mediation hypotheses can be written as follows:

- H<sub>4a</sub>: Relationship quality has a mediating effect on agreeableness and conflict management styles.
- H<sub>4b</sub>: Relationship quality has a mediating effect on conscientiousness and conflict management styles.
- H<sub>4c</sub>: Relationship quality has a mediating effect on extraversion and conflict management styles.
- H<sub>4d</sub>: Relationship quality has a mediating effect on neuroticism and conflict management styles.
- H<sub>4e</sub>: Relationship quality has a mediating effect on openness to experience and conflict management styles.

### Result from the Bootstrapping Analysis

This study has proposed relationship quality as a mediator within the relationship between personality traits and conflict management styles. Since the predictor comprises two variables which are personality traits and conflict management styles, the bootstrapping analysis is done separately for each predictor. The data is analyzed on mediation by implementing the Preacher & Hayes (2008) script in Smart PLS version 3.9. The results and interpretation of bootstrapping analysis were provided as follows:

**Table 8: The results and interpretation of bootstrapping analysis**

	PT>RQ	RQ>CMS	PT>CMS	H
<b>H<sub>4a</sub></b>	$\beta=0.159$ , $t=2.422$ , $p < 0.01$	$\beta=0.420$ , $t=7.136$ , $p < 0.000$	$\beta=0.067$ , $t=2.200$ , $p < 0.01$	$\beta= 0.003$ , CI= 0.010 to 0.130
<b>H<sub>4b</sub></b>	$\beta=0.232$ , $t=3.492$ , $p < 0.000$	$\beta=0.420$ , $t=7.136$ , $p < 0.000$	$\beta=0.067$ , $t=2.866$ , $p < 0.01$	$\beta= 0.000$ , CI= 0.039 to 0.172
<b>H<sub>4c</sub></b>	$\beta=0.146$ , $t=2.505$ , $p < 0.01$	$\beta=0.420$ , $t=7.136$ , $p < 0.000$	$\beta=0.061$ , $t=2.292$ , $p < 0.01$	$\beta= 0.003$ , CI= 0.007 to 0.113
<b>H<sub>4d</sub></b>	$\beta=-0.271$ , $t=5.497$ ,	$\beta=0.420$ , $t=7.136$ ,	$\beta=-0.114$ , $t=4.114$ ,	$\beta= -0.007$ , CI= -0.0164 to -0.061

	$p < 0.000$	$p < 0.000$	$p < 0.000$	
<b>H<sub>4e</sub></b>	$\beta=0.168,$ $t=2.262,$ $p < 0.01$	$\beta=0.420,$ $t=7.136,$ $p < 0.000$	$\beta=0.070,$ $t=2.066,$ $p < 0.01$	$\beta= 0.005,$ CI= 0.005 to 0.139

#### **Result of the Hypothesis (Hypothesis 4)**

The purpose of this research is to determine how variables in the extended Theory of the Five-factor of Personality Traits and the mediating relationship quality can be tested as a predictor of the conflict management style. Table 18 summarizes the result of the hypothesized relationship in this study. Accordingly, hypotheses H<sub>4a</sub>, H<sub>4b</sub>, H<sub>4c</sub>, H<sub>4d</sub>, and H<sub>4e</sub> were supported in this study with the presence of the mediator showing that personality traits were significantly related to Conflict Management Style.

**Table 9: Summary of Hypothesized Relationship**

<b>H</b>	<b>Hypotheses</b>	<b>Result</b>	<b>Decision</b>
<b>H<sub>4a</sub></b>	Relationship quality has a mediating effect on agreeableness and conflict management styles.	Positively Significant	Supported
<b>H<sub>4b</sub></b>	Relationship quality has a mediating effect on conscientiousness and conflict management styles.	Positively Significant	Supported
<b>H<sub>4c</sub></b>	Relationship quality has a mediating effect on extraversion and conflict management styles.	Positively Significant	Supported
<b>H<sub>4d</sub></b>	Relationship quality has a mediating effect on neuroticism and conflict management styles.	Positively Significant	Supported
<b>H<sub>4e</sub></b>	Relationship quality has a mediating effect on openness to experience and conflict management styles.	Positively Significant	Supported

#### **Discussion**

The underlying theory used to explain the theoretical framework and research hypotheses was derived from two different resources. Firstly, the Five-factor of personality traits by McCrae and Costa. The second is the theory from the Rahim Model of conflict management style. This section summarized the research objectives and research questions, as well as provided justification based on the findings, as follows:

**Research Objective 1:** To identify the relationship between five-factor of personality traits and conflict management styles.

- Which type of five-factor personality traits will have a relationship with conflict management styles?

This research has examined the relationship between five-factor of personality traits and conflict management styles. The result from the total effect shown that the relationship between five-factor of personality traits and conflict management styles: Agreeableness ( $\beta=0.030$ ,  $t=2.200$ ,  $p<0.028$ ), conscientiousness ( $\beta=0.034$ ,  $t=2.866$ ,  $p<0.040$ ), extraversion ( $\beta=0.027$ ,  $t=2.292$ ,  $p<0.022$ ), neuroticism ( $\beta=0.028$ ,  $t=4.114$ ,  $p<0.000$ ), and openness to experience ( $\beta=0.034$ ,  $t=2.066$ ,  $p<0.039$ ) respectively, describes that there is a significant relationship between variables.

**Research Objective 2:** To examine the relationship between five-factor of personality traits and relationship quality.

- Is there any relationship between personality traits and relationship quality?

In this research, the relationship between five-factor of personality traits and relationship quality are determined to be tested. The result shown the relationship between five-factor of personality traits and relationship quality are Agreeableness ( $\beta=0.066$ ,  $t=2.422$ ,  $p<0.015$ ), conscientiousness ( $\beta=0.066$ ,  $t=3.492$ ,  $p<0.000$ ), extraversion ( $\beta=0.058$ ,  $t=2.505$ ,  $p<0.012$ ), neuroticism ( $\beta= 0.049$ ,  $t=5.497$ ,  $p<0.000$ ), and openness to experience ( $\beta= 0.074$ ,  $t=2.262$ ,  $p<0.024$ ). All five-factor of personality traits show a significant relationship with relationship quality in this study. The finding expected that personality traits would predict changes in subsequent relationship quality (Malouff et al., 2010). It has been hypothesized that lower neuroticism and higher extraversion, agreeableness, openness to experience, and conscientiousness would predict decreases in conflict and positive changes in relationship quality.

**Research Objective 3:** To measure the relationship between relationship quality and conflict management styles.

- Is there any relationship between relationship quality and conflict management styles?

The relationship between the mediator and the outcome was revealed to have a positive significance with conflict management styles in this study. Based on a two-tailed analysis, results for the relationship quality to conflict management styles are shown ( $\beta= 0.420$ ,  $t= 7.136$ ,  $p < 0.000$ ). The correlation analysis was used to determine the strength of the relationship between the two variables based on Cronbach's Alpha results: conflict management styles,  $r = 0.878$ , and relationship quality,  $r = 0.928$ . It indicates that there is a very strong positive relationship between relationship quality and conflict management styles. This result supported previous studies that investigated the same variables (Ataee, 2020). Based on the result of the R-square value for this study, 0.176 which indicates a total of 17.6% variance of the dependent variable can be explained for Conflict Management Styles, and 0.329 which indicates a total of 32.9% variance of the mediating variable that was explained for Relationship Quality. The result of R2 should be equal to or greater than 0.10 for the variance and it is explained by a particular endogenous construct to be deemed adequate for this study.

**Research Objective 4:** To investigate mediating effect of relationship quality on five-factor of personality traits and conflict management styles.

- Does relationship quality mediate the relationship between personality traits and conflict management styles?

The bootstrapping method of mediation analysis by Preacher & Hayes (2008) were employed to test the mediating effect of the relationship quality in determining the relationship between the five-factors of personality and conflict management styles. H1, H2, H3, H4 and H5 predicted the mediation role of relationship quality, were explained by path  $c'$  ( $c'=c+ab$ ). The result from the analysis has confirmed the mediation role of relationship quality which include positive and negative relationship in the relationship between five-factor of personality traits and conflict management styles. Results from the analysis discovered that path a, path b and path c for five-factor of personality traits and conflict management styles have shown a positive significant relationship. Hence, the bootstrapping bias-corrected confidence interval estimates were thoroughly observed.

Since zero falls out from the interval with agreeableness ( $\beta = 0.003$ , CI= 0.010 to 0.130), conscientiousness ( $\beta = 0.000$ , CI= 0.039 to 0.172), extraversion ( $\beta = 0.003$ , CI= 0.007 to 0.113), neuroticism ( $\beta = -0.007$ , CI= -0.0164 to -0.061), openness to experience ( $\beta = 0.005$ , CI= 0.005 to 0.139), and conflict management styles, the mediating roles of relationship quality in the relation between five-factors of personality traits to conflict managements styles can be assumed (Preacher & Hayes). Moreover, the direct effect – path c' also shown significant result of Agreeableness ( $\beta = 0.067$ ,  $t = 2.200$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), conscientiousness ( $B = 0.097$ ,  $t = 2.866$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), extraversion ( $\beta = 0.067$ ,  $t = 2.292$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), neuroticism ( $\beta = -0.114$ ,  $t = 4.114$ ,  $p < 0.000$ ), openness to experience ( $\beta = 0.070$ ,  $t = 2.066$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), which suggesting that relationship quality has partially mediated the relationship between five-factors of personality traits and conflict management styles (Preacher & Hayes, 2008).

The findings of the mediation analysis performed in this study are supported by the previous studies (Karen Jehn et al., 2017), provided that relationship quality has a mediation effect of the relationship between personality traits and conflict management styles. Pertaining to the results from the mediation analysis, and the supporting literature from the previous studies, therefore,  $H_{4a}$ ,  $H_{4b}$ ,  $H_{4c}$ ,  $H_{4d}$  and  $H_{4e}$  are supported in this study.

### Conclusion

The current research used conflict management latent change scores to investigate the relationship between changes in relationship quality and personality traits among employees at Secretary of Pahang State Government during the pandemic. The findings indicated changes in neuroticism, agreeableness, and extraversion. These results illustrate that personality in an emerging employee's life is not fixed. This research's findings suggest that life transitions, such as pandemic transitions, present internal conditions associated with personality development. The findings revealed that not all personality traits were related to all relationship quality and conflict management styles. This is consistent not only with previous research in this area but also with personality traits and conflict management style theory.

Other than that, the research has shown the maturity may have an impact on the five-factor of personality among the employees during the pandemic at the Secretary of Pahang State Government. As people age, they tend to become less extroverted, less neurotic, and less open to the experience. Men and women have different biological roles. Gender differences in personality traits are often characterized in terms of which gender has higher scores on that trait. In this research, agreeableness comprises traits relating to altruism, such as empathy and kindness. This means that women, on average, are more nurturing, tender-minded, and altruistic more often and to a greater than men. However, such a finding does not preclude the fact that men may also experience nurturing, tender-minded, and altruistic states and that some men may even score higher in these traits than some women. Therefore, from the researcher's view, these differences will have an impact on how employees manage their personality traits and the quality of their relationships.

The research has important theoretical, managerial, and methodological implications for future researchers, educators, and policymakers. It also discusses the study's limitations and makes recommendations for future research. Meanwhile, the study's findings point to relationship quality as a mediating variable in the relationship between personality traits and conflict management styles among employees at the Pahang State Government's Secretary during the pandemic. Due to the immense pressures of the COVID-19 outbreak on the Secretary of Pahang State Government, issues such as employee behavior and relationships are frequently



overlooked. Working remotely during the pandemic makes management miss warning signs of interpersonal conflict or avoid it entirely. When the conflict is managed proactively and effectively, organizations can adapt and manage it in a way that improves employee well-being and engagement during the pandemic while maintaining the quality of their relationships.

According to the counselling department of the Secretary of Pahang State Government, employees who regularly meet with their managers are three times more engaged than their colleagues. Empowering employees is an essential ingredient of successful and high-trust teams at the Secretary of Pahang State Government. Management with a trust-based culture has higher levels of innovation, customer satisfaction, employee engagement, and agility. Management should establish work schedules that are compatible with the demands and responsibilities of the job description. Therefore, the researcher suggested that the management at the Secretary of Pahang State Government should invest in training, mentoring, and coaching to provide support to their employees. The main attributes of managers and leaders required at this time are being more compassionate, keeping connected with the team, and caring not only about physical but also mental well-being, especially during the pandemic. The new reality must be embraced and with this new reality, the employees can dispose of many conventional ways of management and rethink many work ethics. The change needs to be planned and communicated by the management.

This study has employed relationship quality as a mediator in the relationship between personality traits and conflict management styles, given the relationship quality dimensions are positive and negative relationship quality. Future research could explore other dimensions of relationship quality as suggested by the previous researcher, such as job satisfaction, communication, bonding, or work-life balance that might affect the performance of working among employees during the pandemic. In the area of managing conflict in complex organizations during the pandemic, there were several research challenges on this study. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the researcher having a restricted movement during MCO. The respondents who were in the red zones need to stay in their area because of Conditional Movement Control Order (CMCO). The researcher needs to use an online survey to distribute the questionnaire to the respondents for pilot test. The use of surveys during a pandemic will have an impact on data collecting. It is because the respondents might not complete the questionnaire accurately and took it easy to answer it. Because there was an age difference between them and their knowledge in using the online system also limited. In addition, some respondents might not be familiar with online surveys influence their willingness to participate in this study. Aside from that, the researcher finds it difficult to collect the data and information from the questionnaire of respondents at the Secretary of Pahang State Government for the actual analysis. The respondents were unable to fully cooperate in answering the questionnaire, and the data acquired is doubtful. It is due to their inability to grasp the study's concept and objectives. To assist the researcher in resolving this problem, the employee's leave should be monitored and minimized under the supervision of the top management at the Secretary of the Pahang State Government. It makes a difficult problem when the researcher unable to collect the questionnaire directly and asked the respondents whether they already completed the questionnaire before the deadline.

As with all empirical research, this research is not without limitations, as it did not completely cover every aspect that has ever been discussed about conflict management styles, personality traits, and relationship quality. The findings of this research provided some unique insights into how conflicts are managed in organizations and the buffering effect that personality traits have

in promoting good relationship quality in the workplace. Another limitation is the cross-sectional survey design employed to measure the impact of conflict management on employee behavior and relationships in the workplace during the pandemic. The situation revealed in the research may be different on another occasion. Therefore, future studies could turn this research into a continuous tracking (longitudinal) study to better understand the changes in how conflict management styles influence personality traits and relationship quality among employees over time.

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