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Running head: COPING MECHANISMS, PERSONALITY, AND CONFLICT

MANAGEMENT

An Investigation of Whether Coping Mechanisms Mediate the Relationship between

Personality Traits and Conflict Management Styles

By

Julie Pepin

A Thesis Submitted to Saint Mary's University

Halifax, Nova Scotia

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Master of Science Degree in Industrial/Organizational Psychology

September, 2005

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An Investigation of Whether Coping Mechanisms Mediate the Relationship between
Personality Traits and Conflict Management Styles

By Julie Pepin

## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the relationship between conflict management
styles, personality traits, and coping mechanisms. Specifically, I examined whether
coping mechanisms were predicted by personality styles as defined by the Big Five
personality factors, whether interpersonal conflict management styles were predicted by
personality factors and dispositional coping mechanisms, and lastly, whether coping
mechanisms mediated the relationship between personality traits and conflict
management styles. In a sample of 235 working individuals, results showed that, although
conflict management styles were significantly predicted by personality factors and by
problem-focused coping, the hypothesized mediating effects of dispositional coping
mechanisms in the relationship between conflict management styles and personality
dimensions of the Five-Factor Model (FFM) failed to show significance. These results
suggest that coping mechanisms may not play a pivotal role in the relationship linking
personality traits and conflict management styles.

Date of submission: September 26, 2005

## Introduction

It is well recognized that the health consequences of prolonged exposure to stress depend largely on individuals' strategies to cope with the situation (Sandal, Andresen, Vaernes, & Ursin, 1999). In fact, the theoretical bases of the relationship between coping and stress were established by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) who argued that coping styles were a key element for adaptation to stress. Indeed, coping is believed to be part of a transactional process between the individual and the environment, which impacts mental and physical health functioning.

The study of stress and coping has had a long tradition in the field of personality psychology (Vollrath, 2001), and one's tendency to use particular coping mechanisms is suggested to be a stable, internal personality trait (Costa & McCrae, 1993). Not surprisingly, the Big Five personality dimensions of the Five-Factor Model (FFM) are said to be linked to specific dispositional coping mechanisms (Vollrath & Torgersen, 2000). For example, it is generally recognized that extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness are related to active coping strategies, such as planning and problem-solving (O'Brien & DeLongis, 1996).

In addition to coping mechanisms, the FFM is shown to predict one's preferred conflict management strategies. For example, agreeableness and neuroticism have been shown to be negatively related to the dominating way of handling interpersonal conflict (Antonioni, 1998). Overall, these findings show that both coping mechanisms and conflict management styles are predicted by stable, dispositional, individual variables such as personality traits.

Organizational conflict is inevitable and its management is necessary to ensure a healthy workplace. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that conflict management

skills are recognized to be among the core competencies employees should possess to be

effective collaborators (Yukl, 1994). In fact, considerable evidence points to the

detrimental health-related consequences of unmanaged organizational conflicts. For

example, unmanaged or mismanaged organizational conflicts typically create high levels

of stress, and restrain workers' ability to function in a positive and productive manner,

which consequently leads to negative outcomes for their health and wellbeing (McKenzie,

2002).

Taken together, the aforementioned findings suggest that Big Five personality

dimensions are related to coping mechanisms, as well as to conflict management styles

which are related to stress and wellbeing. Considering these relationships, it would make

intuitive sense to establish a tripartite model linking personality dimensions as explained

by the FFM, coping mechanisms and conflict management styles. However, there have

been few attempts to integrate literature from these three areas of research, and no

theoretical model explaining the relationship between dispositional coping mechanisms,

personality dimensions, and conflict management styles has been proposed.

### Goals of the Proposed Study

Four main questions were addressed in this study: (1) what is the pattern of the

relationships between FFM personality dimensions and coping mechanisms? This study

aims to replicate the findings from Hooker, Frazier, and Monaham (1994), who found

clear patterns of relationships between Big Five personality traits and dispositional coping

mechanisms. (2) What is the pattern of the relationship between FFM personality

dimensions and conflict management styles? Similarly, this study attempts to replicate the

findings from two previous studies (Antonioni, 1998; Moberg, 2001) which found

support for the existence of specific links between personality traits as explained by the

FFM and conflict management styles. (3) What is the relationship between coping

mechanisms and conflict management styles? I wish to understand how coping

mechanisms relate to conflict management styles in an organizational setting. Although

there are indications that relationships between coping strategies and conflict styles exist

(e.g., Lepore, 1995), research addressing this issue is lacking in the I/O literature. (4) Do

coping mechanisms mediate the relationship between personality traits and conflict

styles? In other words, does the addition of coping mechanisms to the prediction of

conflict management styles by personality traits change the relationship between

personality and conflict styles? Also, if coping mechanisms are shown to mediate the

relationship between personality traits and conflict styles, how specifically do they do so?

### Stress and Coping

Holmes and Rahe (1967) were among the first scholars to make a connection

between the occurrence of particular life events and the onset of illnesses. Since their

landmark research, the importance that life events have upon both emotional states and

physical illness has been documented extensively in the literature (Lefcourt, 2001). For

instance, the results from studies generally show that exposure to stress predicts a range

of both physical and mental health problems, namely high-blood pressure (Schwartz,

Pickering, & Landsbergis, 1996), depression (Kwon & Laurenceau, 2002), and drug

addiction (Goeders, 2003).

Coping is thought to be a major component in the relationship between the

experience of stress and health (Oakland & Ostell, 1996). Coping is defined as "a

response aimed at diminishing the physical, emotional, and psychological burden that is

linked to stressful life events and daily hassles" (Snyder & Dinoff, 1999, p. 5). While

there is some empirical support for the existence of various dimensions of coping, there is

a lack of consensus on the structure of coping (Skinner, Edge, Altman, & Sherwood, 2003). Consequently, coping has been categorized in various manners throughout the years. For example, some researchers have divided coping into problem-focused and emotion-focused (e.g., Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), approach versus avoidance coping (e.g., Roth & Cohen, 1986), control versus escape coping (see Latack & Havlovic, 1992), and direct versus indirect coping strategies (e.g., Barrett & Campos, 1991). Despite this lack of consensus regarding the structure of coping, scholars generally agree that the study of coping is fundamental to an understanding of how stress affects people, and that individuals possess a repertoire of coping styles. The reader should note that coping *styles*, *mechanisms* and *strategies* will be used interchangeably in the current study, since research does not make a distinction between these terminologies.

In a critique of Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) coping structure, Carver, Scheier, and Weintraub (1989) suggest the existence of three dispositional coping factors: problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping, and disengagement. These researchers also contend that individuals may use more than one style simultaneously. *Problem-focused coping* involves efforts to modify a stressful event and includes activities such as defining the problem, generating alternative solutions, planning and acting to solve the problem, and suppressing competing activities. *Emotion-focused coping* deals with the way emotions are regulated in reaction to a stressor through, for example, seeking of instrumental social support, and venting emotions. *Disengagement* includes denial, blaming, mentally and behaviourally withdrawing from the situation, and thus, entails an avoidance of the stressful situation.

In general, active coping strategies, whether problem-focused or emotion-focused, are thought to be adaptive ways of dealing with stressful events, compared with

disengagement (an avoidant coping strategy). Disengagement appears to be a

psychological risk factor or marker for adverse responses to stressful life events (Holahan

& Moos, 1987). For example, individuals who use problem-focused coping tend to report

lower levels of distress, regardless of the amount of job demands and work support they

experience (Parkes, 1990). Problem-focused coping was also shown to moderate the

relationship between chronic work stressors (i.e., long term stressors people experience

on a daily basis) and anxiety and depression (Greenglass & Burke, 1991). Conversely,

disengagement can be considered a maladaptive coping strategy when individuals

deliberately refrain from approaching the situation. For example, coping behaviours that

involve denying or avoiding the problem have typically been linked with higher self-

reported psychological distress (e.g., Violanti, 1992).

### The Impact of Personality on the Stress-Coping Response

The Five-Factor Model of personality, comprised of the traits of neuroticism,

extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness, is currently

the dominant model in studies of personality by organizational psychologists. McCrae

and Costa (1987) have provided the following descriptions of the five factors:

*Neuroticism* is characterized by a tendency to experience negative affect, such as anxiety,

depression or sadness, hostility, and self-consciousness, as well as a tendency to be

impulsive. *Extraversion* is marked by a tendency to experience positive emotions and to

be warm, gregarious, fun-loving, and assertive. *Openness to experience* is characterized

by the presence of curiosity, imagination, creativity, originality, aesthetic sensitivity, and

flexibility. *Agreeableness* reflects a tendency to be good-natured, acquiescent, courteous,

helpful, and trusting. *Conscientiousness* has been characterized by a tendency to be

careful, reliable, hard-working, well-organized, and purposeful.

.          Research examining the relationship between personality and ways of coping with

stressful life events has been fruitful in the past decade (e.g., Bolger & Zuckerman, 1995;

Sandal et al., 1999; Vollrath & Torgersen, 2000), and generally shows that one's

personality is strongly related to one's preferred coping strategy. This makes sense as

scholars suggest that commonly studied coping strategies reflect broader and more basic

dispositional tendencies within the individual (Watson, David, & Suls, 1999). More

specifically, researchers contend that neuroticism and extraversion are crucially important

in influencing both the coping strategy one chooses and the level of distress one

experiences. Effectively, research has demonstrated that individuals who are high on

neuroticism tend to rely on passive, maladaptive forms of coping such as escape-

avoidance, wishful thinking, and self-blame, and do not tend to rely on problem-focused

coping strategies (Endler & Parker, 1990; Hooker et al., 1994). On the other hand,

extraverted individuals are generally more likely to use adaptive forms of coping, such as

positive reinterpretation and growth and social support seeking, and less likely to use

maladaptive forms of coping (Hooker et al., 1994). Said differently, neuroticism is

generally negatively related to the use of problem-focused coping, and positively related

to disengagement coping strategies, whereas extraversion is positively related to emotion-

focused coping strategies, and negatively related to disengagement coping strategies.

Studies examining the relationship between the remaining personality traits of the

FFM (i.e., openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness) and coping strategies have

been scarce. In fact, in my review of the literature, few studies have assessed the

influence of all the Big Five personality traits on individuals' coping responses. Hooker

and colleagues (1994) are, as far as I am aware, the only group of researchers that

examined the relationships between the five factors of the FFM and coping mechanisms.

They assessed a sample of spouse caregivers living in the same household with patients

who had a confirmed diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease or a related dementia. The average

age of their participants was 68.7 years. Using the NEO Five Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI;

Costa & McCrae, 1992) and the Ways of Coping Checklist (WCCL-R; Vitaliano, Russo,

Carr, Maiuro, & Becker, 1985), Hooker and colleagues looked at the effects of openness,

agreeableness, and conscientiousness on the coping responses of the spouses, in addition

to examining the effects of extraversion and neuroticism. Their findings showed that

agreeableness was positively related to emotion-focused coping and negatively related to

disengagement (a maladaptive form of coping), while conscientiousness was positively

related to problem-focused coping and negatively related to disengagement. Surprisingly,

Hooker and colleagues found that openness was unrelated to coping; however, they

argued that this may be due to range restriction, since administration of the survey

package was done at the participants' home, and that people who are willing to let a

stranger come into their home and interview them about sensitive issues dealing with

caregiving may be more "open" than a random sample of volunteers. Their study also

revealed that neuroticism and extraversion were the only statistically significant

predictors of coping strategies when all personality traits were considered simultaneously.

Therefore, Hooker and colleagues' study failed to find support for the idea that

agreeableness, openness, and conscientiousness uniquely predicted coping mechanisms.

Yet, their study revealed that further research investigating the link between coping

strategies and personality traits among other populations may yield significant findings

since they found significant zero-order correlations between these personality traits and

coping strategies.

The following three hypotheses were drawn with the goal of replicating Hooker and colleagues' (1994) results in a sample of working individuals. Because there are few previous studies examining the link between coping and *agreeableness*, *conscientiousness*, and *openness to experience*, the relationship between these personality traits and coping was examined in an exploratory manner. It is therefore hypothesized that:

> *Hypothesis 1:* Problem-focused coping will be negatively related to neuroticism, and positively related to conscientiousness and openness to experience.
>
> *Hypothesis 2:* Emotion-focused coping will be positively related to extraversion, openness and agreeableness.

Hypothesis 2 was based on the following findings: In their sample of caregivers, Hooker and colleagues (1994) found significant positive relationships between emotion-focused coping and extraversion and also between emotion-focused coping and agreeableness. As for openness to experience, I hypothesized it would also be positively linked with emotion-focused coping since open individuals have been shown to cope via emotional expression (O'Brien & DeLongis, 1996).

> *Hypothesis 3.* Disengagement will be positively related to neuroticism, and negatively related to extraversion, agreeableness, openness and conscientiousness.

### Organizational Conflict and Conflict Management Styles

Organizational conflicts typically emerge between co-workers or between individuals and the organization that employs them for reasons such as differing attitudes, values, skills, goals, and behaviours (Rahim, 2002). Blake and Mouton (1964) pioneered the development of an instrument measuring interpersonal conflict management styles. Their managerial grid and their proposed styles of managing conflicts laid ground for

Rahim and Bonoma's (1979) taxonomy of conflict management styles, which was used in

the present study. This classification uses two continua of concern for self and concern

for others; the intersection of these continua defines five styles of handling interpersonal

conflicts: dominating, integrating, compromising, avoiding, and obliging. Essentially,

*dominating* implies imposing one's view at the expense of other individuals, and

comprises high concern for self and low concern for others. *Integrating* seeks to use a

problem-solving strategy to confront differences directly, thus promoting high concern

for both self and others. In the *compromising* approach, conflicting parties work together

to find a middle ground solution. This approach is intermediate in concern for self and

others. When using the *avoiding* style, individuals or parties withdraw from the conflict

situation, implying a low concern for self and others. Lastly, when *obliging*, individuals

put their own concerns aside to satisfy the concerns of the other party, designating a low

concern for self and a high concern for others.

The aforementioned taxonomy of conflict styles paved the road for the

development of the Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory (ROCI; Rahim 1983),

which is a self-report measure assessing individuals' use of conflict management

strategies when in conflict with a supervisor. Although support for the five dimensions of

the ROCI was found in a review examining samples of managers (see van de Vliert &

Kabanoff, 1990), Rahim's factor structure failed to be replicated in a sample of college

students. Indeed, using factor analysis, a group of researchers has rather found support for

a four-factor model of interpersonal conflict management (Hammock, Richardson,

Pilkington, & Utley, 1990). Their study contended that among a group of college

students, integrating and compromising were undifferentiated components and thus, these

two factors were collapsed to create a single factor labelled *cooperation*.

*The Impact of Personality on Conflict Management Styles*

It is well established that conflict management strategies are generally linked to stable, dispositional variables such as personality traits. In two independent studies, Antonioni (1998) and Moberg (2001) found support for the fact that people's conflict management in the workplace could be predicted by merely knowing their personality characteristics. In a sample of managers, Antonioni and Moberg both found support for the following findings: Conscientiousness was negatively related to individuals' use of the avoiding style of handling interpersonal conflict, while being positively related to the use of the integrating style. They also found that extraversion was positively linked to the use of the integrating style, while agreeableness was negatively linked to the use of the dominating style of handling interpersonal conflict at work. In addition to the aforementioned findings, Antonioni found that the avoiding and the integrating styles were positively related to agreeableness, while the dominating style was negatively related to neuroticism. Moberg, who examined managers and supervisors in organizational settings, found that the avoiding style was positively linked to neuroticism and negatively linked to extraversion, whereas the integrating style was negatively related to neuroticism and positively related to openness. Moberg also found support for a positive relationship between openness, agreeableness, and the compromising style, as well as a positive relationship between the obliging style and neuroticism.

Taken together, the findings from Antonioni's (1998) and Moberg's study (2001) suggest that all five personality traits predict the use of one or more conflict management styles. Interestingly, both researchers found support for significant positive relationships between the integrating style and extraversion, as well as between the integrating style and conscientiousness among a sample of managers. They also found that

conscientiousness was negatively related to the avoiding style, while agreeableness was negatively related to a tendency to dominate. Consequently, it could be hypothesized that extraversion, conscientiousness, and agreeableness will show similar patterns of relationships with conflict management styles in the present study. With regards to openness to experience and neuroticism, Antonioni's and Moberg's respective studies revealed different findings. A possible explanation for these discrepancies may be that they used different measures to assess conflict management styles. While Antonioni used the ROCI-II, Moberg used the Organizational Communication and Conflict Instrument (OCCI; Putnam & Wilson, 1982). Hence, comparisons between the two studies were made through converting the OCCI scales into ROCI-II ones. This was done by collapsing two scales of the ROCI into one, since the OCCI is a four-factor measure and the ROCI-II is a five-factor one. Specifically, the OCCI comprises the following components: nonconfrontation, confrontation, control, and compromise. According to the conceptual definition of these scales, *nonconfrontation* was considered similar to avoiding, *confrontation* to integrating, *control* to dominating, and *compromise* was a mix between compromising and obliging. Although this made comparisons between Antonioni's and Moberg's results possible, it provided room for error of interpretation since the two measures are quite different. Therefore, conclusions about the prediction of conflict management styles from openness and neuroticism were less straightforward. However, since I am using the ROCI-II in the current study (like Antonioni did), the following hypotheses were drafted after Antonioni's results in the manager sample. The ROCI-II was chosen because it is a short measure (i.e., 28 items) that has been associated with a comprehensive model for diagnosing organizational conflict, that is one that links conflict styles to other important organizational variables, such as organizational

effectiveness (Weider-Hatfield, 1988). Therefore, in a sample of working individuals, it is

hypothesized that:

*Hypothesis 4.* The integrating and compromising styles of handling interpersonal

conflict will be positively related to extraversion, agreeableness, and

conscientiousness.

*Hypothesis 5.* The avoiding style of handling interpersonal conflict will be

positively related to agreeableness and negatively related to conscientiousness.

*Hypothesis 6.* The dominating style of handling interpersonal conflict will be

negatively related to agreeableness and neuroticism.

Although Antonioni (1998) failed to find a relationship between personality traits

and the use of the obliging style among a sample of managers, he found support for the

prediction of this style of handling interpersonal conflict among a sample of students.

Namely, he found that agreeableness and neuroticism were both positively related to

obliging. Since Moberg (2001) found similar results in a sample of managers, the

following hypothesis was drawn on the basis of their combined findings.

*Hypothesis 7.* The obliging style of handling interpersonal conflict will be

positively related to agreeableness and neuroticism.

*The Impact of Stress and Coping on Conflict Management Styles*

The existence of a relationship between coping mechanisms and conflict

management has been reported in various health-related studies. For example, in a

experiment examining the relationship between cynicism, social support, and

cardiovascular reactivity, Lepore (1995) found that social support (a coping response)

was reasonably effective in reducing some of the ill effects of interpersonal conflict,

providing support for the idea that effective coping strategies are associated with effective

conflict management styles. However, little research attention has been devoted to demonstrating the existence of a relationship between conflict management styles and coping strategies in organizational settings (De Dreu, Van Dierendonck, & Dijkstra, 2004). Nonetheless, the failure to manage conflict effectively may carry long-term costs for organizations. In fact, considerable evidence points to the detrimental effects of unmanaged organizational disputes (McKenzie, 2002). For example, organizational conflict may have harmful consequences on employee morale (Lippitt, 1982), counterproductive behaviours (Ayoko, Callan, & Hartel, 2003), turnover intentions and organizational commitment (Schwepker, 1999).

The following hypotheses pertaining to the relationship between coping strategies and conflict management styles are theory-based and, thus, were drawn by extrapolation. Individuals who tend to use problem-focused coping typically engage in activities such as planning and acting to solve the problem (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). These are activities similar to those related to the integrating style of handling interpersonal conflict, whereby individuals seek to use a problem-solving strategy to confront differences directly. Conversely, individuals who tend to cope by disengaging from stressful situations may be less likely to tackle the problem directly, preferring to avoid it altogether. It is, therefore, hypothesized that:

> *Hypothesis 8.* The integrating style of handling interpersonal conflict will be
>
> positively related to problem-focused coping and negatively related to
>
> disengagement.

Individuals typically engage in seeking social support and venting emotions when using emotion-focused coping (Carver et al., 1989). In terms of conflict management style, when individuals use the obliging style of handling interpersonal conflict, they put their

own concerns aside to satisfy the concerns of the other party. In other words, an obliging

person attempts to play down the differences and emphasizes commonalities to satisfy the

concerns of the other party (Rahim & Bonoma, 1979), There is a "social" component in

both emotion-focused coping and the obliging style of handling interpersonal conflict, in

that individuals who use these strategies rely on others to solve the problem or gauge their

reactions to adapt them to the reactions of the other party. Therefore, individuals who

tend to use emotion-focused coping strategies such as seeking emotional support from

others, and who prefer to find comfort in other people, may also be suggested to use

conflict styles whereby others' needs and concerns are viewed as vital to the resolution of

the conflict. Individuals who use the obliging style of handling interpersonal conflict may

also be less likely to use problem-focused coping strategies such as planning and

problem-solving because they prefer finding comfort in other people. Therefore, it is

hypothesized that:

> *Hypothesis 9.* The obliging style of handling interpersonal conflict will be
>
> positively related to emotion-focused coping and negatively related to problem-
>
> focused coping.

Dominating implies imposing one's view at the expense of other individuals. Individuals

who tend to dominate when in a conflict situation will use their power and influence to

get their ideas across (Rahim & Bonoma, 1979), suggesting that they will approach

stressful situations in a similar fashion. Specifically, individuals who use the dominating

style may be inclined to cope with stress on their own, without the support of others.

Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

> *Hypothesis 10.* The dominating style of handling interpersonal conflict will be
>
> negatively related to emotion-focused coping.

Individuals who use the avoiding style of handling interpersonal conflict withdraw from the conflict situation. This is similar to the disengagement way of coping with stress in that these two strategies imply that one gets away from the situation by behaviourally escaping them. Thus, when using disengagement or avoiding, individuals do not face the issue at hand by attempting to solve it, they rather hide from it. It is, consequently, hypothesized that:

> *Hypothesis 11.* The avoiding style of handling interpersonal conflict will be
>
> positively related to disengagement and negatively related to problem-focused
>
> coping.

Compromising in a conflict situation implies that conflicting parties work together to find a middle ground solution. Individuals who compromise try to find a solution that is satisfying to both parties, in a give and take manner (Rahim & Bonoma, 1979). Compromising implies a problem-solving approach to the resolution of a conflict, and therefore, it is hypothesized that:

> *Hypothesis 12.* The compromising style of handling interpersonal conflict will be
>
> positively related to problem-focused coping and negatively related to
>
> disengagement.

> *Assessing the Mediating Effects of Coping Mechanisms on*
>
> *Personality Dimensions and Conflict Styles*

> *Hypothesis 13.* Coping mechanisms, including problem-focused, emotion-focused,
>
> and disengagement will mediate the effects of personality in predicting conflict
>
> management styles.

The hypothesized model linking personality traits, coping mechanisms, and conflict management styles is portrayed in Figure 1.

*Figure 1.* The Mediating Effects of Coping Mechanisms on the Relationship between Personality Traits and Conflict Management Styles[1].
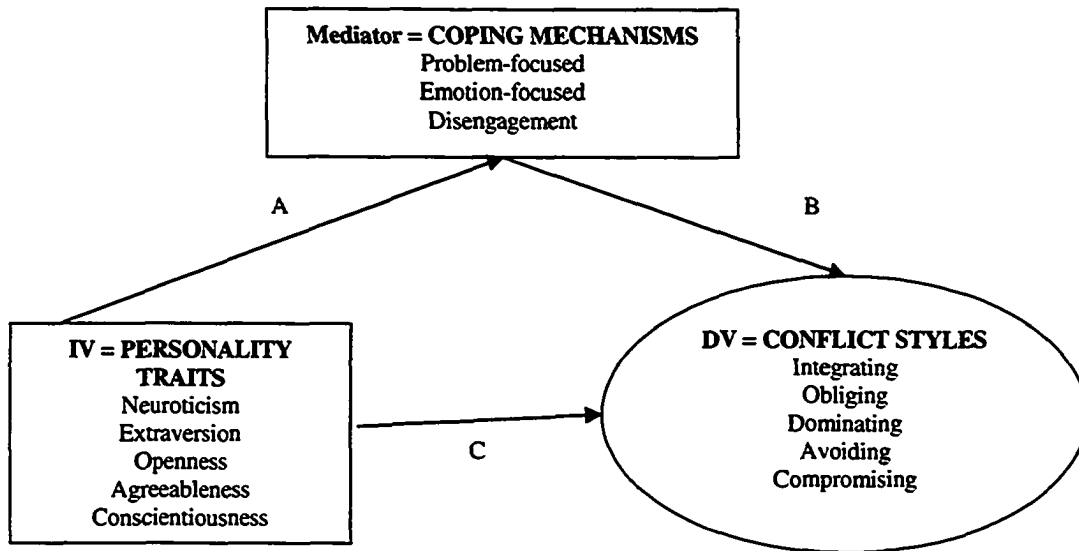


The following example illustrates the functioning of this model: Conscientious

individuals are typically reliable, hard-working, well-organized, and purposeful

individuals (McCrae & Costa, 1987). When examining the direct relationship between

personality traits and conflict management styles, it has been demonstrated that

conscientious individuals will be more likely to use the integrating style of handling

interpersonal conflict at work (e.g., Antonioni, 1998). I am hypothesizing that what

makes conscientious individuals handle interpersonal conflict in such a cooperative

manner is the way they cope with stress. Indeed, because of their typical characteristics,

---

[1] In this model, stress is viewed as an external, yet ubiquitous, variable in that it influences the appraisal of the situation and impacts the coping process. Stress can be suggested to be an antecedent as well as a consequence of organizational conflict, and it ultimately plays a role on how individuals cope with the situation. Although stress is an important contributor to the model shown in Figure 1 since it can be related to the three variables of interest, a comprehensive assessment of its influence on the model is beyond the scope of this research.

conscientious individuals may be more tempted to tackle stressful situations up front, by

directly trying to solve the problem. In fact, conscientiousness has been linked to the use

of problem-focused coping strategies (Hooker et al., 1994). Conscientiousness people will

first appraise a conflict situation as being stressful, they will then cope with this situation

by using problem-focused coping strategies (e.g., planning), and this will bring them to

handle the conflict by integrating. In other words, the effect personality has on conflict

styles is done through coping mechanisms. Specifically, problem-focused coping is the

vehicle that brings conscientious individuals to handle interpersonal conflicts in an

integrating manner. Coping mechanisms are therefore hypothesized to act as the

connector between personality traits and conflict management styles. Consequently,

problem-focused coping is hypothesized to mediate the relationship between

conscientiousness and the integrating style, because it impacts the relationship between

this personality trait and that conflict management style. Indeed, according to Baron and

Kenny (1986), a variable may be considered a mediator to the extent to which it carries

the influence of a given independent variable (IV) to a given dependent variable (DV).

Said differently, personality traits impact conflict management styles through their

influence on coping mechanisms.

The rationale of hypothesis 13 can be explained through *proximal* and *distal*

influences. In a study assessing conflict in the context of romantic relationships, Corcoran

and Mallinckrodt (2000) demonstrated the existence of a model linking conflict resolution

styles to self-efficacy, adult attachment, and perspective taking. More specifically, using

Rahim's (1983) taxonomy of conflict management styles, Corcoran and Mallinckrodt

proposed that social competencies (i.e., social self-efficacy and perspective taking) acted

as mediators in the relationship between attachment styles (secure versus non-secure) and

conflict resolution styles, suggesting that effective conflict management styles depended

on a particular configuration of beliefs about self and others that are defining

characteristics of a secure adult attachment style. The results from this study suggest that

conflict resolution styles (i.e., the outcome) are predicted by *distal* mechanisms that have

their roots in childhood (i.e., attachment styles); however this relationship is explained in

part by *proximal* factors, such as social competencies. Proximal factors are typically

linked with current life events. For example, retirement or the loss of a spouse, as well as

social support are considered proximal factors (Martin & Martin, 2002). Similarly, in the

present case, I am arguing that personality traits are *distal* influences, and coping

mechanisms are *proximal* influences on conflict and its management (i.e., the outcome).

Personality traits are suggested to be *distal* variables in the current model because,

according to McCrae and Costa (1999), the Big Five personality factors constitute basic

tendencies that have a biological basis. In other words, the behavioural differences linked

to the Big Five are represented within the body in terms of genes, brain structure, and so

on. The argument for the influence of genes on personality traits was anchored in Freud's

(1952) as well as in Murray's personality theory (1938). More recently, Eysenck (1967)

linked extraversion, neuroticism, and psychoticism to individual differences in nervous

system structures and functioning. In another study, the genetic and environmental

etiology of the FFM as measured by the revised NEO Personality Inventory (NEO-PI-R;

Costa & McCrae, 1992) was assessed using 123 pairs of identical twins and 127 pairs of

fraternal twins (see Jang, Livesley, & Vernon, 1996). This group of scholars revealed that

the broad genetic influence on the five dimensions of neuroticism, extraversion, openness,

agreeableness, and conscientiousness was estimated at 41%, 53%, 61%, 41%, and 44%,

respectively. These findings provide further support for the existence of a genetic basis to

personality traits. Therefore, personality traits can be argued to be distal antecedents in the model linking them to coping mechanisms, and conflict management styles.

In this same model, the coping process consists of a *proximal* influence because the appraisal of a stressful event, as well as the coping behaviours associated with this appraisal are hypothesized to influence the health and wellbeing of individuals, suggesting that coping strategies have a direct and present impact on individuals' functioning (Martin & Martin, 2002). Specifically, according to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), coping as a process involves some form of thought, action or feeling that is used, modified or eliminated to deal with a current event that elicits some form of psychological stress. This is why, in the current study, coping mechanisms are suggested to mediate the relationship between currently experienced stressful events (i.e., conflict situations) and the related outcomes (i.e., conflict management styles). For instance, an individual will typically appraise a conflict situation as a stressful event (McKenzie, 2002), and this appraisal will elicit a coping response from this individual (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). That response is determined, in part, by the individual's personality (e.g., Hooker et al., 1994). Consequently, this suggests that as stressful events, conflicts – and their subsequent management– depend upon current appraisal of the situation and the following coping mechanisms, which are characteristics defined in part by personality.

In the light of the aforementioned findings, it would be reasonable to believe that conflict management styles are not directly influenced by FFM personality traits as demonstrated by Antonioni (1998) and Moberg (2001), but are in fact influenced by the indirect effects coping mechanisms have on the relationship between personality traits and conflict management styles. In sum, in the model represented by Figure 1, personality traits would play the role of the distal antecedents, since they are considered to be at the

origin of what defines an individual; whereas coping mechanisms would be the proximal influences having an impact on organizational conflict, and the consequent conflict management strategies.

## Method

### *Participants*

Because I intended to study conflict in a workplace context, I chose to study students and adults who had a minimum of two years of work experience. I considered that 2 years of work experience was a long enough period of time to have taken part in an interpersonal conflict at least once, either with a co-worker, superior, or subordinate. This study received ethics approval from the Research Ethics Board (REB; see Appendix A). Participants signed an informed consent form, which explained the purpose and procedure of the study, and that their participation was voluntary and they could terminate participation at any time (see Appendix B). The research was described as a survey study of coping, personality, and conflict. Recruitment of participants was done in two ways: (1) directly through the students in various MBA classes, Psychology undergraduate classes, as well as in Executive and Professional Development classes; and (2) by offering students who did not possess two years of work experience to ask their parents or friends to complete the survey package. Whether they took part in the study themselves, or had a family member or friend complete a survey package, Psychology undergraduate participants received one bonus point that could be applied to their courses. Other participants (i.e., MBA and Executive and Professional Development students, and participants recruited by the Psychology undergraduate students) had a chance of winning one of two cash prizes of $250 each for their participation in the study.

From a total of 532 surveys distributed, 243 were returned (46% return rate).

Table 1 provides details on the demographics of the participants for which data was

available. Although 20 participants did not meet the minimum required tenure of two

years, their data was analyzed with the rest of the sample, because a one-way ANOVA

showed that, aside from the emotion-focused factor of the coping measure, their scores on

the other measures were not different from the scores of the other groups (see Appendix

C for details).

*Materials*

The Demographic Interview (see Appendix D). This measure provided

information about participants' gender, age, marital status, number of children, current

life occupation, tenure, managerial level (if any), education level, ethnicity, and family

income.

The Brief COPE (Carver, 1997). This questionnaire is an abbreviated version of the

COPE-LB (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989) which examines the general coping

styles of an individual. The Brief COPE is a 28-item measure of the way people generally

cope when under stress. The Brief COPE contains 14 scales and assesses topics such as

positive reframing, planning, denial, self-distraction, religious coping, and behavioural

disengagement. Items are rated using a four-point Likert scale that ranges from 1 = *I usually*

*don't do this at all* to 4 = *I usually do this a lot*. Example of items include: "I've been

blaming myself for things that happened" (i.e., self-blame), "I've been thinking hard about

what steps to take" (i.e., planning), and "I've been trying to get advice or help from other

people about what to do" (i.e., instrumental support). Carver (1997) reported internal

consistency reliabilities from .50 to .90 for the 14 subscales. In order to help improve the

reliability of the scales, and to obtain a factor structure similar to the one used by Carver

Table 1

*Demographics of the Participants*

| Variables | Categories | N | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | 0. Male | 108 | 46 |
| | 1. Female | 126 | 54 |
| Age | 1. < 25 | 30 | 13 |
| (in years) | 2. 25-34 | 85 | 36 |
| | 3. 35-44 | 28 | 12 |
| | 4. 45-54 | 70 | 30 |
| | 5. >54 | 21 | 9 |
| Marital status | 1. Married/Living with someone | 139 | 59 |
| | 2. Widowed | 1 | .4 |
| | 3. Divorced | 16 | 7 |
| | 4. Separated | 5 | 2 |
| | 5. Never married | 74 | 32 |
| Job tenure | 1. < 1 | 20 | 8 |
| (in years) | 2. 1 – 3 (inclusive) | 34 | 14 |
| | 3. 3.1 – 5 (inclusive) | 46 | 20 |
| | 4. 5.1 – 7 (inclusive) | 36 | 15 |
| | 5. > 7 | 95 | 40 |

Table 1 (cont'd)

| Variables | Categories | N | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| Education level | 1. Did not finish high school | 1 | .4 |
| | 2. High school | 29 | 12 |
| | 3. Trade school | 19 | 8 |
| | 4. Some university training | 47 | 20 |
| | 5. Bachelor's degree | 88 | 37 |
| | 6. Master's degree | 20 | 9 |
| | 7. Ph.D. degree | 3 | 1 |
| | 8. Other (e.g., sales) | 27 | 12 |
| Family income | 1. < $30,000 | 38 | 16 |
| (per year) | 2. $30,000 - $50,000 | 53 | 23 |
| | 3. $51,000 - $100,000 | 96 | 41 |
| | 4. > $100,000 | 44 | 19 |

and colleagues (1989), an exploratory factor analysis was performed and yielded a four-factor structure, although one of the factors (i.e., religious coping) was later dropped from further analyses because it was not part of the original factor structure established by Carver and colleagues (1989) on which hypothesises were based. The decision to use this measure notwithstanding its low internal consistency was made with the intention to reduce the completion time of the survey package. Indeed, in order to attract as many working individuals to this study as possible, care was taken to ensure that the survey package could be completed in a reasonable amount of time (i.e., 30-40 minutes). Using the short version of the COPE, instead of the longer 60-item version one was certainly helpful in this instance.

*The NEO-FFI* (Costa & McCrae, 1992). The Big Five personality dimensions were assessed using the short version of the NEO Personality Inventory, the NEO-FFI. This survey consists of 60 behavioural statements divided equally into five scales. Each factor is measured using 12 items. The NEO-FFI measures five domains of personality that correspond to the "Big Five" theory of personality. These domains, or major dimensions, are neuroticism (e.g., "I often feel inferior to others"), extraversion (e.g., "I like to have a lot of people around me"), openness to experience (e.g., "I am intrigued by the patterns I find in art and nature"), agreeableness (e.g., "I try to be courteous to everyone I meet"), and conscientiousness (e.g., "I keep my belongings clean and neat"). Participants respond using a five-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 = *Strongly disagree* to 5 = *Strongly agree*. Cronbach's alpha for this study were .84 for the neuroticism scale, .78 for extraversion, .70 for openness, .75 for agreeableness, and .81 for conscientiousness.

*The Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory* (ROCI-II; Rahim, 1983). This measure is comprised of 28 items and permits the assessment of the styles of handling

interpersonal conflicts. The five styles of handling interpersonal conflict are integrating

(e.g., "I try to work with the other person for a proper understanding of a problem"),

obliging (e.g., "I generally try to satisfy the needs of the other person"), dominating (e.g., "I

use my influence to get my ideas accepted"), avoiding (e.g., "I usually avoid open

discussion of my differences with the other person"), and compromising ("I try to find a

middle course to resolve an impasse"). Respondents indicated on a five-point Likert scale

the extent to which they engaged in each of the various conflict-handling behaviours (1 =

*Strongly disagree*; 5 = *Strongly agree*). A higher score indicated greater use of a style of

handling interpersonal conflict with a supervisor. The original measure only assessed

conflict with a supervisor. In this study, however, the term supervisor was replaced by

"other person" in order to also include co-workers and subordinates. Encompassing co-

workers, supervisors, and subordinates ensured that individuals who did not generally

engage in conflicts with their supervisor (because they did not work closely with them or

simply because they got along well with them), could address conflicts they had with other

individuals in their workplace. In their study, Rahim, Antonioni, and Psenicka (2001)

found that Cronbach internal consistency reliability coefficients for the five subscales

ranged between .76 and .85. However, in this study, an exploratory factor analysis yielded

a four-factor structure (see *analyses* section for more details).

   *Organizational Conflict Situation Question* (see Appendix E). In addition to

completing the aforementioned self-report measures, participants were asked to describe

in writing a conflict situation they had experienced at work with a colleague, subordinate,

or superior. This open-ended question evaluated participants' conflict management styles

through a situational interview-type question. Specifically, participants were asked to

describe (1) the situation, (2) their thought process, (3) their behaviour (i.e., how they

reacted), and (4) the outcome/result of the conflict situation they had experienced. This measure was exploratory in nature, in that I planned to use it as an indicator of the latent endogenous construct *conflict style* in structural equation modeling (SEM), providing my data was suited for this type of analysis. This open-ended question was employed because it was considered as a less contaminated (by common self-report variance) measure than the conflict style scale and was valuable as a potential outcome.

In order to rate the answers to this question, a coding scheme was developed (see Appendix F). Two subject matter experts (SMEs) provided their input when developing and testing the coding scheme. The scheme assessed individuals' use of Rahim's (1983) five conflict styles (integrating, avoiding, dominating, obliging, and compromising) by rating on a four-point Likert-type scale (0 = *did not mention this style* to 5 = *provided at least 2 mentions of this style in the text*) how much participants mentioned this style in their answers. These anchors were created with the intention to have variability in the responses. It was deemed reasonable to establish that participants who provided two clear mentions (see *Typical quotes* in Appendix F) of one style received the highest rating. The coding scheme also included an effectiveness rating, whereby participants' dominant conflict style (i.e., the style they mostly used) was evaluated for appropriateness. Indeed, according to Rahim (2002), each conflict style can be used in an appropriate or inappropriate manner. When used appropriately, a conflict style is said to be effective; when used inappropriately, it is deemed ineffective. The grid used in the current coding scheme replicated the one used in Rahim's study (2002). Participants' effectiveness in using a conflict management style was rated on a three-point Likert scale (1 = *ineffective* to 3 = *highly effective*). A preliminary analysis of the concurrent validity between the scores on the ROCI-II (Rahim, 1983) and the score on the open-ended question failed to

yield significant results. In other words, there was no concordance between participants'

scores on the ROCI-II and their score on the situational question.

Although the open-ended question provided a wealth of information regarding

participants' experience of conflict situations in the workplace, it may not have been

suited for this study. Indeed, the situational question was modeled after a structured

interview-type question in personnel selection. Specifically, this type of situational

question is generally used as a guide throughout the interview process, and the

interviewer typically tries to obtain the required answers by prompting the interviewee

when necessary. Perhaps in the present instance the question was not straightforward

enough and thus, participants did not entirely grasp what was required of them. In fact, by

examining the answers to question 3 (i.e., "Please describe your behaviour"), I noticed

that many participants answered by explaining their feelings and emotions when dealing

with the conflict, (e.g., "I was angry"), whereas, I was looking for their behaviours (e.g.,

"I stop talking to the other person"). Moreover, inter-rater reliability between the

investigator and the SMEs was low ($r = .30$) possibly explaining the reason for the lack of

concurrent validity between the ROCI and the open-ended question. Consequently, the

open-ended situational question was dropped from further analyses.

*Procedure*

Participants were recruited directly or indirectly in various MBA, Executive and

Professional Development and Psychology undergraduate classes. This was done with the

agreement of the professor. Participants completed a survey package including measures

of their personality, coping mechanisms, and conflict management styles, as well as a

demographic information form. The order of the self-report measures (i.e., NEO-FFI,

Brief COPE, and ROCI-II) was counterbalanced, such that there were six different

versions of the package. All participants were invited to fill in the survey package at a time

of their convenience and to either return it in class to the main investigator the following

week, or to drop it in a mailbox located in the Psychology Department. Detailed

instructions on the purpose of the study and the participation process were provided orally

by the investigator, and in writing on an instruction sheet (see Appendix G). The complete

assessment took approximately 40 minutes.

Participation was voluntary; however, undergraduate students received one bonus

point for taking part in the study, either directly or indirectly. In addition, each individual

who completed a survey package or parts thereof had a chance to win one of two cash

prizes of $250. These draws were held on June 24, 2005.

*Preliminary analyses*

*Data Cleaning and Screening.* An initial screening of the data for univariate and

multivariate outliers, and violations of the assumptions on the residuals including non-

linearity, non-normality, heteroskedasticity and independence was conducted using SPSS

for Windows version 11.5. Two univariate outliers were detected, one on the *integrating*

subscale of the ROCI-II and the other on the *denial* subscale of the Brief COPE. Six (five

subscales of the Brief COPE, and one of the ROCI-II) of the initial 24 subscales (5 for the

NEO-FFI, 5 for the ROCI-II, and 14 for the Brief COPE) were skewed, thus violating the

assumption of normality for these subscales. This fact was, however, disregarded because

regressions are quite robust to the violation of the normality assumption. After running

the regressions, I also verified if the distributions of residuals had any outliers by looking

at the maximum of Cook's distance. Seven multivariate outliers were found since their

Cook's distance maximum was above 1. The data from these participants were therefore

deleted from further analyses. Also, one participant completed only the situational

interview question, and failed to complete the surveys and the demographic information form. Therefore, this person's data was also deleted from further analyses. A missing value analysis in SPSS showed that data was missing at random and thus, missing data on the self-report measures were treated by using mean substitution.

*Factor Structure of the Brief COPE.* The Brief COPE (Carver, 1997) is a relatively new scale and has not been extensively validated. Therefore, Principal Component Analysis (PCA) and Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) tested whether the components fit the data collected in the current sample and replicated the original 14-factor structure that was previously reported by its developer. Principal components extraction with varimax rotation was used prior to principal factors extraction to estimate number of factors, presence of outliers, absence of multicollinearity, and factorability of the correlation matrices. An initial estimation of the factor structure through PCA indicated that eight factors best fit the data (eigenvalues greater than one), explaining 63.56% of the variance. PCA was employed because the goal of the analysis was to replicate the component structures reported in the original studies in the current sample (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). Examination of the scree plot, however, suggested the presence of a four- or five-factor structure. Therefore, EFA using Principal Axis Factoring (PAF) was used to test both possibilities. Principal factor extraction with promax rotation was performed on 28 items from the Brief COPE for a sample of 235 individuals. The promax rotation was used because there is some degree of overlap between the subscales in the original work. Indeed, the factor correlation matrix revealed that the four factors were moderately correlated, with correlation coefficients varying between .03 to .42 (see Table 2). Although some factors were not highly correlated, the

Table 2

*Factor Correlation Matrix for the Brief COPE*

| Factor | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 1.00 | | | |
| 2 | .42 | 1.00 | | |
| 3 | .39 | .20 | 1.00 | |
| 4 | .21 | .03 | .09 | 1.00 |

decision was made to keep the oblique rotated structure since it provided a clearer factor structure. After extracting four and five factors, the former extraction resulted in the best fit of the data. Five items had ambiguous or unsatisfactorily low factor loadings and were eliminated, resulting in a 23-item four-factor measure that accounted for 44.31% of the total variance. The results from the four-factor structure of the Brief COPE showed a simple structure, since items that significantly loaded together on a factor did not cross-load on other factors. The criterion for inclusion in a factor was a loading of .32 or more, which represents a meaningful correlation (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001).

The four factors, in order of percentage of variance, were labeled: *emotion-focused* (i.e., seeking emotional and instrumental support), *problem-focused coping* (i.e., action, planning, and positive reframing), *disengagement* (i.e., substance use, denial, humor, behavioural disengagement), and *religion* (i.e., praying and meditating). However, this last factor was not included in further analyses because it was not part of the original hypotheses. Moreover, it was deemed not usable because it contained only 2 items and it later violated the assumption of linearity with all the other variables of interest. This terminology was based on the nature of the items that loaded together on a factor. Table 3 shows the items that loaded on each factor, along with their factor loadings and internal reliabilities.

*Factor Structure of the ROCI-II.* In terms of its factor structure, the ROCI-II (Rahim, 1983) has received equivocal support, with some researchers arguing for a five-factor structure (e.g., van de Vliert & Kabanoff, 1990), while others defend a four-factor structure (e.g., Hammock et al., 1990). For this reason, PCA and EFA were used to test whether the components fit the data and replicate the original five-factor structure reported by Rahim. An approach similar to the one used for the validation of the Brief

Table 3

*Questionnaire items and factor loadings of the Brief COPE*

| Subscale | Eigenvalue | % Variance explained | Item | Factor loading |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Emotion-focused* (α = .83) | 5.63 | 20.01 | I've been getting emotional support from others. | .70 |
| | | | I've been getting comfort and understanding from someone. | .95 |
| | | | I've been trying to get advice or help from other people about what to do. | .73 |
| | | | I've been getting help and advice from other people. | .74 |
| | | | I've been expressing my negative feelings. | .48 |
| *Problem-focused* (α = .75) | 2.79 | 9.95 | I've been concentrating my efforts on doing something about the situation I'm in. | .53 |
| | | | I've been taking action to try to make the situation better. | .57 |
| | | | I've been trying to come up with a strategy about what to do. | .68 |

Table 3 (cont'd)

| Subscale | Eigenvalue | % Variance explained | Item | Factor loading |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | I've been thinking hard about what steps to take. | .66 |
| | | | I've been accepting the reality of the fact that it has happened. | .45 |
| | | | I've been trying to see it in a different light, to make it seem more positive. | .48 |
| | | | I've been looking for something good in what is happening. | .52 |
| *Disengagement* (α = .73) | 2.13 | 7.59 | I've been saying to myself "this isn't real". | .49 |
| | | | I've been refusing to believe that it has happened. | .48 |
| | | | I've been using alcohol and other drugs to make myself feel better. | .46 |
| | | | I've been using alcohol or other drugs to help me get through it. | .50 |
| | | | I've been making jokes about it. | .45 |
| | | | I've been making fun of the situation. | .47 |

Table 3 (cont'd)

| Subscale | Eigenvalue | % Variance explained | Item | Factor loading |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | I've been giving up trying to deal with it. | .53 |
| | | | I've been giving up the attempt to cope. | .56 |
| | | | I've been doing something to think about it less, such as going to movies, watching TV, reading, daydreaming, sleeping, or shopping. | .46 |
| *Religion* | 1.87 | 6.67 | I've been trying to find comfort in my religion or spiritual beliefs. | .78 |
| (α = .87) | | | I've been praying or meditating. | .80 |

*Note. n* = 235. Principal factor extraction with promax rotation.

COPE was employed. Therefore, principal components extraction with varimax rotation was used prior to principal factors extraction to estimate number of factors, presence of outliers, absence of multicollinearity, and factorability of the correlation matrices. The initial PCA indicated the presence of a seven-factor structure (eigenvalues greater than one), explaining 60.63% of the variance. Examination of the scree plot, however, suggested the presence of a four-factor structure. Therefore, four factors were extracted through PAF. More specifically, PAF with promax rotation was performed on the 28 items of the ROCI-II for a sample of 226 individuals. The promax rotation was used because the items were correlated (see Table 4). The results from the four-factor structure of the ROCI-II showed a simple structure, with all items having large loadings on one factor and small loadings on other factors (see Table 5). No items were deleted. Thus, the resulting scale comprised 28 items, and the four-factor measure accounted for 48.26% of the total variance. The criterion for inclusion in a factor was a loading of .32or more for the same reason as mentioned above.

The resulting factor structure was similar to the one found by Hammock and colleagues (1990). The compromising and integrating factors were undifferentiated and thus, the items from their respective scales all loaded onto the same factor, and were therefore collapsed to create one broader factor labelled *cooperation*. The other three factors (avoiding, obliging, and dominating) contained the same items as the original scale. Table 5 shows the items that loaded on each factor, along with their factor loadings and internal reliabilities.

Table 4

*Factor Correlation Matrix for the ROCI-II*

| Factor | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|--------|------|------|------|------|
| 1 | 1.00 | | | |
| 2 | -.05 | 1.00 | | |
| 3 | .23 | .46 | 1.00 | |
| 4 | -.11 | -.09 | .01 | 1.00 |

Table 5

*Questionnaire items and factor loadings of the ROCI-II*

| Subscale | Eigenvalue | % Variance explained | Item | Factor loading |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Cooperation* (α = .87) | 5.55 | 19.12 | I try to investigate an issue to find a solution acceptable to both of us. | .64 |
| | | | I try to integrate my ideas with those of the other person to come up with a decision jointly. | .67 |
| | | | I try to work with the other person to find solutions to a problem which satisfy our expectations. | .75 |
| | | | I try to find a middle course to resolve an impasse. | .51 |
| | | | I exchange accurate information with the other person to solve the problem together. | .69 |
| | | | I usually propose a middle ground for breaking deadlocks. | .59 |
| | | | I negotiate with the other person so that a compromise can be reached. | .59 |

Table 5 (cont'd)

| Subscale | Eigenvalue | % Variance explained | Item | Factor loading |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | I use "give and take" so that a compromise can be made. | .53 |
| | | | I try to bring all our concerns out in the open so that the issues can be resolved in the best possible way. | .53 |
| | | | I collaborate with the other person to come up with decisions acceptable to us. | .77 |
| | | | I try to work with the other person for a proper understanding of a problem. | .69 |
| *Avoiding* *(α = .74)* | 4.28 | 14.74 | I attempt to avoid being "put on the spot" and try to keep the conflict to myself. | .59 |
| | | | I usually avoid open discussion of my differences with the other person. | .60 |

Table 5 (cont'd)

| Subscale | Eigenvalue | % Variance explained | Item | Factor loading |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | I try to stay away from disagreement with the other person. | .81 |
| | | | I avoid an encounter with the other person. | .76 |
| | | | I try to keep my disagreement with the other person to myself in order to avoid hard feelings. | .61 |
| | | | I try to avoid unpleasant exchanges with the other person. | .54 |
| *Obliging* (α = .74) | 2.60 | 8.97 | I generally try to satisfy the needs of the other person | .59 |
| | | | I give in to the wishes of the other person. | .58 |
| | | | I usually accommodate the wishes of the other person. | .69 |
| | | | I usually allow concessions to the other person. | .54 |
| | | | I often go along with the suggestions of the other person. | .46 |

Table 5 (cont'd)

| Subscale | Eigenvalue | % Variance explained | Item | Factor loading |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | I try to satisfy the expectations of the other person. | .55 |
| *Dominating* (α = .82) | 1.57 | 5.43 | I use my influence to get my ideas accepted. | .61 |
| | | | I use my authority to make a decision in my favour. | .71 |
| | | | I use my expertise to make a decision in my favour. | .60 |
| | | | I am generally firm in pursuing my side of the issue. | .44 |
| | | | I sometimes use my power to win a competitive situation. | .72 |

*Note. n* = 226. Principal factor extraction with promax rotation.

*Factor Structure of the NEO-FFI.* To explore whether the Big Five personality

items of the NEO-FFI loaded onto their original factors by statistical methods, another

PCA was performed. The original solution generated 18 eigenvalues greater than 1,

explaining 65.96% of the total Variance. However, the scree plot indicated an emergence

of five factors (see Figure 2). Thus, PAF with varimax rotation was performed on the 60

items of the NEO-FFI for a sample of 222 individuals. Varimax rotation was employed

because the five factors showed to be uncorrelated (correlation coefficients varying

between .003 and .36), most of them having a value below .2. A five-factor solution was

forced, which was consistent with the original theory (see Table 6). Most items loaded

onto their respective components, except two cross-loading items (see items 4, 52), three

items with low loadings (see items 3, 15, 57), two items with low loadings on their own

scale and high loadings on another scale (see items 34, 47), and four items with low

loadings on all the scales (see items 8, 12, 18, 38). Specifically, openness and

extraversion appeared to be the most problematic factors, with four of their respective

items not loading adequately on the expected factors, or having low loadings on the

expected scale. In fact, in a British study, Egan, Deary, and Austin (2000) found that

although British norms corresponded favourably with American ones, the factor structure

of the NEO-FFI was less satisfactory. Neuroticism, agreeableness, and conscientiousness

appeared reliably, while many of the items of the openness and extraversion scales did

not load adequately on the expected factors. This suggests that sample adequacy was not

a reason to explain my failure to replicate the original simple structure of the NEO-FFI.

Despite these findings, a decision was made to leave all items in the final solutions,

because the internal consistency of the five scales was acceptable to good ($\alpha$ = .70 to .84).

*Figure 2.* Scree Plot Indicating the Presence of a Five-Structure for the NEO-FFI.

## Scree Plot



Factor Number
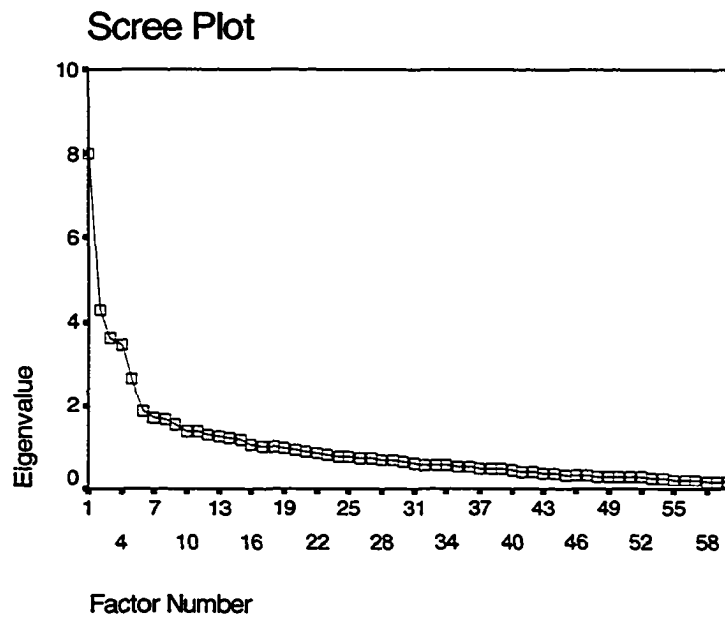
Table 6

*Rotated Component Loadings of the NEO-FFI Items*

| Components | Factor | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **N** | **C** | **E** | **A** | **O** |
| 1 - I am not a worrier. (R) | **-0.45** | 0.13 | -0.10 | 0.07 | 0.04 |
| 6 - I often feel inferior to others. | **0.49** | -0.04 | -0.16 | 0.09 | -0.01 |
| 11 - When I'm under a great deal of stress, sometimes I feel like I'm going to pieces. | **0.49** | 0.01 | -0.18 | 0.01 | 0.01 |
| 16 - I rarely feel lonely or blue. (R) | **-0.61** | -0.11 | -0.14 | -0.01 | 0.10 |
| 21 - I often feel tense and jittery. | **0.60** | -0.06 | -0.12 | -0.23 | 0.11 |
| 26 - Sometimes I feel completely worthless. | **0.55** | -0.19 | -0.10 | 0.03 | 0.01 |
| 31 - I rarely feel fearful or anxious. (R) | **-0.47** | 0.05 | -0.07 | -0.12 | 0.06 |
| 36 - I often get angry at the way people treat me. | **0.51** | -0.08 | -0.07 | -0.28 | -0.01 |
| 41 - Too often, when things go wrong, I get discouraged and feel like giving up. | **0.49** | -0.19 | -0.16 | 0.06 | -0.08 |
| 46 - I am seldom sad or depressed. (R) | **-0.66** | -0.06 | -0.22 | -0.06 | 0.08 |
| 51 - I often feel helpless and want someone else to solve my problems. | **0.54** | -0.35 | 0.04 | 0.08 | -0.12 |
| 56 - At times I have been so ashamed I just wanted to hide. | **0.50** | -0.15 | -0.03 | -0.16 | -0.04 |
| 5 - I keep my belongings clean and neat. | -0.07 | **0.49** | 0.00 | 0.08 | -0.22 |
| 10 - I'm pretty good about pacing myself so as to get things done on time. | -0.05 | **0.55** | -0.05 | 0.04 | 0.03 |
| 15 - I am not a very methodical person. (R) | 0.01 | **-0.25** | -0.14 | 0.08 | 0.04 |
| 20 - I try to perform all the tasks assigned to me conscientiously. | 0.12 | **0.49** | 0.08 | 0.17 | 0.17 |
| 25 - I have a clear set of goals and work toward them in an orderly fashion. | -0.04 | **0.59** | 0.22 | -0.03 | 0.02 |
| 30 - I waste a lot of time before settling down to work. (R) | -0.14 | **-0.50** | -0.11 | 0.22 | -0.10 |
| 35 - I work hard to accomplish my goals. | 0.07 | **0.61** | 0.24 | -0.02 | 0.11 |
| 40 - When I make a commitment, I can always be counted on to follow through. | -0.06 | **0.58** | 0.11 | 0.05 | 0.11 |
| 45 - Sometimes I'm not as dependable or reliable as I should be. (R) | -0.21 | **-0.56** | -0.09 | 0.00 | -0.03 |
| 50 - I am a productive person who always gets the job done. | -0.05 | **0.70** | 0.08 | -0.04 | 0.15 |
| 55 - I never seem to be able to get organized. (R) | -0.23 | **-0.54** | 0.03 | -0.07 | -0.06 |
| 60 - I strive for excellence in everything I do. | -0.03 | **0.53** | 0.29 | -0.08 | 0.07 |

Table 6 (cont'd)

| Components | Factor | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **N** | **C** | **E** | **A** | **O** |
| 2 - I like to have a lot of people around me. | -0.16 | -0.11 | **0.52** | -0.08 | 0.01 |
| 7 - I laugh easily. | -0.14 | -0.01 | **0.50** | 0.03 | 0.05 |
| 12 - I don't consider myself especially "light-hearted." (R) | -0.18 | -0.06 | **-0.21** | 0.18 | -0.06 |
| 17 - I really enjoy talking to people. | -0.16 | 0.12 | **0.50** | 0.00 | 0.15 |
| 22 - I like to be where the action is. | -0.20 | 0.05 | **0.51** | -0.23 | 0.10 |
| 27 - I usually prefer to do things alone. (R) | -0.26 | -0.05 | **-0.40** | 0.14 | -0.11 |
| 32 - I often feel as if I'm bursting with energy. | -0.21 | 0.20 | **0.40** | -0.24 | 0.05 |
| 37 - I am a cheerful, high-spirited person. | -0.19 | 0.16 | **0.62** | 0.17 | 0.05 |
| 42 - I am not a cheerful optimist. (R) | -0.27 | 0.11 | **-0.54** | 0.26 | 0.08 |
| 47 - My life is fast-paced. | -0.17 | 0.36 | **0.24** | -0.24 | 0.09 |
| 52 - I am a very active person. | -0.19 | 0.34 | **0.34** | -0.18 | 0.05 |
| 57 - I would rather go my own way than be a leader of others. (R) | -0.36 | 0.16 | **-0.22** | -0.08 | 0.18 |
| 4 - I try to be courteous to everyone I meet. | 0.06 | 0.25 | 0.41 | **0.39** | 0.10 |
| 9 - I often get into arguments with my family and co-workers. (R) | -0.24 | 0.08 | 0.03 | **-0.42** | -0.02 |
| 14 - Some people think I'm selfish and egotistical. (R) | -0.09 | 0.08 | 0.09 | **-0.56** | -0.02 |
| 19 - I would rather cooperate with others than compete with them. | 0.18 | -0.03 | 0.09 | **0.34** | -0.01 |
| 24 - I tend to be cynical and skeptical of others' intentions. (R) | -0.44 | 0.08 | 0.09 | **-0.30** | 0.09 |
| 29 - I believe that most people will take advantage of you if you let them. (R) | -0.31 | -0.08 | -0.09 | **-0.31** | 0.02 |
| 34 - Most people I know like me. | -0.13 | 0.17 | 0.38 | **0.23** | 0.06 |
| 39 - Some people think of me as cold and calculating. (R) | -0.17 | 0.01 | 0.27 | **-0.47** | 0.03 |
| 44 - I'm hard-headed and tough-minded in my attitudes. (R) | -0.14 | -0.14 | -0.01 | **-0.52** | 0.04 |
| 49 - I generally try to be thoughtful and considerate. | 0.04 | 0.30 | 0.23 | **0.42** | 0.13 |
| 54 - If I don't like people, I let them know it. (R) | -0.03 | -0.03 | -0.09 | **-0.56** | -0.02 |
| 59 - If necessary, I am willing to manipulate people to get what I want. (R) | 0.06 | 0.16 | -0.28 | **-0.56** | -0.07 |

Table 6 (cont'd)

| Components | Factor | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **N** | **C** | **E** | **A** | **O** |
| 3 - I don't like to waste my time daydreaming. (R) | 0.11 | -0.32 | 0.01 | 0.01 | **-0.25** |
| 8 - Once I find the right way to do something, I stick to it. (R) | -0.14 | -0.21 | -0.24 | 0.10 | **-0.03** |
| 13 - I am intrigued by the patterns I find in art and nature. | 0.07 | 0.00 | 0.13 | 0.13 | **0.68** |
| 18 - I believe letting students hear controversial speakers can only confuse and mislead them. (R) | 0.00 | -0.02 | 0.11 | 0.01 | **-0.11** |
| 23 - Poetry has little or no effect on me. (R) | 0.05 | 0.05 | -0.03 | 0.16 | **-0.56** |
| 28 - I often try new and foreign foods. | -0.14 | 0.04 | 0.11 | -0.04 | **0.42** |
| 33 - I seldom notice the moods or feelings that different environments produce. (R) | 0.10 | 0.03 | 0.04 | -0.06 | **-0.43** |
| 38 - I believe we should look to our religious authorities for decisions on moral issues. (R) | 0.02 | -0.05 | -0.21 | -0.13 | **-0.09** |
| 43 - Sometimes when I am reading poetry or looking at a work of art, I feel a chill or wave of excitement. | 0.07 | 0.10 | -0.07 | 0.09 | **0.61** |
| 48 - I have little interest in speculating on the nature of the universe or the human condition. (R) | 0.02 | 0.01 | -0.08 | 0.00 | **-0.59** |
| 53 - I have a lot of intellectual curiosity. | -0.04 | 0.04 | 0.20 | -0.19 | **0.56** |
| 58 - I often enjoy playing with theories or abstract ideas. | -0.12 | -0.01 | -0.03 | -0.08 | **0.47** |

*Note.* N = Neuroticism; E = Extraversion; O = Openness to experience; A = Agreeableness; C = Conscientiousness.

(R) represents reverse coded items

Consequently, it was deemed reasonable to use the NEO-FFI in its entirety, respecting the original five-factor structure. Hence, the resulting scale comprised 60 items and the five-factor measure accounted for 36.70% of the total variance.

*Checking Assumptions on the Revised Scales.* Following the aforementioned factor analyses and the creation of different subscales for the Brief COPE and the ROCI-II, the assumptions of normality, linearity, homoskedasticity, independence of residuals, and multicollinearity were re-checked in the process of the hierarchical regression analyses. No violation of these assumptions was indicated. More specifically, normality of the three distributions (*coping, personality and conflict*) was checked by recalculating the z-scores for the skew for all their respective subscales. One of the coping subscales (*disengagement*) was positively skewed, with a z-score for skew of 4.76. No kurtosis was present in any of the distributions. There were no univariate outliers. I also checked for linearity and homoskedasticity by looking at the scatterplots. All the scatterplots were showing linearity and homoskedasticity between the criterion and the predictor.

Overall, these data do not violate the homogeneity of variance assumption (i.e., homoskedasticity). In regression analyses, however, we usually conduct the preliminary screening of the data through the residuals. Examination of residuals scatterplots provided a test of assumptions of normality, linearity, and homoskedasticity between predicted DV scores and errors of prediction (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). The observation of the various scatterplots representing the relationship between the predictors and criteria residuals showed that all assumptions had been met. Therefore, the data were suited for further analyses. After the final cleaning and screening of the data, the responses of 235 individuals were suited for further analyses.

Results

*Correlations between Variables*

In order to examine strength of relationships among the personality, coping, and conflict style variables, correlations between them were performed (see Table 7). Table 7 also shows the means and standard deviations of the variables (N = 235). As indicated in Table 7, the components of the NEO-FFI were all intercorrelated, except for the openness scale. These results were, for the most part, consistent with both Moberg's (2001) and Antonioni's (1998) results on the inter-correlations of the Big Five factors of personality. When examining the inter-correlations between the subscales of the ROCI-II, Table 7 shows that the obliging style was positively correlated with the cooperation and the avoiding styles of handling interpersonal conflict. Although surprising, the results between the cooperation and the obliging styles were somewhat similar to Antonioni's (1998) findings. He found a positive relationship between obliging and compromising, which, in the current study was merged with integrating to create the *cooperation* subscale. Another surprising result came from the inter-correlations between the factors of the Brief COPE, which all showed positive significant relationships. Theoretically, disengagement should show a negative relation to problem-focused coping, and not a positive one (Carver et al., 1989), as found in this study.

*Hypotheses 1 – 3: Regression Analyses between Personality and Coping*

While it is important to determine the extent to which each personality trait relates to each coping mechanism, these personality traits are all present to some degree in every individual, and it may be that in the context of all the traits, certain ones stand out as being more important than others in relation to coping strategies (Hooker et al., 1994).

Table 7

*Descriptive Statistics, Internal Consistency Coefficients, and Observed Intercorrelations for the NEO-FFI, ROCI-II and Brief COPE*

| Variables | M | SD | Personality | | | | | Conflict style | | | | Coping mechanism | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 |
| **Personality** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1.Neuroticism | 2.51 | 0.64 | (.84) | -.45** | -.25** | -.25** | .02 | -.13* | .23** | -.11 | .15* | .22** | -.14* | .19** |
| 2.Extroversion | 3.52 | 0.54 | | (.78) | .25** | .19** | .06 | .21** | -.15* | .19** | -.05 | .10 | .19** | -.06 |
| 3.Conscientiousness | 3.91 | 0.52 | | | (.81) | .19** | -.05 | .28** | -.03 | .02 | -.06 | -.13* | .13 | -.34** |
| 4.Agreeableness | 3.74 | 0.48 | | | | (.75) | .02 | .26** | .13 | -.32** | .24** | .03 | .13 | -.20** |
| 5.Openness | 3.33 | 0.51 | | | | | (.70) | .23** | -.03 | -.04 | .04 | .16* | .29** | .11 |
| **Conflict style** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 6.Cooperation | 3.94 | 0.45 | | | | | | (.87) | -.05 | -.03 | .19** | .03 | .18** | -.04 |
| 7.Avoiding | 3.01 | 0.77 | | | | | | | (.74) | -.05 | .46** | -.04 | .00 | .06 |
| 8.Domination | 2.94 | 0.68 | | | | | | | | (.82) | .03 | -.03 | .05 | .11 |
| 9.Obliging | 3.01 | 0.57 | | | | | | | | | (.74) | .21** | .10 | .10 |
| **Coping mechanism** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 10.Emotion-focused | 2.64 | 0.74 | | | | | | | | | | (.83) | .31** | .32** |
| 11.Problem-focused | 3.20 | 0.54 | | | | | | | | | | | (.75) | .16* |
| 12.Disengagement | 1.75 | 0.47 | | | | | | | | | | | | (.73) |

*Note.* $* p < .05$; $** p < .01$; Listwise N = 235; α on diagonal is Cronbach's alpha of the scale.

Therefore, in order to determine how personality traits predict coping strategies, a multivariate approach, considering all the personality traits together, was necessary to answer this question. In order to explore the question of the relative importance of the personality dimensions in predicting coping strategies, three multiple regression analyses were conducted using the coping scales as dependent variables and entering the five personality factors into the equation simultaneously. Additionally, factors which may be related to coping with workplace stress such as age (Vaillant, 1977), gender[2] (Carver et al., 1989), marital status and work experience (or job tenure; Isikhan, Comez, & Danis, 2004), and SES[3] (i.e., education level and family income; Billings & Moos, 1981) were also entered into the equations so that the personality coefficients would have the influence of these factors statistically removed. A hierarchical model was thus employed.

Table 8 includes the $B$ and $\beta$ coefficients and change statistics in the three hierarchical regression analyses in predicting the three dimensions of coping with stress. Demographic variables were included in the first step to control for their effects. Gender was shown to significantly predict emotion-focused coping ($\beta = .26$, $p < .001$), job tenure significantly predicted emotion-focused coping ($\beta = -.22$, $p < .01$), and family income significantly predicted problem-focused coping ($\beta = .17$, $p < .05$) and emotion-focused coping ($\beta = .17$, $p < .05$). As shown in Table 8, hypotheses 1, 2, and 3 were partly

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2 For example, tendencies to focus on and vent emotions and to seek social support are greater among women than among men; whereas men tend to cope by using alcohol or drugs more than women (Carver et al., 1989).

3 For example, people with higher SES have been shown to be more likely to use problem-focused coping (Billings & Moos, 1981).

## Table 8

*Regression Analyses for Coping Strategies as Predicted by Personality Traits*

| Predictors | Problem-focused | | | | Emotion-focused | | | | Disengagement | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | B | (SE) | β | % | B | (SE) | β | % | B | (SE) | β | % |
| **Step 1** | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Demographic variables | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Gender | .04 | (.07) | .03 | .00 | .39 | (.10) | .26*** | .06 | -.07 | (.06) | -.07 | .00 |
| Age | .03 | (.04) | .08 | .00 | -.03 | (.05) | -.05 | .00 | -.05 | (.03) | -.14 | .01 |
| Marital status | .00 | (.02) | .01 | .00 | .01 | (.03) | .02 | .00 | .01 | (.02) | .02 | .00 |
| Job tenure | -.05 | (.03) | -.12 | .01 | -.12 | (.04) | -.22** | .03 | -.03 | (.03) | -.10 | .01 |
| Education level | -.00 | (.02) | -.01 | .00 | .01 | (.03) | .03 | .00 | -.02 | (.02) | -.06 | .00 |
| Family income | .10 | (.04) | .17* | .02 | .13 | (.05) | .17* | .02 | -.03 | (.03) | -.05 | .00 |
| | $R^2 = .07$ | | | | $R^2 = .19$ | | | | $R^2 = .12$ | | | |
| | $F (6, 221) = 2.60, p = .019$ | | | | $F (6, 221) = 8.41, p = .0001$ | | | | $F (6, 221) = 5.21, p = .0001$ | | | |
| **Step 2** | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Personality traits | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Neuroticism | -.04 | (.07) | -.05 | .00 | .22 | (.09) | .19* | .02 | .07 | (.06) | .09 | .01 |
| Extraversion | .08 | (.08) | .09 | .00 | .26 | (.10) | .19** | .02 | .01 | (.06) | .01 | .00 |
| Openness | .29 | (.07) | .28*** | .07 | .14 | (.09) | .10 | .01 | .09 | (.06) | .10 | .01 |
| Agreeableness | .06 | (.08) | .05 | .00 | .07 | (.10) | .05 | .00 | -.07 | (.06) | -.07 | .00 |
| Conscientiousness | .07 | (.07) | .07 | .00 | -.23 | (.09) | -.17* | .02 | -.21 | (.06) | -.24*** | .05 |
| | $\Delta R^2 = .10$ | | | | $\Delta R^2 = .07$ | | | | $\Delta R^2 = .09$ | | | |
| | $\Delta F (5, 216) = 5.31, p = .0001$ | | | | $\Delta F (5, 216) = 3.90, p = .002$ | | | | $\Delta F (5, 216) = 5.12, p = .0001$ | | | |

*Note.* B is the unstandardized parameter estimate.
SE is the standard error of the parameter estimate.
β is the standardized regression coefficient.
% is the percentage of unique variance explained by the variable (squared semi-partial correlations).
* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$; Listwise N = 228.

supported: As predicted in hypothesis 1, problem-focused coping was shown to be significantly predicted by openness ($\beta = .28$, $p < .001$), however it was not predicted by neuroticism ($\beta = -.05$, $p > .05$), nor conscientiousness ($\beta = .07$, $p > .05$). As predicted (hypothesis 2), emotion-focused coping was significantly predicted by extraversion ($\beta = .19$, $p < .01$), however, unlike hypothesized, it was also predicted by neuroticism ($\beta = .19$, $p < .05$) and conscientiousness ($\beta = -.16$ $p < .05$). Emotion-focused coping was not predicted, as expected, by openness ($\beta = .10$, $p > .05$) and agreeableness ($\beta = .05$, $p > .05$). As hypothesized (hypothesis 3), disengagement was shown to be significantly predicted by conscientiousness ($\beta = -.24$, $p < .001$), however, the regression failed to produce the expected results for neuroticism ($\beta = .09$, $p > .05$), extraversion ($\beta = .01$, $p > .05$), agreeableness ($\beta = -.07$, $p > .05$), and openness ($\beta = .10$, $p > .05$). In sum, neuroticism, extraversion, openness, and conscientiousness were all significant predictors of coping mechanisms in these hierarchical regressions. Although agreeableness had a zero-order relationship with coping strategies, it was correlated with neuroticism, extraversion, and conscientiousness, thus reducing the variance apportioned to it in the multivariate models.

The hierarchical regression analysis results showed that the demographic variables, entered in the first step, accounted for a significant proportion of the variance in the three equations. Specifically, demographic variables accounted for 7% of the variance in problem-focused coping ($F(6, 221) = 2.60$, $p < .05$), 19% in emotion-focused coping ($F(6, 221) = 8.41$, $p < .001$), and 12% in disengagement ($F(6, 221) = 5.21$, $p < .001$). Entering personality traits simultaneously into the equation significantly improved the prediction of problem-focused coping ($\Delta R^2 = .10$, $F_{inc}(5, 216) = 5.31$, $p < .001$), emotion-

focused coping ($\Delta R^2$ = .07, $F_{inc}$ (5, 216) = 3.90, $p$ < .01), and disengagement ($\Delta R^2$ = .09, $F_{inc}$ (5, 216) = 5.12, $p$ < .001).

Overall, the results from these regression analyses show that personality is related to use of coping mechanisms in this sample of working individuals, accounting for an increment portion of the variance of 10% in problem-focused, 7% in emotion-focused, and 9% in disengagement.

*Hypothesis 4 – 7: Regression Analyses between Personality and Conflict*

In order to examine how personality traits predicted conflict management styles, analyses similar to the ones used to examine coping mechanisms were performed. Four hierarchical regressions analyses were conducted to explore the question of the relative importance of the personality dimensions in predicting conflict management styles. In order to control for extraneous variables statistically -because they could be a possible source of variance in the criterion variables- gender, age, marital status, job tenure, education level, and family income were also entered in the equations. In a similar fashion as for coping mechanisms, demographic variables were entered in the first step of the hierarchical regressions, and the five personality factors were entered together in the second step. Conflict styles were the dependent variables.

Table 9 shows that some of the personality traits are significant predictors of conflict management strategies. Indeed, as predicted in hypothesis 4, cooperation (the merger between *integrating* and *compromising*) was significantly predicted by agreeableness ($\beta$ = .21, $p$ < .01), and conscientiousness ($\beta$ = .23, $p$ < .01), however, openness ($\beta$ = .25, $p$ < .001) was also a significant predictor of cooperation, which was not hypothesized. Moreover, unlike expected, extraversion ($\beta$ = .11, $p$ > .05) was not a

## Table 9

*Regression Analyses for Conflict Styles as Predicted by Personality Traits*

| Predictors | Cooperation | | | | Avoiding | | | | Dominating | | | | Obliging | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | B | (SE) | β | % | B | (SE) | β | % | B | (SE) | β | % | B | (SE) | β | % |
| **Step 1** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Demographic variables | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Gender | .04 | (.06) | .05 | .00 | .03 | (.11) | .02 | .00 | -.15 | (.09) | -.11 | .01 | .15 | (.08) | .13 | .01 |
| Age | -.06 | (.03) | -.16 | .01 | -.07 | (.06) | -.12 | .01 | .00 | (.05) | .00 | .00 | -.07 | (.04) | -.16 | .01 |
| Marital status | -.03 | (.02) | -.12 | .01 | .02 | (.03) | .05 | .00 | .06 | (.03) | .16* | .02 | .01 | (.02) | .02 | .00 |
| Job tenure | .04 | (.02) | .13 | .01 | .05 | (.04) | .10 | .01 | .00 | (.04) | .00 | .00 | .03 | (.03) | .06 | .00 |
| Education level | -.01 | (.02) | -.04 | .00 | .03 | (.03) | .08 | .01 | -.00 | (.03) | .00 | .00 | -.01 | (.02) | -.03 | .00 |
| Family income | -.02 | (.03) | -.04 | .00 | -.03 | (.06) | -.03 | .00 | .08 | (.05) | .11 | .01 | .06 | (.04) | .10 | .01 |
| | $R^2 = .02$ | | | | $R^2 = .04$ | | | | $R^2 = .08$ | | | | $R^2 = .05$ | | | |
| | $F(6, 221) = .92, p = .484$ | | | | $F(6, 221) = 1.35, p = .236$ | | | | $F(6, 221) = 3.12, p = .006$ | | | | $F(6, 221) = 1.98, p = .070$ | | | |
| **Step 2** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Personality traits | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Neuroticism | .00 | (.05) | .01 | .00 | .22 | (.10) | .18* | .02 | -.09 | (.08) | -.09 | .00 | .12 | (.07) | .13 | .01 |
| Extraversion | .09 | (.06) | .11 | .01 | -.17 | (.11) | -.12 | .01 | .22 | (.09) | .18* | .02 | -.05 | (.08) | -.04 | .00 |
| Openness | .22 | (.06) | .25*** | .06 | -.05 | (.10) | -.03 | .00 | -.02 | (.08) | -.02 | .00 | .03 | (.07) | .02 | .00 |
| Agreeableness | .20 | (.06) | .21** | .04 | .33 | (.11) | .21** | .04 | -.52 | (.09) | -.38*** | .12 | .36 | (.08) | .30*** | .08 |
| Conscientiousness | .20 | (.06) | .23** | .04 | .05 | (.10) | .03 | .00 | .07 | (.09) | .05 | .00 | -.09 | (.08) | -.08 | .00 |
| | $\Delta R^2 = .19$ | | | | $\Delta R^2 = .07$ | | | | $\Delta R^2 = .14$ | | | | $\Delta R^2 = .09$ | | | |
| | $\Delta F(5, 216) = 10.36, p = .0001$ | | | | $\Delta F(5, 216) = 3.48, p = .005$ | | | | $\Delta F(5, 216) = 7.81, p = .0001$ | | | | $\Delta F(5, 216) = 4.35, p = .001$ | | | |

*Note.* B is the unstandardized parameter estimate.
SE is the standard error of the parameter estimate.
β is the standardized regression coefficient.
% is the percentage of unique variance explained by the variable (squared semi-partial correlations).
* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$; Listwise N = 228.

significant predictor of cooperation. The avoiding style of handling interpersonal conflict

(hypothesis 5) was predicted by agreeableness ($\beta = .21$, $p < .01$), as expected, as well as

by neuroticism ($\beta = .18$, $p < .05$), which was not expected. Also, conscientiousness ($\beta =$

$.03$, $p > .05$) was not a significant predictor of the avoiding style, as hypothesized.

Hypothesis 6 was also partly supported since agreeableness ($\beta = -.38$, $p < .001$) was a

significant predictor of the dominating style, so was extraversion ($\beta = .18$, $p < .05$), which

was not expected. Furthermore, neuroticism ($\beta = -.09$, $p > .05$) was not a significant

predictor of that style of handling interpersonal conflict. Lastly, hypothesis 7 received

partial support since agreeableness ($\beta = .30$, $p < .001$) was a significant predictor of the

obliging style, while neuroticism ($\beta = .13$, $p > .05$) did not predict the obliging style.

The demographic variables accounted for a significant amount of variance in only

one of the four models (the model predicting dominating; $R^2 = .08$, $F(6, 221) = 3.12$, $p <$

$.01$), with marital status ($\beta = .16$, $p < .05$) being a significant predictor of the use of the

dominating style of handling interpersonal conflict. Specifically, people who are not

married or living with a partner are more likely to use this style of handling interpersonal

conflict than married individuals. When personality factors were entered into the

equations after demographic variables, they accounted for significant additional variance

in all four models. Namely, personality traits accounted for an increment of 19% of the

variance in the model predicting cooperation ($F_{inc}(5, 216) = 10.36$, $p < .001$), 7% in the

model predicting avoiding ($F_{inc}(5, 216) = 3.48$, $p < .01$), 14% in the model predicting

dominating ($F_{inc}(5, 216) = 7.81$, $p < .001$), and 9% in the model predicting obliging ($F_{inc}$

$(5, 216) = 4.35$, $p < .01$).

In sum, hypotheses 4 to 7 were partly supported, and the equations predicting the four conflict management styles from personality traits were all significant, with the increment percentage of variance accounted for ranging from 7% to 19%.

*Hypothesis 8 – 12: Regression Analyses between Coping and Conflict*

In order to examine how coping mechanisms predicted conflict management styles, analyses similar to the aforementioned ones were performed. Four hierarchical regressions analyses were conducted to explore the question of the relative importance of the coping mechanisms in predicting conflict management styles, whereby conflict styles were the dependent variables. In order to control for extraneous variables statistically gender, age, marital status, job tenure, education level, and family income were entered in the equations in the first step of the model, and the three coping mechanisms (IVs) were entered simultaneously in the second step of the equation.

As shown in Table 10, only problem-focused coping was a significant predictor of conflict management styles. More specifically, hypothesis 8, which stated that the integrating style of handling interpersonal conflict would be predicted by problem-focused coping and disengagement was partially supported. Problem-focused coping ($\beta =$ .20, $p < .01$) was a significant predictor of cooperation, as expected; whereas disengagement was not ($\beta = -.06$, $p > .05$). Hypothesis 9 was not supported. Indeed, the obliging style of handling interpersonal conflict was not shown to be predicted by emotion-focused coping ($\beta = -.13$, $p > .05$) or problem-focused coping ($\beta = .04$, $p > .05$). The hypothesized prediction of the dominating style of handling interpersonal conflict (hypothesis 10) was not supported since emotion-focused coping ($\beta = -.09$, $p > .05$) failed to predict this style. Also, problem-focused coping ($\beta = .04$, $p > .05$) and disengagement

Table 10

*Regression Analyses for Conflict Styles as Predicted by Coping Mechanisms*

| Predictors | Cooperation | | | | Avoiding | | | | Dominating | | | | Obliging | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | B | (SE) | β | % | B | (SE) | β | % | B | (SE) | β | % | B | (SE) | β | % |
| **Step 1** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Demographic variables | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Gender | .09 | (.06) | .10 | .01 | .25 | (.11) | .16* | .02 | -.22 | (.09) | -.16* | .02 | .19 | (.08) | .17* | .02 |
| Age | -.03 | (.03) | -.09 | .00 | -.05 | (.06) | -.08 | .00 | -.05 | (.05) | -.09 | .00 | -.04 | (.04) | -.09 | .00 |
| Marital status | -.03 | (.02) | -.10 | .01 | .02 | (.03) | .05 | .00 | .06 | (.03) | .15 | .02 | .01 | (.03) | .04 | .00 |
| Job tenure | .04 | (.03) | .11 | .01 | .05 | (.05) | .08 | .01 | .01 | (.04) | .01 | .00 | .04 | (.03) | .10 | .01 |
| Education level | -.01 | (.02) | -.02 | .00 | .04 | (.03) | .08 | .01 | .00 | (.03) | .01 | .00 | -.01 | (.02) | -.04 | .00 |
| Family income | -.02 | (.04) | -.04 | .00 | -.03 | (.06) | -.03 | .00 | .11 | (.05) | .16* | .02 | .03 | (.05) | .05 | .00 |
| | $R^2 = .02$ | | | | $R^2 = .04$ | | | | $R^2 = .08$ | | | | $R^2 = .05$ | | | |
| | $F(6, 221) = .92, p = .484$ | | | | $F(6, 221) = 1.35, p = .236$ | | | | $F(6, 221) = 3.12, p = .006$ | | | | $F(6, 221) = 1.98, p = .070$ | | | |
| **Step 2** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Coping mechanisms | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Emotion-focused | .00 | (.05) | -.00 | .00 | -.15 | (.08) | -.15 | .02 | -.09 | (.07) | -.09 | .01 | .10 | (.06) | .13 | .01 |
| Problem-focused | .17 | (.06) | .20** | .03 | .05 | (.10) | .04 | .00 | .06 | (.09) | .05 | .00 | .04 | (.08) | .04 | .00 |
| Disengagement | -.06 | (.07) | -.06 | .00 | .16 | (.12) | .10 | .01 | .15 | (.11) | .10 | .01 | .06 | (.09) | .05 | .00 |
| | $\Delta R^2 = .04$ | | | | $\Delta R^2 = .02$ | | | | $\Delta R^2 = .01$ | | | | $\Delta R^2 = .03$ | | | |
| | $\Delta F(3, 218) = 2.78, p = .042$ | | | | $\Delta F(3, 218) = 1.33, p = .267$ | | | | $\Delta F(3, 218) = 1.03, p = .378$ | | | | $\Delta F(3, 218) = 2.01, p = .112$ | | | |

*Note.* B is the unstandardized parameter estimate.
SE is the standard error of the parameter estimate.
β is the standardized regression coefficient.
% is the percentage of unique variance explained by the variable (squared semi-partial correlations).
$* p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001$; Listwise N = 228.

($\beta$ = .10, $p$ > .05) did not significantly predict avoiding (hypothesis 11). The results of

hypothesis 12 are collapsed with those of hypothesis 8 since cooperation is comprised of

the integrating and compromising styles of handling interpersonal conflict (see *analyses*

section). Overall, coping mechanisms can be argued to be somewhat related to the use of

conflict management styles in this sample of working individuals, however, not as

hypothesized.

The hierarchical regression analysis results showed that the demographic variables

successfully accounted for a significant proportion of variance (8%) in the dominating

equation ($R$ = .21, $F(6, 221)$ = 3.12, $p$ < .01), with gender ($\beta$ = -.16, $p$ < .05) and family

income ($\beta$ = .16, $p$ < .05) being significant predictors. Gender was a significant predictor

of three conflict management styles, namely avoiding, dominating, and obliging such that

women were more likely to use avoiding and obliging than men, while men were more

likely to use dominating, Entering personality traits into the equation significantly

improved the prediction of cooperation ($\Delta R^2$ = .04, $F_{inc}(3, 218)$ = 2.78, $p$ < .05),

however, this was not the case for avoiding ($\Delta R^2$ = .02, $F_{inc}(3, 218)$ = 1.33, $p$ > .05),

dominating ($\Delta R^2$ = .01, $F_{inc}(3, 218)$ = 1.03, $p$ > .05), and obliging ($\Delta R^2$ = .03, $F_{inc}(3,$

218) = 2.01, $p$ > .05).

Overall, hypotheses 8 and 12 (which were combined to assess the prediction of

*cooperation*) were partly supported, as problem-focused coping was a significant

predictor of these styles of handling conflict; however, emotion-focused coping and

disengagement were not shown to be significant predictors of any style. Hypothesis 9 was

not supported, nor were hypotheses 10 and 11. Interestingly, however, coping

mechanisms were shown to predict the use of the cooperation (integrating and

compromising) style of handling interpersonal conflict over and above demographic

variables, while the other three conflict styles were not shown to be predicted by coping

mechanisms.

*Hypothesis 13: The Mediation Effects of Coping Mechanisms in Predicting Conflict*

*Management Styles.*

Mediation can be assessed with traditional regression models or with path analytic

techniques, such as structural equation modeling (SEM). In the current study, the original

goal was to use the SEM technique, which is a technique designed to evaluate how well a

causal model represents the data. The key finding of interest in mediation is whether the

direct relationship from personality to conflict styles would be necessary to achieve

satisfactory model fit. If not, this would provide some support for the idea that coping

mediates the personality-conflict style relationship. If, by contrast, a direct path from

personality traits to conflict management styles is needed to achieve satisfactory fit, then

the effect of personality is less likely to be completely due to coping strategies. Therefore,

it would be inconsistent with a mediation model if personality continued to have a direct

effect on conflict styles, even when coping mechanisms were included in the model.

Conversely, support for full or partial mediation would be found if a direct path from

personality traits to conflict management styles was not necessary to achieve satisfactory

model fit, suggesting that coping mechanisms mediated the relationship between

personality and conflict management styles.

Specifically, SEM refers to a hybrid model with both multiple indicators for each

variable (called latent variables or factors), and specified paths connecting the latent

variables (Garson, n.d.). The SEM process centers around two steps: (1) validating the

measurement model and (2) fitting the structural model. The former step is accomplished

primarily through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), while the latter is accomplished

primarily through path analysis with latent variables (Garson, n.d.). One starts by

specifying a model on the basis of theory. Each variable in the model is conceptualized as

a latent one, measured by multiple indicators. In the current study, personality

(comprising five indicators), coping (comprising four indicators), and conflict

(comprising four indicators and one additional indicator resulting from the coded conflict

situation open-ended answers) were the latent variables. In theory, several indicators are

developed for each model, with a view to winding up with at least three per latent

variable after CFA (Garson, n.d.). Factor analysis is used to establish that indicators seem

to measure the corresponding latent variables, represented by the factors. In order to

establish if the structural model fits the data, the researcher has to first validate the

measurement model. In the current study, this first condition was not met. Indeed, in an

attempt at testing the SEM technique on the data, using EQS 6.1 for Windows, the factors

of each latent construct were found to be separate, some orthogonal in fact, making them

unsuitable for SEM as indicators of a single latent construct. In other words, SEM could

not be used because the latent constructs of personality and coping did not truly have

multiple indicators (the subfacets of coping, personality, conflict, are distinct and not

different measurements of the same thing). For instance, while *personality* is one

construct, its five dimensions (which were found to be orthogonal in this study) did not fit

as indicators, and very little percent variance of each trait was getting *into* the solution,

contributing to abysmal fit. In sum, as a test of the meaningfulness of latent variables and

their indicators, the CFA step in SEM failed to show that this data was suited for step 2 of

the SEM technique. Hence, because the data was not suited for SEM, multiple regressions

were use to test for the mediating effects of coping mechanisms on conflict management styles.

Generally speaking, mediation can be said to occur when (1) the IV significantly affects the mediator (path A in Figure 1), (2) the IV significantly affects the DV in the absence of the mediator (path C in Figure 1), (3) the mediator has a significant unique effect on the DV (path B in Figure 1), and (4) the effect of the IV on the DV shrinks upon the addition of the mediator to the model (Preacher & Leonardelli, 2001; originally presented by Baron and Kenny, 1986). Therefore, the first three conditions require that the three paths (A, B, and C) are all individually significant. The final step consists of demonstrating that when the mediator and the IV are used simultaneously to predict the dependent variable, the previously significant path between the IV and DV (path C) is significantly reduced, if not nonsignificant. Maximum evidence for mediation would occur if path C dropped to zero (Howell, 2002). That is, I expected that the impact of personality traits (the IV or predictor) on conflict management styles (the DV or criterion) would be substantially or completely reduced by introducing coping mechanisms (the mediator) within the model, thus documenting partial or complete mediation, respectively. In other words, the effects of coping mechanisms on conflict management styles were expected to prevail over those of personality traits.

The first three steps required to test for mediation using the Baron and Kenny (1986) multi-step regression procedure are detailed above, in the sections related to hypotheses 1 through 12. Specifically, step 1 was tested through the multiple regressions assessing the impact personality traits had on coping mechanisms (hypotheses 1-3). Three of the four regressions testing these hypotheses were found to be significant (see Table 8), providing support for the idea that personality traits do predict coping mechanisms.

Namely, problem-focused, emotion-focused, and disengagement coping strategies were

significantly predicted by some personality traits. Therefore, condition 1 of the Baron and

Kenny (1986) procedure was met, or said differently, path A was significant. Indeed,

although not all predictors were significant for all outcomes, the addition of personality in

the model predicting coping mechanisms was significant for the three predictions.

Therefore, since I was interested in evaluating the increment of personality traits (entered

simultaneously), this was as an indication that path A of the mediation model was

significant. Similarly, path C of the model was significant. More specifically, Step 2 was

tested through the multiple regressions examining the effect personality traits had on

conflict management styles (hypotheses 4-7). As shown in Table 9, all of the four

multiple regressions testing hypotheses 4 to 7 were significant, demonstrating that

personality did indeed predict conflict management styles, or said differently, path C was

significant. Condition 2 was, thus, also met. Step 3, assessing the impact coping

mechanisms had on conflict management styles (hypotheses 8-12) did not produce the

desired findings. Of the four multiple regressions performed to examine these hypotheses,

only one individual predictor variable was found to be significant (i.e., the one predicting

the dominating style; see Table 10); moreover, the only significant predictors of this

equation were demographic variables (i.e., gender and family income). In other words,

the relationships between coping mechanisms and conflict management styles were not

found to be significant, failing to provide support for the existence of path B. Said

differently, path B was nonsignificant, and this violates one of the rules of Baron and

Kenny's (1986) multi-step mediation procedure. This had further implications on the

analysis of the mediation model, since the effect of the IV (personality) on the DV

(conflict styles) was unlikely to be reduced upon the addition of the mediator (coping) to

the model. The multiple regressions testing the mediation hypothesis (hypothesis 13) were still performed to complete the multi-step procedure.

To complete the test of the mediated path, a direct test of the full or partial mediational path (Personality traits → Coping mechanisms → Conflict Management Styles) was conducted. This test was done through hierarchical regression, whereby the demographic variables were first entered simultaneously, the coping mechanisms were entered together in the second step, and the personality traits were entered together in the third step. This resulted in nonsignificant models of mediation for all four conflict management styles (see Tables 11-14), since all the predictors that were significant in Step 2 (Path C) of the multi-step method were still significant after the addition of coping mechanisms to the equations. If mediation had been successful, all or at least some of the predictors would have failed to yield significance in this last step of the procedure, and individual betas would have changed from Table 9.

In sum, the effects of coping mechanisms on conflict management styles did not prevail over those of personality traits. In fact, personality predicted all four conflict management styles after taking into consideration the effects of demographic variables and coping mechanisms. Taken together, the results from these analyses demonstrate that coping mechanisms do not mediate the relationship between personality traits and conflict management styles. Thus, the mediation hypothesis failed to be supported.

## Discussion

The major objective of this study was to investigate relations between personality traits, coping mechanisms and conflict management styles, namely whether coping mechanisms mediated the relationship between personality traits and conflict

Table 11

*Regression Analyses for the Mediating Effects of Coping Mechanisms on the Cooperation Style*

| Step | Predictors | B | $\beta$ | R | $R^2$ | $\Delta R^2$ | $\Delta F$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Gender | .04 | .05 | .16 | .02 | .02 | .92 |
| | Age | -.06 | -.16 | | | | |
| | Marital status | -.03 | -.12 | | | | |
| | Job tenure | .05 | .15 | | | | |
| | Education level | -.01 | -.03 | | | | |
| | Family income | -.02 | -.04 | | | | |
| 2 | Emotion-focused | .00 | .01 | .25 | .06 | .04 | 2.78* |
| | Problem-focused | .05 | .06 | | | | |
| | Disengagement | .05 | .05 | | | | |
| 3 | Neuroticism | .00 | .00 | .47 | .22 | .16 | 8.63*** |
| | Extraversion | .09 | .10 | | | | |
| | Openness | .20 | .23* | | | | |
| | Agreeableness | .20 | .21* | | | | |
| | Conscientiousness | .20 | .24* | | | | |

*Note.* $n = 228$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 12

*Regression Analyses for the Mediating Effects of Coping Mechanisms on the Avoiding Style*

| Step | Predictors | $B$ | $\beta$ | $R$ | $R^2$ | $\Delta R^2$ | $\Delta F$ |
|------|------------|-----|---------|-----|-------|--------------|------------|
| 1 | Gender | .11 | .07 | .19 | .04 | .04 | 1.35 |
|   | Age | -.08 | -.12 | | | | |
|   | Marital status | .02 | .05 | | | | |
|   | Job tenure | .05 | .08 | | | | |
|   | Education level | .04 | .09 | | | | |
|   | Family income | .00 | -.01 | | | | |
| 2 | Emotion-focused | -.17 | -.17* | .23 | .05 | .02 | 1.33 |
|   | Problem-focused | .11 | .07 | | | | |
|   | Disengagement | .15 | .09 | | | | |
| 3 | Neuroticism | .25 | .21* | .36 | .13 | .08 | 3.75** |
|   | Extraversion | -.13 | -.10 | | | | |
|   | Openness | -.06 | -.04 | | | | |
|   | Agreeableness | .34 | .22* | | | | |
|   | Conscientiousness | .03 | .02 | | | | |

*Note.* $n = 228$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 13

*Regression Analyses for the Mediating Effects of Coping Mechanisms on the Dominating Style*

| Step | Predictors | $B$ | $\beta$ | $R$ | $R^2$ | $\Delta R^2$ | $\Delta F$ |
|------|-----------|-----|---------|-----|-------|--------------|------------|
| 1 | Gender | -.11 | -.08 | .28 | .08 | .08 | 3.12** |
| | Age | .01 | .01 | | | | |
| | Marital status | .06 | .16* | | | | |
| | Job tenure | .00 | .00 | | | | |
| | Education level | .00 | .01 | | | | |
| | Family income | .08 | .12 | | | | |
| 2 | Emotion-focused | -.06 | -.07 | .30 | .09 | .01 | 1.03 |
| | Problem-focused | .06 | .05 | | | | |
| | Disengagement | .16 | .11 | | | | |
| 3 | Neuroticism | -.09 | -.08 | .48 | .23 | .14 | 7.75*** |
| | Extraversion | .23 | .19* | | | | |
| | Openness | -.05 | -.03 | | | | |
| | Agreeableness | -.51 | -.37*** | | | | |
| | Conscientiousness | .09 | .07 | | | | |

*Note.* $n = 228$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 14

*Regression Analyses for the Mediating Effects of Coping Mechanisms on the Obliging Style*

| Step | Predictors | $B$ | $\beta$ | $R$ | $R^2$ | $\Delta R^2$ | $\Delta F$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Gender | .13 | .11 | .23 | .05 | .05 | 1.98 |
|  | Age | -.07 | -.15 |  |  |  |  |
|  | Marital status | .01 | .02 |  |  |  |  |
|  | Job tenure | .04 | .10 |  |  |  |  |
|  | Education level | -.01 | -.03 |  |  |  |  |
|  | Family income | .04 | .07 |  |  |  |  |
| 2 | Emotion-focused | .08 | .11 | .28 | .08 | .03 | 2.02 |
|  | Problem-focused | .05 | .05 |  |  |  |  |
|  | Disengagement | .07 | .06 |  |  |  |  |
| 3 | Neuroticism | .10 | .11 | .40 | .16 | .08 | 4.12* |
|  | Extraversion | -.07 | -.07 |  |  |  |  |
|  | Openness | -.01 | -.01 |  |  |  |  |
|  | Agreeableness | .35 | .30*** |  |  |  |  |
|  | Conscientiousness | -.05 | -.05 |  |  |  |  |

*Note. n* = 228, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

management styles. The results of this study failed to support the mediation hypothesis; however, some of the expected overall predictions between the three variables of interest were significant. Indeed, personality traits were shown to significantly predict coping mechanisms, as previously demonstrated by Hooker and colleagues (1994). Moreover, as previously shown by Antonioni (1998) and Moberg (2001), personality traits were shown to significantly predict conflict management styles. As expected, coping mechanisms were partly shown to predict conflict management styles. Contrary to expectation, however, coping mechanisms did not mediate the relationship between personality traits and conflict management styles.

When examining the unique contribution personality traits have on coping mechanisms, one notices that hypotheses 1 to 3 received partial support. Specifically, problem-focused coping was shown to be significantly predicted by openness (hypothesis 1), emotion-focused coping was significantly predicted by extraversion (hypothesis 2), and disengagement was shown to be significantly predicted by conscientiousness (hypothesis 3). Unexpected findings emerged, namely, emotion-focused coping was shown to be predicted by neuroticism and conscientiousness. A possible explanation for these findings may be that neurotic individuals, who are typically more anxious, sad, and self-conscious than individuals who are less neurotic (McCrae & Costa, 1987) need to get their feelings validated. Therefore, it is likely that they rely on coping mechanisms that entail seeking emotional and instrumental support from co-workers and family members in order to vent off their negative feelings. On the other hand, conscientious individuals, who tend to be careful, reliable, hard-working, well-organized, and purposeful (McCrae & Costa, 1987), may prefer to avoid using their social network when dealing with stressful situations at work, and to tackle the issue on their own.

Although support for the aforementioned hypotheses was found, many of the predicted relationships failed to be supported. Indeed, contrary to hypothesis 1 and contrary to Hooker and colleagues' (1994) study, problem-focused coping was not found to be predicted by neuroticism (hypothesis 1). Problem-focused coping also failed to be predicted by conscientiousness (hypothesis 1). Emotion-focused coping was not predicted by openness or agreeableness (hypothesis 2). Also, contrary to hypothesis 3 and to Hooker and colleague's study, disengagement was not shown to be predicted by neuroticism, nor was it predicted by extraversion, agreeableness, and openness.

There are three possible explanations for the failure to find support for these relationships. The first explanation lies in the type of stressful response assessed. Specifically, in the current study, a dispositional measure of coping mechanisms was employed. Indeed, Carver (1997) claims the Brief COPE measures individuals' general tendency to cope with stressful events. However, the Brief COPE was developed and tested among a sample of community residents who were participating in a study of recovery after Hurricane Andrew (Carver, 1997). Although an advantage of using this measure was that it had been validated among a non-student sample, its external validity may have been limited by the fact that the Brief COPE assesses individuals' use of coping mechanisms when they are under a good deal of real-life stress. In other words, perhaps the Brief COPE is better suited to evaluate coping responses when individuals are in a crisis situation, which was the not the case in the current study. Consequently, the Brief COPE may be suggested to be unsuited to assess working individuals' general coping strategies when dealing with daily hassles and typical stressful events such as organizational conflicts.

A second possible explanation may be related to the instructions given to participants before completing the Brief COPE and to item wording. When filling out this measure, participants were asked to "indicate what you generally do and feel when you experience stressful events". Instead of using such general instructions, in retrospect it may have been better to specify that stressful events had to be *work-related*, since it is believed that individuals adapt their coping strategies to the type of stressful situations they face. Indeed, according to Terry (1994), individuals typically employ problem-focused coping to deal with potential controllable problems such as work-related problems and family-related problems; whereas stressors perceived as less controllable, such as physical health problems, incite more emotion-focused coping. If participants had been asked to rate their coping strategies when dealing with a work-related issue, they may have reported their coping styles differently. In fact, the Brief COPE scores may suffer from range restriction, which would explain the low variability in the scores. Also, the wording of the items on the brief COPE could be better written to tap into dispositional coping. For instance, instead of this wording: "I've been getting emotional support from others", items could read as follows: "I usually get emotional support from others".

Third, some of the current hypotheses were modeled after Hooker and colleagues' (1994) study which, as previously mentioned, assessed a sample of spouse caregivers living in the same household with patients who had a confirmed diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease or a related dementia. Although Hooker and colleagues' study was well designed, it may lack in external validity. Indeed, some researchers argue that coping strategies evolve over the years as a result of changes in cognitive-developmental reorganization in adulthood and developmental maturity (Irion & Blanchard-Fields, 1987). It is, in fact,

suggested that older adults become more effective copers and have a better sense of reality than younger adults (Vaillant, 1977), and that older adults more effectively balance both instrumental and emotional coping strategies depending on the appraised controllability of the situation (Blanchard-Fields, 1989). Consistent with this theory, researchers have found that compared with younger individuals, adults seem to use more flexible and mature coping mechanisms in the second half of the life-span (Diehl, Coyle, & Labouvie-Vief 1996). Such mechanisms include withholding inappropriate feelings and thoughts until a more appropriate setting is encountered, or reinterpretation of situations on the basis of more general principles. Other researchers have also reported a decrease, among older adults, in the use of hostile reactions and escapist-fantasy strategies (McCrae, 1982). Therefore, coping behaviours should differ among younger and older adults, and perhaps it is not possible to generalize the results from Hooker and colleagues' study to a sample of younger working adults, such as those assessed in the current study (where the mode for age was 25 to 34 years).

In sum, the findings from this study demonstrated that four of the five personality traits, namely neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, and conscientiousness uniquely predicted the use of one or two coping styles. Neurotic individuals were more likely to use emotion-focused coping; extraverted individuals were more likely to use emotion-focused coping; open individuals were more likely to use problem-focused coping; and conscientious individuals were less likely to use emotion-focused coping and disengagement. The overall hierarchical regression equations showed that personality traits significantly predicted the use of all three coping mechanisms.

Hypotheses 4 to 7, measuring the unique impact of personality traits on conflict management styles, also received partial support. As predicted, cooperation (the merger

between *integrating* and *compromising*) was significantly predicted by agreeableness and conscientiousness (hypothesis 4), avoiding was predicted by agreeableness (hypothesis 5), dominating was significantly predicted by agreeableness (hypothesis 6), and obliging was shown to be predicted by agreeableness as well (hypothesis 7).

Unexpected results were also found, namely, cooperation was significantly predicted by openness, avoiding was shown to be predicted by neuroticism, and dominating was predicted by extraversion. Although these relationships were not found in Antonioni's (1998) manager sample, they were shown among his student sample. Indeed, in his study examining the relationship between personality traits and conflict management styles, Antonioni assessed two groups: one comprised of 120 managers, and one comprised of 351 undergraduate students. Both samples completed the same measures, yet the results from the two samples were somewhat different. Among the discrepancies between the results in Antonioni's study were those found unexpectedly here. In other words, Antonioni's results in his student sample are quite similar to the results found in the present study. Specifically, as found in this study, Antonioni found (in his student sample) that cooperation was significantly predicted by openness, avoiding was predicted by neuroticism, and dominating was predicted by extraversion. In fact, of the eight significant unique predictions yielded in this part of the current study, seven match those found in the *student sample* of Antonioni's study, while only three match the results yielded in his *manager sample*. This suggests that the sample assessed in the current study may be more similar to Antonioni's student sample than to his sample of managers. This suggestion is likely since a large portion of the participants of the current study were students, whether at the undergraduate or MBA level (the exact number of students is not known), while only one third of participants were managers.

Although support for the existence of a significant relationship between

personality traits and conflict styles was found, some of the predicted relationships failed

to be supported. Indeed, contrary to expectations, cooperation was not significantly

predicted by extraversion (hypothesis 4), avoiding was not predicted by conscientiousness

(hypothesis 5), dominating was not predicted by neuroticism (hypothesis 6), and obliging

was not predicted by neuroticism (hypothesis 7). A possible explanation for the failure to

yield the aforementioned findings may be due to sampling. In fact, there are quite some

similarities between the findings and the lack of findings between the sample examined in

this study and Antonioni's (1998) student sample. That is, in addition to the similarities

found in the expected and unexpected findings between this study and Antonioni's

student sample (as shown above), similarities were also encountered in the failure to find

some unique predictions between personality traits and conflict management styles.

Indeed, as it was the case in the current study, Antonioni found no relationship between

extraversion and cooperation, between avoiding and conscientiousness, or between

dominating and neuroticism. Since the current sample did include several students,

whether Psychology undergraduates or MBA students, it is likely that both Antonioni's

student sample and the current sample possess similar characteristics, and thus, yielded

similar results. Antonioni suggested that the differences in managers' and students'

results were, in part, due to the difference in the type of environment both groups

typically evolved in. For example, he argued that organizations are generally less likely to

encourage an attitude of openness compared to universities, which generally foster

intellectualism, philosophical and artistic thinking, not to mention creativity and

imagination. This may explain why openness was not a significant predictor of conflict

styles in his manager sample but it was in his student sample, as it is the case in the

current study. Overall, this suggests that the present sample parallels Antonioni's student

sample, more than it does his manager sample (on which hypotheses were based).

In sum the findings from this study demonstrated that all five personality traits

uniquely predicted the use of one or more conflict management styles. Neurotic

individuals were more likely to use avoiding; extraverted individuals were more likely to

use dominating; open individuals were more likely to use cooperation; and, conscientious

individuals were more likely to use cooperation as well. Interestingly, agreeableness was

found to be the strongest predictor of conflict management styles, since it was shown to

predict all four conflict styles. Namely, agreeable individuals are more likely to use

cooperation, avoiding, and obliging, and less likely to use dominating. The overall

hierarchical regression equations showed that personality traits significantly predicted the

use of all four conflict management styles above and beyond the effect of demographic

variables.

Hypotheses 8 to 12 measured the impact of coping mechanisms on conflict

management styles. Only one of the expected results was found, namely, problem-

focused coping significantly predicted cooperation (hypotheses 8 and 12, since

cooperation represents the collapse of *integrating* and *compromising*). Moreover, one of

the four hierarchical regressions examining the prediction of conflict styles by coping

mechanisms was significant. Indeed, cooperation was significantly predicted by coping

mechanisms. These findings are quite interesting and confirm the hypothesis that coping

mechanisms come into play when individuals handle interpersonal conflicts at work.

Most of the other hypothesized predictions between coping mechanisms and conflict

management styles, however, failed to reach significance. Indeed, hypothesis 8, which

stated that the integrating style of handling interpersonal conflict would also be predicted

by disengagement was not supported. Hypothesis 9, whereby emotion-focused coping and problem-focused coping were expected to predict the obliging style of handling interpersonal conflict was not shown to be significant. Hypothesis 10, which stated that emotion-focused coping would predict the dominating style was also not supported, nor was hypothesis 11, whereby problem-focused coping and disengagement were expected to predict the avoiding style.

The reasons explaining the failure to find support for the majority of the predictions of conflict management styles by coping mechanisms (hypotheses 8 to 12) are similar to the ones mentioned for the prediction of coping mechanisms by personality traits (hypotheses 1 to 3). Specifically, it is suggested that conflicting parties are unlikely to qualify a conflict situation as a "life threatening" issue. Conflict will typically be described as a stressful event, however, not to a point where it is considered a critical, uncontrollable issue. Therefore, perhaps the use of the Brief COPE was inadequate for this study. That is, the goal of the study was to assess individuals' coping strategies when dealing with daily hassles and typical life events and not crisis-like events. By the same token, perhaps the instructions associated to the Brief COPE should have directed participants to rate their coping mechanisms when dealing with work-related stressful events, rather than to report their rating of "coping with stress in general". This may have permitted direct comparisons between the coping mechanisms and conflict management styles associated to a particular work-related stressful situation. In other words, I hereby suggest that if the Brief COPE's instructions had directed participants to rate their stress-coping responses when they were experiencing conflict at work, significant predictions between coping strategies and conflict management styles may have been found. However, in the current study, only one of the overall equations examining the prediction

of conflict management styles by coping strategies was found to be significant. This raises the question of the mere existence of a relationship between coping mechanisms and conflict management styles. Perhaps both constructs are simply unrelated, and that individuals' way of handling interpersonal conflicts, whether in the work or home environment, is dictated by internal mechanisms such as personality, self-efficacy or self-esteem, more so than by the cognitive appraisal of the situation followed by the coping response it generates. Said differently, although conflict situations typically involve stress, the original reaction they engender may be deeply rooted in one's anima (individual's true inner self), more so than in one's cognitive processes.

Finally, hypothesis 13, which stated that coping mechanisms would mediate the relationship between personality traits and conflict management styles failed to be supported. Coping mechanisms were not shown to mediate this relationship, and this is most likely explained by the lack of relationship between coping mechanisms and conflict management styles (hypotheses 8 to 12). Indeed, I was unlikely to find support for the idea that coping mediated the relationship between personality traits and conflict management styles, since coping alone was found to significantly predict only one conflict style (while personality traits were strongly linked to conflict management styles). Again, the mediation hypothesis may have been supported had I used another coping measure, or more situation-specific instructions. However, as previously mentioned, mediation may have not been yielded because coping mechanisms and conflict management styles are simply not related.

*Limitations of this Study and Future Research*

A limitation of this study is that most variables were measured via self-reports, and thus the possibility cannot be ruled out that some of the relationships between

variables were inflated by common method variance. Moreover, the one measure that was not a self-report one (i.e., the organizational conflict situation question) showed to be inadequate for analysis in this study. While acknowledging the possibility that common method variance may have occurred, the variability in the magnitude of the correlations (Table 7) suggests that substantive factors were also at work. Nevertheless, using multiple methods to measure many of the variables would have strengthened the study. Consequently, in addition to self-report measures, future research should attempt to use other assessment tools such interviews or focus groups to fully grasp the underlying mechanisms linking coping mechanisms and conflict management styles.

With this in mind, a second limitation concerns the self-report coping measure. As mentioned extensively in the previous paragraphs, the Brief COPE (Carver, 1997) might not have been suited for this study, and thus it may not have fully captured participants' coping strategies in the intended way. Therefore, future research should find a better adapted measure, while keeping in mind that it should remain relatively short (which was the main advantage of the Brief COPE). For example, Latack (1986) designed a 26-item instrument assessing coping in the workplace, whereby the following five dimensions of coping are measured: avoidance/resignation, positive thinking, direct action, help seeking and alcohol use. Specifically, Latack's measure assesses the coping strategies used by workers to manage the negative emotional consequences of stressful events. This scale was validated on a sample of managers and professionals working in a manufacturing firm and an osteopathic hospital, and its typical use is done among samples of working individuals (e.g., nurses; Wong, Leung, So, & Lam, 2001).

A third limitation is the cross-sectional design of the study. Assessing individuals' coping mechanisms may be better done in a longitudinal manner, whereby these

behaviours would be monitored regularly, and not solely on a given day. This would help understand how individuals cope with stress in general, since it would be possible to average their typical coping responses on a number of weeks or months. It would, therefore, help understand whether individuals always use a core set of coping strategies, or whether they adapt their coping strategies to the situation at hand. Research testing these two hypotheses is lacking, and it is consequently difficult to know how specifically to assess coping mechanisms (i.e., in a situational versus a dispositional manner).

There are other reasons that could explain the failure of this study to yield the hypothesized mediational effect. The suggested model linking personality traits, coping mechanisms, and conflict management styles may have been overly simplistic. Specifically, many other variables may come into play when stress, coping, and organizational conflicts are concerned. For example, the current study did not assess situational variables such as the severity of the conflict situation or the type of conflict participants were evaluating. It may well be that people's conflict management styles vary as a function of the type or severity of conflict they are involved in. In fact, within organizations, several authors have distinguished conflict processes evolving around work and task-related issues, or around socio-emotional and relationship issues (e.g., Jehn, 1995). Examples of task conflict are conflicts about the distribution of resources, about procedures and policies, and about judgments and interpretation of facts; whereas examples of relationship conflict are conflicts about personal taste, about political preferences, about values, and about interpersonal style (De Dreu et al., 2004). It could be argued that people's conflict management styles are adapted to the nature of the conflict they are facing, that is whether the conflict is task-related or relationship-related. Future research should attempt to either control for such variables (i.e., type and severity of

conflict) or ensure that they are being measured and taken into consideration in the interpretation of the results.

As previously mentioned, coping is considered to be a proximal influence in the model linking personality traits, coping mechanisms, and conflict management styles. However, other proximal influences may have an impact in this model. Namely, the organizational culture individuals evolve in. Indeed, research has shown that departments within organizations, and even entire organizations, develop a conflict culture that determines how conflict is viewed and valued, what conflict management strategies are deemed appropriate or inappropriate, and so on (De Dreu et al., 2004). Thus, there are departments/organizations in which open-minded debate and problem-solving strategies are seen as appropriate ways of managing the conflict. However, there are also departments in which conflict is seen as personal and identity-related, and in which withdrawal is deemed as an appropriate way of handling conflict. Therefore, a more complex picture of the relationship between personality, coping, and conflict could be drawn. With this in mind, it could be argued that other proximal influences such as social and economic resources may come into play. For instance, employees may adopt a specific conflict management style because they wish to fit in and do not want to be marginalized from their co-workers. Individuals may also choose to handle interpersonal conflict in a manner consistent with the corporate culture for economic reasons: they do not want to lose their job. Future research should therefore attempt to include as many potential extraneous variables in the model as possible in order to paint a complete picture of the relationship that exists between the three constructs.

Lastly, the difference between coping mechanisms and coping behaviours needs further attention. It may be that individuals report using a specific style of coping with          .

stressful situations, but behave in a manner inconsistent with that style. Again, this

highlights the necessity for future research to use other means of assessing individuals'

coping response than self-report measures. Interviews and focus groups could be useful

tools in this instance because they permit the evaluation of complex phenomena and

allow for the inclusion of the context, which adds a lot of richness to the data being

collected.

*Implications of this Study*

The results of this study did not provide support for the idea that relationships

between personality traits and conflict management styles were mediated by coping

mechanisms; however, in the case of interpersonal conflict management styles, there was

evidence that both personality traits and coping mechanisms uniquely predicted their use.

These findings may have implications for selection purposes in the case of recruiting

employees for positions known for their high conflict-related content. For example, when

hiring the leader of a team known for its disputes among members, human resources (HR)

specialists may decide to select an individual who will tend to use *cooperation*, and thus

could target individuals who possess the personality traits and coping mechanisms most

likely related to the use of *cooperation*. Therefore, according to the results found in the

current study, HR specialists would opt for an open, agreeable and conscientious

individual, and/or for someone who tends to cope through a problem-focused strategy.

In general, managing conflict to enhance learning and effectiveness requires the

use of an integrating (i.e., *cooperation*) or problem solving style (Rahim, 2002).

Cooperation is said to be ideal in that conflict situations are tackled in a constructive,

active manner. Rahim indeed argues that the use of cooperation is appropriate when

issues are complex, or when a commitment is needed from all the parties in order to

achieve successful implementation. Keeping in mind that problem-focused coping was

shown to predict the use of *cooperation*, the results from this study may help HR

specialists decide on training needs. Specifically, coping skills have been demonstrated to

be trainable (e.g., Hains & Szyjakowski, 1990; Toobert, Glasgow, Nettekoven, & Brown,

1998), and therefore, since *cooperation* is the organizational conflict management style of

choice, it would be possible for employees to be trained on developing their problem-

focused coping skills in order to resolve organizational conflicts in a constructive,

*cooperative* manner. Said differently, the findings from this study may have implications

on the identification of organizational training needs, which would in turn allow

organizations to ensure that employees receive the adequate training to become effective

in their conflict management.

*Conclusions*

The present study found further support for relationships established in previous

studies, that is by Antonioni (1998), Moberg (2001) and Hooker and colleagues (1994),

however, in a sample comprised of 235 *working individuals*. Therefore, the

generalizability of the findings from this study to a larger sample of working individuals,

as opposed to merely *managers* (i.e., Antonioni, 1998; Moberg 2001) or *older adults* (i.e.,

Hooker et al., 1994) is possible.

In sum, conflict management styles have been shown to be uniquely predicted by

Big Five personality traits (i.e., neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, and

conscientiousness), and by coping mechanisms (i.e., problem-focused coping, emotion-

focused coping, and disengagement). Moreover, the presence of an overall significant

variance in conflict management styles when predicted by coping mechanisms suggests

they may be connected. Although the current results failed to show that coping

mechanisms mediated the relationship between personality traits and conflict

management styles, results did reveal that working individuals' coping mechanisms were

uniquely predicting the way with which they handle the cooperation style of handling

interpersonal conflicts, and this is, to my knowledge, the first study that attempted to find

a connection between these two constructs among a sample of working individuals.

Lastly, an area rich in possibilities has been identified, namely that of linking

personality traits, coping mechanisms, and conflict management styles. The model

linking these three variables merits additional exploration and seems to have potential to

play an important role in the performance management process, including selection,

training, coaching, development, and employee-employer relationships.

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Appendix C

# Comparing Mean Differences for Job Tenure - One-Way ANOVA Results

Analysis of Variance for Job Tenure

| Source | df | F | $\eta^2$ | $p$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| RELIGION | 5 | 2.13 | .05 | .063 |
| Emotion-focused | 5 | 3.94* | .08 | .002 |
| Problem-focused | 5 | 1.96 | .04 | .086 |
| Disengagement | 5 | 3.38* | .07 | .006 |
| Neuroticism | 5 | 2.09 | .04 | .068 |
| Extraversion | 5 | 1.50 | .03 | .192 |
| Openness | 5 | .382 | .01 | .861 |
| Agreeableness | 5 | 2.61* | .06 | .026 |
| Conscientiousness | 5 | 1.79 | .04 | .116 |
| Cooperation | 5 | 1.01 | .02 | .415 |
| Avoiding | 5 | 1.24 | .03 | .292 |
| Dominating | 5 | 1.72 | .04 | .132 |
| Obliging | 5 | .451 | .01 | .812 |

Note. * significant F-tests. Bonferroni tests were performed on these distributions to find where the mean differences were.

Descriptive Statistics for Emotion-Focused Coping as a function of Job Tenure

| Job Tenure | $M$ | $SD$ |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Less than one year | $3.04^A$ | .81 |
| 1 to 2 years inclusive | $2.90^{AB}$ | .60 |
| 3 to 5 years inclusive | $2.71^{AB}$ | .76 |
| 6 to 7 years inclusive | $2.58^{AB}$ | .67 |
| More than 7 years | $2.44^B$ | .72 |

*Note.* Means with the same letter in their superscripts do not differ significantly from one another according to a Bonferroni test with a .05 limit on familywise error rate.

Descriptive Statistics for Disengagement Coping as a function of Job Tenure

| Job Tenure | $M$ | $SD$ |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Less than one year | $1.88^{AB}$ | .38 |
| 1 to 2 years inclusive | $1.96^A$ | .46 |
| 3 to 5 years inclusive | $1.81^{AB}$ | .44 |
| 6 to 7 years inclusive | $1.73^{AB}$ | .58 |
| More than 7 years | $1.63^B$ | .42 |

*Note.* Means with the same letter in their superscripts do not differ significantly from one another according to a Bonferroni test with a .05 limit on familywise error rate.

Descriptive Statistics for Agreeableness as a function of Job Tenure

| Job Tenure | $M$ | $SD$ |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Less than one year | $3.85^A$ | .42 |
| 1 to 2 years inclusive | $3.62^A$ | .54 |
| 3 to 5 years inclusive | $3.64^A$ | .51 |
| 6 to 7 years inclusive | $3.61^A$ | .49 |
| More than 7 years | $3.74^A$ | .44 |

*Note.* Means with the same letter in their superscripts do not differ significantly from one another according to a Bonferroni test with a .05 limit on familywise error rate.

Appendix D

# The Demographic Interview

1.  What is your gender? (Please check one)_____          _____
                                            Male                    Female

2.  What is your age? (Please circle)
    a.  Below 25 years-old
    b.  25-34
    c.  35-44
    d.  45-54
    e.  Over 54 years-old

3.  What is your current marital status? (Please circle)
    a.  Married or living with a partner
    b.  Widowed
    c.  Divorced
    d.  Separated
    e.  Never married

4.  Do you have any children? (Please answer YES or NO) _____

5.  If *YES*, how many children do you have? (If NO, skip to question 6)?
    a.  One
    b.  Two
    c.  Three
    d.  More than three

6.  What is your major life occupation? _____

7.  How long have you been holding this position? (Please circle)
    a.  Less than 1 year
    b.  More than 1 year, but less than 3 years
    c.  More than 3 years, but less than 5 years
    d.  More than 5 years, but less than 7 years
    e.  More than 7 years

8.  Is it a managerial position? (Please answer YES or NO) _____

9.  If *YES* to the previous question, how many employees report to you? (If NO, skip to question 10)?

    a.  1-10 employees
    b.  11-25
    c.  26-50
    d.  51-75
    e.  More than 75

10. What is the highest level of education you <u>completed</u>? (Please circle)
    a.  Did not finish high school
    b.  High school
    c.  Trade school
    d.  Some university training but no diploma
    e.  Bachelor's degree
    f.  Master's degree
    g.  Ph.D. degree
    h.  Other. Please specify _____

11. To which of the following ethnic group(s) do you belong? (Please circle all that apply)
    a.  Caucasian/White
    b.  African Canadian/Bahamian/Black
    c.  Asian
    d.  Arab
    e.  Other. Please specify _____

12. Please indicate in which of the following groups you consider your **family income** to be:
    a.  Less than $30,000/year
    b.  $30,000 to $50,000/year
    c.  $50,000 to $100,000/year
    d.  More than $100,000/year

Appendix E

# Organizational Conflict Situation Question

*Managing Organizational Conflicts*

## (Please complete directly on this sheet)

Please answer the following questions that pertain to a conflict situation you have experienced at work with a colleague or supervisor. When answering the questions, please be as detailed as possible. If you require more space than the one provided here, you can use an extra sheet or write on the back of this one. In this case, please make sure to label the question.

1. *Please describe the situation:*

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. *Please describe your thought process and reasoning (i.e., what was going through your mind at the time of the conflict?):*

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. *Please describe your behaviour (i.e., how did you react?):*

_____

_____

_____

_____

4. *Please describe the outcome/result of the conflict:*

_____

_____

_____

_____

Appendix F

# Open-Ended Question Coding Scheme

## [1] FIVE-STYLE CODING SCHEME

According to Rahim (1983), there are 5 styles of handling interpersonal conflict: *Integrating, Obliging, Dominating, Avoiding,* and *Compromising.*

Here are the definitions of these 5 styles of handling interpersonal conflict:

1. **Integrating** (high concern for both self and others): it seeks to use a problem-solving strategy to confront differences directly; it involves openness, exchange of information, and examination of differences to reach an effective solution acceptable to both parties. This approach is ideal in that conflict situations are tackled in a constructive, creative, and active manner.

   Examples of such behaviour:
   - person tries to investigate the issue with the other person to find an acceptable solution to both of them.
   - person exchange accurate information with the other person to solve the problem together.
   - person brings all his/her concerns out in the open so that the issue can be resolved in the best possible way.

   ***Typical quotes:***
   "At the time, I wanted to calm him down and somehow resolve or at least help him out with the situation. I spoke with him and offered to pull some other workers into the kitchen to help him with the more menial tasks."

   "I wanted to speak with my colleague rather than leave resentful feelings build. I went into the conversation calmly, and I told her that I appreciated working with her. However, I had noticed that lately she was not pulling her weight, being absent more often and taking longer lunch hours. So I inquired if perhaps there was a reason for her absences, let her explain and got my point across."

2. **Obliging** (low concern for self and a high concern for others): it is associated with attempting to play down the differences and emphasizing commonalities to satisfy the concern of the other party, i.e., individuals put their own concerns aside to satisfy the concerns of the other party.

   Examples of such behaviour:
   - person generally tries to satisfy the needs of his/her supervisor (or of a co-worker).
   - person usually accommodates the wishes of his/her supervisor (or co-worker).
   - person allows concessions to his/her supervisor (or co-worker).
   - person goes along the suggestions of his/her supervisor (or co-worker).

***Typical quote:***

"One of the staff was always coming to work late. Every time he was late, he was providing me very reasonable reasons, so I had to forgive him."

3. **Dominating** (high concern for self and low concern for others): it has been identified with win-lose orientation; it implies imposing one's view at the expense of other individuals and forcing behaviour to win one's position.

Examples of such behaviour:
- person uses his/her influence to get ideas accepted.
- person uses his/her authority to make a decision in his/her favour.
- person uses his/her expertise to make a decision in his/her favour.
- person is firm in pursuing his/her side of the issue.
- person uses his/her power to win a competitive situation.

***Typical quotes:***

"Nothing had been done, so I needed to take things into my own hands. She was doing damage to the organization, so I called our confidential ethics line and reported her for 2 situations".

"My supervisor talked with me and gave me some bad comment on my working attitude. But I thought I was the most diligent people in our department and did most of the work. I thought he was totally wrong. So I just told him my ideas directly."

4. **Avoiding** (low concern for self and others): it has been associated with withdrawal, buck-passing, or side stripping situations, i.e., individuals or parties withdraw from the conflict situation altogether.

Examples of such behaviour:
- person attempts to avoid being "put on the spot" and tries to keep the conflict to him/herself.
- person avoids open discussion of his/her differences with the other person (supervisor or colleague).
- person tries to stay away from disagreement with the other person.
- person avoids encounters with the other person.
- person tries to avoid unpleasant exchanges with the other person.

***Typical quotes:***

"I let the comments roll off my back and tried to ignore them."

"During the completion of the project, I avoided my team leader and chose to work independently except for staff meetings."

5. **Compromising** (intermediate in concern for self and others): it implies that conflicting parties work together to find a middle ground solution; give-and-take whereby both parties give up something to make a mutually acceptable decision.

Examples of such behaviour:
- person tries to find a middle course to resolve the impasse.
- person negotiates with other person so that a compromise can be reached.

*Typical quotes:*

"I wanted to help resolve the situation. So I sat down with the 2 employees separately and then together in order to seek common ground."

"I explained my situation to my colleague and said that I would do my part of the work ASAP so that she could finish her job (after I am done with mine)."

*Example of not rateable:*

"Had a conflict with a co-worker. He became too bossy and quite loud. He was not the boss. Conflict was not resolved."

## [1] FIVE-STYLE CODING SCHEME

Participant # _____

Please use the following scale to evaluate the answer to the PBDI question (i.e., open-ended conflict question). Please check the cell that corresponds to your rating:

|               | 0 | 1 - 2 | 3 – 4 | 5 | 66 | 99 |
|---------------|---|-------|-------|---|----|----|
| Integrating   |   |       |       |   |    |    |
| Obliging      |   |       |       |   |    |    |
| Dominating    |   |       |       |   |    |    |
| Avoiding      |   |       |       |   |    |    |
| Compromising  |   |       |       |   |    |    |

Whereby:

0 = did not mention this style. Represents 0% of the style used by that person.

1 - 2 = provided a hint / slightly mentioned this style. Bottom third, i.e., 1% to 33%.

3 - 4 = provided 1 clear mention of this style and made some allusions to it elsewhere in the text. Middle third, i.e., 34% - 66%.

5 = at least 2 mentions of this style were provided in the text. Top third, i.e., 67% - 100%.

66 = missing data (i.e., participant did not write down anything).

99 = not rateable (e.g., impossible to read hand writing, or text is incoherent).

Here is an example:

|               | 0 | 1 - 2 | 3 – 4 | 5 | 66 | 99 |
|---------------|---|-------|-------|---|----|----|
| Integrating   |   |       | ✓     |   |    |    |
| Obliging      |   | ✓     |       |   |    |    |
| Dominating    | ✓ |       |       |   |    |    |
| Avoiding      |   | ✓     |       |   |    |    |
| Compromising  |   |       |       | ✓ |    |    |

**[2] EFFECTIVENESS RATING**

**Styles of handling interpersonal conflict and the situations
where they are appropriate or inappropriate.**

| Conflict style | Situations where appropriate | Situations where inappropriate |
|---|---|---|
| INTEGRATING | • Issues are complex.<br>• Synthesis of ideas is needed to come up with better solutions.<br>• Commitment is needed from other parties for successful implementation.<br>• Time is available for problem-solving.<br>• One party alone cannot solve the problem.<br>• Resources possessed by different parties are needed to solve their common problems. | • Task or problem is simple.<br>• Immediate decision is required.<br>• Other parties are unconcerned about outcomes.<br>• Other parties do not have problem-solving skills. |
| OBLIGING | • You believe that you may b e wrong.<br>• Issue is more important to the other party.<br>• You are willing to give up something in exchange for something from the other party in the future.<br>• You are dealing from a position of weakness.<br>• Preserving relationship is important. | • Issue is important to you.<br>• You believe that you are right.<br>• The other party is wrong or unethical. |
| DOMINATING | • Issue is trivial.<br>• Speedy decision is needed.<br>• Unpopular course of action is implemented.<br>• Necessary to overcome assertive subordinates.<br>• Unfavourable decision by the other party may be costly to you.<br>• Subordinates lack expertise to make technical decisions.<br>• Issue is important to you. | • Issue is complex.<br>• Issue is not important to you.<br>• Both parties are equally powerful.<br>• Decision does not have to be made quickly.<br>• Subordinates possess high degree of competence. |
| AVOIDING | • Issue is trivial.<br>• Potential dysfunctional effect of confronting the other party outweighs benefits of resolution.<br>• Cooling off period is needed. | • Issue is important to you.<br>• It is your responsibility to make decision.<br>• Parties are unwilling to defer, issue must be resolved.<br>• Prompt attention is needed. |
| COMPROMISING | • Goals of parties are mutually exclusive.<br>• Parties are equally powerful.<br>• Consensus cannot be reached.<br>• Integrating or dominating style is not successful.<br>• Temporary solution to a complex problem is needed. | • One party is more powerful.<br>• Problem is complex enough needing problem-solving approach. |

## [2] PBDI – EFFECTIVENESS RATING

Participant # _____

Please use the grid above to evaluate whether the participant's **dominant conflict style** (i.e., the style mostly used by the participant) has been used effectively. If there are 2 dominant styles, please rate them both separately.

Please use the following anchors and circle the corresponding number:

0 = not applicable, i.e., in the case of missing data or not rateable data.

1 = Ineffective – Participant used conflict style in an inappropriate manner/situation, i.e., wrong conflict style for the situation at hand.

For example, using *Integrating* when the problem is simple is Ineffective.

2 = Somewhat effective – Participant used a little of both (inappropriate and appropriate) ways to deal with the conflict.

3 = Effective – Participant dealt with the conflict in appropriate manner, i.e., proper use of the conflict style for the situation at hand.

For example, using *Dominating* when a speedy decision is needed is Effective.

Appendix G
# Study Instructions

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### (Please <u>read carefully</u> before beginning)

You will be asked to complete a packet containing one open-ended question, three surveys, and one demographic information form. Please complete the open-ended question (i.e., sheet labelled [1]) in the space provided on the sheet. Please complete the three surveys (labelled [2], [3], and [4]) on the **bubble sheet** enclosed with this packet in the envelope. Finally, please complete the demographic information form (labelled [5]) directly on the sheet.

To summarize:
- Open-ended question [1] = directly on the sheet
- Multiple choice surveys [2], [3], [4] = on the bubble sheet
- Demographic information form [5] = directly on the sheet

When using the bubble sheet, please, make sure to use a **lead pencil** (HB type) and to completely fill in the circle corresponding to your answer. You will notice that each circle has a letter and a number above and below. To write down your answer, fill-in the circle corresponding to the question number. If you take a look at the bubble sheet, you will see that your participant number is already filled in. This can is an example of the proper use of the bubble sheet. You <u>DO NOT</u> need to provide your name or student ID number on the bubble sheet as your answers are strictly <u>confidential</u>. Please note that the consent form will be separated from your survey packet as soon as the researcher opens the envelope.

Also, please make sure to <u>complete the forms in the order they have been placed in the packet</u>. The entire testing session will take approximately 35 minutes of your time. Your participation in this study is <u>voluntary</u> and you may refuse to answer questions or choose to withdraw your participation at any time. You will have a chance of winning one of two cash prizes of <u>$250</u>, if you decide to take part in our draws.

You may start now, but first, please make sure to read the instructions accompanying each form.