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Emotional intelligence, conflict management styles, and innovation performance

An empirical study of Chinese employees

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to investigate the relationship among emotional intelligence (EI), conflict management styles (CMSs) and innovation performance, and test the mediating effects of various types of CMSs. Innovation is playing a more and more critical role in the survival and development of companies. EI is assumed to be an antecedent of employees' innovation performance. Conflict is an inevitable phenomenon in organizations, and different CMSs have different impacts on individual performance.

Design/methodology/approach – Research data were obtained from 159 employees in the construction industry in China. SPSS 19.0 was used to test and verify the hypotheses concerning the relationship among EI, CMSs and innovation performance. The authors also conducted a 500-times bootstrapping to verify the mediating roles of different CMSs.

Findings – Results indicate that EI is positively and significantly associated with integrating, compromising and dominating styles, as well as innovation performance in the construction industry. In addition, the integrating style has a significantly positive relationship with innovation performance. This research also confirms the mediating effect of integrating style on the relationship between EI and innovation performance.

Practical implications – The authors recommend that managers, especially in the construction industry, who are willing to maintain high levels of innovation performance of employees can provide EI training programs. In addition, to improve innovation performance, companies should provide employees with appropriate training emphasizing the importance of conflict management strategies, especially the integrating style.

Originality/value – Limited research has focused on the antecedents of conflict management strategies or the relationship between EI and innovation performance. A framework integrating EI, CMSs and innovation performance is put forward and empirical evidence of the relationship between EI and employees' innovation performance is provided. This research helps to have a better understanding of the relationship between EI and innovation performance by introducing the integrating style as a mediating variable.

Keywords Emotional intelligence, Conflict management styles, Innovation performance, Chinese context

Paper type Research paper

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Introduction

With the advent of an information-based world, knowledge and innovation are playing more and more critical roles. One of the great challenges facing companies today is to maintain a high level of competitiveness through strengthening the knowledge and innovation abilities of their employees (Prajogo and Ahmed, 2006; Chen *et al.*, 2012). Organization innovation is considered as a fundamental element of an organization's survival and the way it competes in today's increasingly global market (Suliman and Al-Shaikh, 2007). As Scott and Bruce (1994) explained: "The foundation of innovation is ideas and it is people who 'develop, carry, react to, and modify ideas' (Van de Ven, 1986)". It is necessary and critical to study what motivates or enables individual innovative behavior. Therefore, employees' innovation performance and creativity play critical roles in the survival and development of companies, and ways should be found to improve employees' innovation performance.

As to the antecedents of employees' innovative work behavior, research have indicated that different kinds of conflict handling strategies may produce different influences on innovation performance. Conflict is inevitable and dealing with conflict is a natural and pervasive part of daily activities in workplace (Brew and David, 2004). When people are interacting, misunderstandings, disagreements and tensions are common social phenomena, resulting in interpersonal conflict. If managed properly, conflict can be a positive force in organizations (Wall and Callister, 1995; Callanan *et al.*, 2006), enhancing decision-making qualities, creativity and job performance of employees (Jehn, 1997; Tjosvold, 1998). Conflict is multidimensional, mainly including relationship conflict and task conflict (Jehn, 1997). Relationship conflict or affective conflict is rooted in the emotional aspects of interpersonal relationships and is often considered as detrimental (Jehn, 1997). While task conflict or cognitive conflict refers to disagreements or opposing viewpoints, ideas or thoughts toward tasks (Jehn, 1995, 1997; Jehn and Mannix, 2001). When conflict is functional, it is generally task-oriented and often focuses on how to achieve common objectives to deal with problems (Jehn, 1997). Task conflict plays an important role in innovation because of its involvement in generating ideas, improving decision quality and promoting creativity (Jehn and Mannix, 2001). In this research, we mainly focus on task conflict.

To manage conflict, there are five kinds of conflict management styles (CMSs), namely, integrating, compromising, avoiding, dominating and obliging (Rahim, 2002). The contingency view of conflict indicates that whether conflict is constructive depends on the conflict management strategies undertaken (Wall and Callister, 1995; Rahim, 2002; Chen *et al.*, 2012). It is how individuals approach or manage conflict, rather than the occurrence of conflict, that greatly affects whether conflict is functional or dysfunctional (Lovelace *et al.*, 2001; Chen *et al.*, 2005). Integrating and compromising styles could contribute to mutual exchange and open-minded discussions between employees that eventually help develop beneficial resolutions and innovative ideas, while dominating and avoiding styles frustrate communication and lead to deadlocks or unfulfilling solutions (Chen *et al.*, 2012). Song *et al.* (2006) found that integrating and obliging styles are positively related to constructive conflict, which is significant to improve innovation performance, while dominating and avoiding behaviors cause the appearance of destructive conflict, reducing innovation performance. But their research was at the organizational level. Thus, we will test and verify the relationship between

five types of CMSs and employees' innovation performance in the Chinese context, at the individual level.

Limited studies have been conducted to investigate the antecedents of individuals' CMSs. These include research into the roles of personality and emotional intelligence (EI) as important predicators of certain CMSs (Shih and Susanto, 2010). EI refers to an ability where people regard their own emotions and the emotions of other people as bases for framing their relationship with others (Salovey and Mayer, 1990; Mayer and Salovey, 1993). EI has substantial potential as an indispensable predicator of workplace behaviors in organizations (Jordan and Troth, 2002). Employees with high levels of EI tend to satisfy the interests of others to achieve a win-win solution, indicating a preference for cooperative CMSs. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that employees' EI has a positive influence on their preference of CMSs, which further affects their innovation performance. In addition, though many studies have indicated that EI has a positive effect on individual attitudes and behaviors, job performance and team performance (Wong and Law, 2002; Jordan and Troth, 2002; Shih and Susanto, 2010), to our knowledge, little is known about the mechanisms involved in the relationship between EI and employees' innovation performance, except Suliman and Al-Shaikh (2007), who find that employees with higher levels of EI are inclined to report lower levels of conflict and higher levels of readiness to create and innovate. From what have been talked above, this research aims to empirically test the relationship between EI and individual innovation performance and the mediating effects of different CMSs.

Therefore, this current research mainly has two purposes:

(1) one is to provide additional empirical evidence supporting the relationship between EI and individual innovation performance; and

(2) another main point is to verify the mediating roles of different CMSs on this relationship.

Our research is the first one to link EI, employees' preference for various types of CMSs and individual innovation performance, to unlock the black box underlying the relationship between EI and innovation performance of employees. Findings of this research will not only contribute to expanding the literature of conflict management theory and innovation but also provide some future guidelines for both employees and managers in workplace. Data were collected from employees working in the construction industry in the Chinese context.

Literature review

Emotional intelligence

EI has been an emerging and popular topic among social and organizational psychologists in recent years (Schutte *et al.*, 2001; Law *et al.*, 2004). The development of EI is based on "social intelligence", which was first identified by Thorndike in 1920 (Wong and Law, 2002). There are two main construct models defining EI, an ability-based model and a mixed-based model (Mayer *et al.*, 2000; Joseph and Newman, 2010). Salovey and Mayer (1990, p. 189) were among the earliest researchers to define EI as the ability of an individual to deal with his or her emotions:

> […] the subset of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions.

Then they further revised it as a set of interrelated skills concerning:

> […] the ability to perceive accurately, appraise, and express emotion; the ability to access and/or generate feelings when they facilitate thought; the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge; and the ability to regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth (Mayer and Salovey, 1997).

Based on the psychological literature, Mayer *et al.* (2004) divided the abilities and skills of EI into four areas: the ability to perceive emotion, use emotion to facilitate thought, understand emotions and manage emotions. This is the so-called ability-based model of EI (Day and Carroll, 2008). On the other hand, the mixed model definitions of EI consider EI as a combination of intellect, personality and affect (Petrides and Furnham, 2001), which are often criticized for its lack of empirical bases and too broad conceptualization (Murphy, 2006; Joseph and Newman, 2010). Thus, the theoretical deduction of this paper focuses on the ability-based EI model.

Based on the definition of Mayer and Salovey (1997), Davies *et al.* (1998) summarized the EI literature and put forward that EI is conceptualized as being composed of four distinct dimensions:

(1) appraisal and expression of emotion in the self (self-emotional appraisal [SEA]);

(2) appraisal and recognition of emotion in others (others' emotional appraisal [OEA]);

(3) regulation of emotion in the self; and

(4) use of emotion to facilitate performance (use of emotion [UOE]).

The four-dimensional definition of EI was widely accepted due to its representativeness of the entire EI literature (Wong and Law, 2002; Law *et al.*, 2004; Shih and Susanto, 2010). Thus, we also use the definition of Davies *et al.* (1998) to focus on the nature and characteristics of EI construct.

Conflict and conflict management styles

Conflict refers to "a process that begins when one party perceives the other has frustrated, or is about to frustrate, some concerns of his" (Thomas, 1976). Rahim (2002) broadened the definition of conflict as "an interactive process manifested in incompatibility, disagreements, or dissonance within or between social entities (i.e. individual, group, organization, etc.)". According to this definition, conflict is not only related to activities but also incompatible preferences, attitudes and goals. Conflict is typically divided into two dimensions: one consisting of disagreements related to task issues and the other is related to emotional or interpersonal issues. These two dimensions have various labels: substantive and affective conflict, task and relationship conflict (Jehn, 1997), cognitive and affective conflict and task and emotional conflict (Rahim, 2002). Moderate levels of task conflict contribute to generating ideas, improving qualities of decision-making and promoting creativity (Jehn and Mannix, 2001), which can be functional to the organization performance, while relationship conflict can be detrimental. This research mainly concentrates on the task conflict and the ways or strategies to deal with task-related conflict.

CMSs, or conflict resolution styles, and conflict-handling approaches were put forward by a number of researchers (Blake and Mouton, 1964; Thomas, 1974; Rahim, 1983) as comprising five different ways: competing, collaborating, sharing, neglecting

and accommodating. Many researchers have used these styles to identify different CMSs to give suggestions for appropriate conflict management. Based on two dimensions: concern for production and concern for people, Blake and Mouton (1964) first proposed a grid of CMSs and distinguished five styles, i.e. forcing, withdrawing, smoothing, compromising and problem solving. Thomas then interpreted the grid of Blake and Mouton and classified five types, i.e. competing, collaborating, avoiding, accommodating and compromising, dividing them into two dimensions, namely, cooperativeness (satisfying the other party's concerns) and assertiveness (satisfying one's own concerns) (Thomas, 1976, 1992). Rahim used a similar conceptualization to differentiate the styles of handling conflict on two basic dimensions – concern for self and concern for others – and named the five styles as integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding and compromising (Rahim and Bonoma, 1979; Rahim, 1983). Rahim's model of interpersonal conflict, considered as one of the most popular revisions (Montes *et al.*, 2012), is adopted in this research. A combination of the two dimensions results in five specific styles of handling interpersonal conflict, as indicated in Figure 1.

Innovation performance

Creativity is a starting point for innovation and innovation is considered as "the successful implementation of creative ideas within an organization" (Amabile, 1996). Innovation refers to:

> […] the intentional introduction and application within a role, group or organization of ideas, process, products or procedures, new to the relevant unit of adoption, designed to significantly benefit the individual, the group, the organization or wider society (West and Farr, 1990).

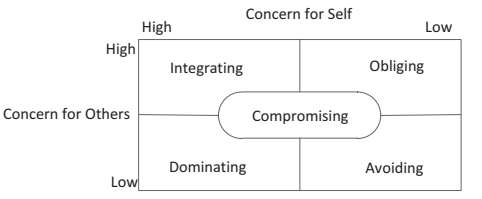
According to Scott and Bruce (1994), individual innovation is viewed as a multi-stage process in three stages:

(1) problem recognition and the generation of ideas or solutions;

(2) an innovative individual seeks sponsorship and supports for an idea; and

(3) the completion of the idea.

Janssen followed their definition and then considered innovative work behavior (IWB) in the workplace as complex behaviors comprising three different behavioral tasks: idea generation, idea promotion and idea realization (Janssen, 2000; Janssen and Van Yperen, 2004). IWB is widely claimed to be crucial to effective functioning and long-term development of enterprises (West and Farr, 1989, 1990; Woodman *et al.*, 1993). As Tompson and Werner (1997) stated, it is no longer sufficient for an employee to simply carry out the essential job functions. Instead, employees nowadays are expected to take



Source: Rahim (1983)

Figure 1.
The styles of handling interpersonal conflict

initiative actions and come up with creative ideas to guarantee the organization performance.

In the idea generation step, novel ideas are often derived from perceived work-related problems which need to be solved (Scott and Bruce, 1994), incongruities or emerging trends (Drucher, 1984; Janssen, 2000; Janssen and Van Yperen, 2004). The generation of creative ideas is often the first step of innovation. Idea promotion, the second step of innovation process, means that one should promote the ideas to potential allies and market the ideas to gain support (Janssen, 2000). Usually, those who have generated an idea tend to involve in social activities to find friends, backers or supporters who can provide power or help to move the idea into reality (Kanter, 1988; Janssen, 2000). The final step of innovation process is idea realization, meaning a product, a plan or a prototype of innovation that can be ultimately applied or implemented within a work role, a group or an organization (Kanter, 1988). This research concentrates on innovation performance at the individual level. In this way, in the construction industry, innovation also includes three steps in workplace, just as in other industries. For example, employees in the project teams think of innovative ways to deal with various risks or problems occurred during the implementation of projects. More specifically, in Trans-Asia Gas Pipleline project, the engineers designed a new "internal welding plus semi-automatic welding" technique based on the practical situation. The new welding technique is very efficient and brought huge economic benefit. In this research, we only consider the construction industry as a context or background.

Research model and hypotheses

Emotional intelligence and conflict management styles

Task conflict is inevitable in workplace and employees may have different preferences for different kinds of conflict management strategies. Among the five CMSs from Figure 1, integrating, obliging and compromising styles are the ones with a moderate to high level of concern for others and are considered as more cooperative CMSs. Avoiding and dominating are regarded as uncooperative CMSs or competitive CMSs (Rahim *et al.*, 2000; Yu *et al.*, 2006). Higher levels of EI may facilitate collaborative and problem-solving behaviors, in which emotions can be controlled and generated to develop new and creative solutions that satisfy the needs of both parties (Jordan and Troth, 2002; Schlaerth *et al.*, 2013). While, lower levels of EI can lead to greater use of forcefulness and avoidance of individuals when faced with conflict, which may signal destructive conflict management (Goleman, 1995). In addition, as Goleman (1998) suggests EI at work consists of five components, one of which is social skills. Social skills are associated with one's ability to deal with problems and not allow own or others' negative feelings to inhibit collaboration, which help handle with conflict appropriately (Rahim *et al.*, 2002). This means that employees with high EI have better ability to control emotions and understand the emotions of their colleagues when in conflict situations, thus they are likely to show cooperative behaviors and avoid uncooperative behaviors, indicating preferences for avoiding and dominating styles.

In addition, EI plays an important role in conflict management behaviors (Jordan and Troth, 2004), because constructive solutions may require compromise which needs an ability to recognize and regulate emotions (Schlaerth *et al.*, 2013). Effective and appropriate conflict management relies strongly on an individual's skills in self-management and abilities to find constructive solutions (Jordan and Troth, 2002).

Employees who can accurately perceive and manage their emotions or feelings and understand the perspectives and emotions of others can manage conflict constructively (Schlaerth *et al.*, 2013), which contributes to resolving conflict properly and functionally (Jordan and Troth, 2002, 2004). On the other hand, integrating and compromising styles are both beneficial to individual job performance when both parties can benefit from the solution of task conflict (Chen *et al.*, 2012). Thus, individuals with higher levels of EI are more likely to prefer integrating and compromising styles due to their efficacy and appropriateness for producing functional or productive results (Gross and Guerrero, 2000). We therefore assume that emotionally intelligent employees would prefer more cooperative and favorable conflict resolution behaviors to handle task conflict, like integrating, compromising and obliging styles.

Jordan and Troth's (2002) empirical research found that individuals with high levels of EI are more effective in resolving conflict than individuals with low levels of EI. Previous research of Shih and Susanto (2010) has also argued that EI functions as an antecedent for employees' preference of CMSs in terms of integrating and compromising styles when faced with conflict because they are more likely to believe that those styles can help solve conflict productively. The research of Schlaerth *et al.* (2013) also shows that employees with high levels of EI are able to manage conflict more constructively. Hence, *H1* is put forward as follows:

H1. EI is positively associated with more cooperative CMSs (integrating, obliging and compromising styles) and negatively associated with uncooperative CMSs (avoiding and dominating styles).

Conflict management styles and innovation performance

Innovation opportunities lie not only in breakthrough product creation or continuous product refinement but also in problem solving which occurs in everyday life (Fenwick, 2003). Task conflict in organizations, if managed properly, could produce constructive impacts on organizational outcomes (Jehn, 1995, 1997). Organizations with functional conflict tend to be more creative and have higher employee job satisfaction (Jordan and Troth, 2002). It is discovered in research and development (R&D) enterprises that integrating and obliging styles contribute to constructive conflict and thus bring higher innovation performance, while dominating and avoiding behaviors are related to destructive conflict, thus reducing organizational innovation performance (Song *et al.*, 2006). Different types of CMSs can have different influences on innovation performance (Chen *et al.*, 2012).

Integrating style involves high concern both for self and the other party, with active collaboration to reach a solution which satisfies both individuals (Rahim and Bonoma, 1979). This style, which focuses on problem solving and collaboration, can be effective in managing conflict (Gross and Guerrero, 2000). It is characterized by openness, exchange of information and examination of differences (Rahim *et al.*, 2000), and it can encourage each party to express their ideas and feelings and use any information to maximize the benefits (Prein, 1984). Employees using this style are inclined to express their ideas and feelings directly, face conflict and communicate the desire to resolve the conflict for mutual benefits and try to find and develop new and creative solutions to problems (Rahim and Bonoma, 1979; Rahim *et al.*, 2002; Yu *et al.*, 2006). In addition, the integrating strategy can make people confront conflict situations and create environments in which conflict can be discussed face-to-face. When in task-related conflict, in situations where

employees can communicate with each other directly and they need to find out satisfying solutions, innovation is likely to occur and increase (De Dreu and West, 2001). With the interaction among employees and open information sharing, there is more possibility that different elements of intelligence can be combined to produce new and creative outputs (West and Farr, 1990). On the other hand, new and novel ideas, often produced from work-related problems (Scott and Bruce, 1994), are the foundation of innovation (West and Altink, 1996). Research in R&D organizations also shows the positive influence of integrating style on constructive conflict, which contributes to innovation performance (Song *et al.*, 2006). Under this harmonious and cooperative environment, we can argue that integrating style contributes to the idea generation of innovation process and can enhance individual creativity and innovation in workplace. On the other hand, research have indicated that personalities, such as disagreeableness and open to experience, may produce significant influence on creativity and innovation (Hunter and Cushenbery, 2014). In a task conflict situation, integrating individual tend to express their ideas directly instead of always being agreeable, but in a more pleasing way. Thus, we deduce the following hypothesis:

H2a. Integrating style is positively related to innovation performance.

Obliging style, also named accommodating or yielding style, involves low concern for self and high concern for the other party or individual, in which there is an element of self-sacrifice that may take the form of selfless generosity or obedience to other individual (Rahim *et al.*, 2000). Individuals with the obliging style emphasize the concern of the other party, deny or fail to express ones' own needs and give in to the others' positions (Rahim, 2002). Obliging behavior, characterized as neglecting an individual's own concerns to satisfy those of others, works against the tendency to present an individual's viewpoints and to be innovative (Chen *et al.*, 2012). As Song *et al.* (2006) pointed out, information in this style tend to flow in only one direction. But innovation needs the combination of various points of views and different information sources to bring forth new knowledge (Galbraith, 1982). According to Rahim *et al.* (2002), obliging leads to a one-sided decision-making process which is less creative than collaborative or compromising style. Therefore, when dealing with task conflict, an obliging individual tends to submit to others instead of thinking up of creative ideas to solve problems and resolve conflict, thus leading to dysfunctional conflict and bring about a low level of individual innovation performance. This behavior will have negative impacts on idea generation of innovation process. In addition, qualities like disagreeableness may play a role in novel idea instantiation for individuals with creative suggestions or ideas might withhold from public consumption if they are too agreeable (Hunter and Cushenbery, 2014). Thus, on the basis of the deduction above, we hypothesize the following:

H2b. Obliging style is negatively related to innovation performance.

Dominating style, characterized as competing and controlling, involves high concern for self and low concern for the other party (Rahim *et al.*, 2000). Dominating individuals are apt to argue fiercely against others when solving conflict and ignore other people's needs or expectations (Rahim and Bonoma, 1979), hope to persuade others to accept his/her standpoints and aim to achieve his/her own objectives, which will hurt the interpersonal relationship between the two parties. In a task conflict situation, a dominating individual tends to use persistent argument of his/her own position (Putnam

and Wilson, 1982) and is likely to ignore the viewpoints of other parties. In this way, dominating individuals lack different points of views or information sources from others, and dominating behaviors are harmful to the relationship between colleagues, in which creative ideas are not likely to occur. Innovation, on the other hand, is considered to be the successful implementation of creative ideas within an organization, in the situation, a construction project organization (Amabile, 1983). Though, a dominating employee may tend to take active actions and try to persuade other people to promote his/her ideas, to create opportunities to implement the ideas. This in turn may be beneficial to the idea promotion and idea realization of innovation process. Researches have indicated that individuals with innovative achievement or capable of original outcomes are likely to have qualities such as confidence, hostility and dominance (Barron and Harrington, 1981; Feist, 1998; Silvia *et al.*, 2011). Above all, we argue that the dominating style will harm the cooperative atmosphere among colleagues and cause unfulfilling solutions to problems, which is ineffective for innovation performance. Based on the above literature, we hypothesize the following:

H2c. Dominating style is negatively related to innovation performance.

Avoiding style is also called the withdrawal or ignoring style, which always takes the form of postponing an issue or simply withdrawing from a conflicting situation (Rahim *et al.*, 2000). Avoiding behavior, a kind of competitive or uncooperative conflict handling strategy (Rahim, 1983; Song *et al.*, 2006), is regarded as showing a lack of participation, leading to incomplete information for judgments of options. People choosing an avoiding style may avoid dealing with disagreements by removing themselves from the scene of conflict or simply withdrawing or change the subject (Rahim, 2002; Song *et al.*, 2006). He or she may even deny the fact that task conflict exists in workplace or conflict needs to be resolved (Song *et al.*, 2006), not to mention coming up of ideas or solutions to handle with conflict. As a result, this uncooperative approach is generally ineffective and inappropriate (Gross and Guerrero, 2000). Uncooperative behavior can lead to poor relationships among colleagues and result in various negative or destructive organizational outcomes (Rahim, 2000). Just as the study of Xie *et al.* (1998) indicated that the avoidance resolution has a negative effect on new product success and collaborative resolution has a positive influence. Research also find that avoiding conflict handling strategy is negatively associated with constructive conflict (Dyer and Song, 1998), thus causing lower levels of innovation performance (Song *et al.*, 2006). When faced with task conflict, we can imagine that an avoiding individual would be unwilling to search for adequate information and look for creative ideas, which is not beneficial to his/her decision quality, as well as the three steps of innovation process. Therefore, we have the following hypothesis according to the above analysis:

H2d. Avoiding style is negatively related to innovation performance.

Compromising style, representing the midpoint between "concern for self" and "concern for others", shows modest interest in achieving a mutually acceptable solution for both parties (Montes *et al.*, 2012). It is regarded as a cooperative style to handle conflict (Rahim, 1983; Song *et al.*, 2006). Cooperative efforts are related to effective conflict resolution and harmonious relationships, which are necessary to get better performance in organizational environments, such as that of innovation (Norton *et al.*, 1994; Song *et al.*, 2006). This favorable climate or environment to some extent can positively

stimulate innovative behavior (Scott and Bruce, 1994). In addition, compromising behavior contributes to creating a common concern for the task and increases the likelihood of individuals to voluntarily search for the information about solutions (Chen *et al.*, 2012). Those various sources of information and knowledge help the generation of new ideas, thus contributing to the individual innovation performance. Studies also find that cooperative CMSs lead to distributive, procedural and interactive justice, organizational innovation and team effectiveness (Chen and Tjosvold, 2002; Chen *et al.*, 2005). It is reasonable to assume that employees preferring this style would voluntarily search for information or solutions to solve problems in certain conflict situations, contributing to the idea generation process of innovation process. In addition, compromising employees can also maintain good relationship with others and get certain support to implement their creative ideas, thus contributing to the idea promotion and realization steps. On the contrary, research have showed that disagreeable qualities may help with idea promotion, getting a creative idea heard and used by others (Hunter and Cushenbery, 2014). Compromising individuals has a moderate level of concern for self and others, indicating that they may search suggestions and information and show a certain level of disagreeableness, which is beneficial to innovation. Therefore, the hypothesis concerning compromising style and innovation performance is developed as follows:

H2e. Compromising style is positively related to innovation performance.

EI, CMSs and innovation performance

EI is considered to be positively related to team performance, work performance and employees' attitudes and behaviors, such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment or turnover intention (Goleman, 1998; Wong and Law, 2002; Jordan and Troth, 2004; Shih and Susanto, 2010). Goleman (1997) defined EI as being able to motive oneself to get jobs down and be creative. On the other hand, innovation is considered as a significant and complex dimension of learning in work, involving rational, intuitive, emotional and social processes, and emotion plays an important role in influencing employees' readiness to create and innovate (Fenwick, 2003). Emotions could influence individuals' thinking processes and judgments through promoting various information processing strategies (Forgas, 1995). Positive emotions could facilitate promoting heuristic processing and be useful for creative tasks (Lyons and Schneider, 2005). Park (2005) also argued that the quality of emotional environment of organizations may enhance productivity and creativity. Employees with higher EI have higher competencies in negotiation and problem solving skills (Goleman, 1998), which is the basis of creative ideas (Scott and Bruce, 1994). The generation of creative ideas is the first step of individual innovation process.

Additionally, employees with higher levels of EI can have a better understanding of people's emotions, control emotions of themselves better and rarely have negative emotions at work (Davies *et al.*, 1998). When facing task conflict in workplace, emotionally intelligent people have the abilities to guide thinking and actions that could successfully handle with environmental demands and pressures (Van Rooy and Viswescaran, 2004), thus tend to have a better understanding of conflict in organizations and recognize it better (Pooya *et al.*, 2013). Thus, they will manage conflict more constructively and bring about positive outcomes (Schlaerth *et al.*, 2013). Effective and appropriate conflict management behaviors in turn are likely to improve individual

innovation performance (Chen *et al.*, 2012). Furthermore, employees with high EI tend to share their ideas with others, get effective suggestions and help from colleagues and know how to maintain a long-term and cooperative relationship with their co-workers, all of which are required to be creative and innovative (Suliman and Al-Shaikh, 2007). Finally, employees with high EI know how to express their own ideas appropriately even if there is a conflict with other's opinions and make their deprecatory novel ideas more agreeable. We can thus hypothesize that EI is associated with employees' innovation performance.

Employees encounter a variety of task conflict in workplace with their colleagues every day. To further illustrate and explain the relationship between EI and innovation performance, we introduce conflict management behaviors as potential mediating roles. In task conflict situations, emotionally intelligent individuals may help optimize cognitive processing, thus discovering and utilizing positive opportunities to resolve conflict. This may produce a beneficial influence on individuals' innovation. As mentioned earlier, emotionally intelligent employees have the ability to perceive, manage and control emotions and have a better understanding of conflict situations which may lead to functional conflict resolutions (Jordan and Troth, 2004). Goleman's (1988) EI model comprises several clusters, one of which is "social skills", meaning effective handling of interpersonal relationships. Among these social skills, conflict management is one of the emotional competencies (Hay/Mcber, 2002). In conflict situations, employees with higher levels of EI are likely to select more cooperative CMSs to deal with problems (i.e. integrating, obliging and compromising styles) and have a lower preference for competitive CMSs (i.e. dominating and avoiding styles). In addition, different kinds of CMSs are likely to influence individual innovation performance (Chen *et al.*, 2012). For example, integrating, compromising and dominating styles seem to facilitate the generation of creative ideas to deal with conflict, while avoiding and obliging styles may indicate employees' unwillingness to solve problems. Therefore, the following hypotheses are developed:

H3a. Employees' EI is positively associated with their innovation performance.

H3b. CMSs mediate the relationship between employees' EI and innovation performance.

Research model

Overall, this research aims to test and verify a model linking EI, CMSs and innovation performance of employees from the level of individuals in the Chinese context. The research model combining all the hypotheses is shown in Figure 2.

Method

Questionnaires were used in this research. Before the formal distribution, a pretest was performed using respondents from employees in the construction industry and post-graduate students in the Department of Construction Management, Tianjin University in China. In total, 55 available questionnaires were returned in the pretest analyses, 28 from student participants and 27 from employees with an average of two years working experience. We also asked the participants to provide their comments and suggestions. According to their responses, we revised and clarified any items which

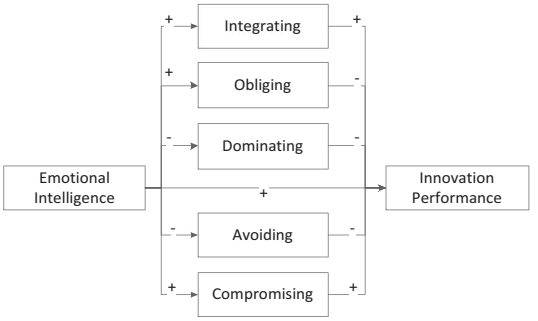


Figure 2.
Research model

were ambiguous. In addition, SPSS 19.0 was applied to undertake a reliability analysis of these 55 data, the results of which guaranteed the reliability of the scales.

Sample

Formal respondents were employees from Chinese construction industry, whose privacy was highly protected. In total, 334 questionnaires containing self-assessments on EI-related scales, CMSs scales and innovation performance-related scales were emailed to employees and 216 questionnaires were returned. The overall response ratio was 64.67 per cent. Among those, 159 data with suitable and available responses were used in the following analyses, representing an effective rate of 73.61 per cent. We used several approaches to prevent or reduce social desirability:

- keep all the respondents totally anonymous and tell them that the data are used for purpose of research;
- ask "neutral questions" as possible; and
- send emails instead of distributing papery questionnaires.

While either of these methods is partially effective, they can be beneficial for controlling social desirability in the survey, according to Nederhof (1985). Descriptive statistics of the final sample are shown in Table I. The five variables (gender, educational background, working experience, ownership type and position) are considered as control variables in the following analyses.

Measures

Emotional intelligence (EI). In this research, a self-report measure of Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS) (Wong and Law, 2002) was used to measure the EI of

	Gender		Educational background			Working experience			Ownership type		Position		
Items	M	F	Bachelor	Master	PhD	≤5	6-10	≥11	State-owned	Private	CE	DM	EM
No	122	37	109	48	2	113	32	14	132	27	3	23	133

Notes: Bachelor means Bachelor's degree or below; Master means Master's degree; PhD means PhD's degree or above; CE is short for chief engineer or business manager; DM for department manager and EM for general employee

Table I.
Descriptive statistics of sample

employees. Although there are some measures of EI in the literature, such as Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i) instrument (Baron, 1997), Multifacet Emotional Intelligence Scale (MEIS) and the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSXEIT) (Mayer and Salovey, 1997; Mayer *et al.*, 1999; Mayer *et al.*, 2004), Wong and Law (2002) considered them unsuitable for research in the workplace. After re-examining the definition and domain of EI construct, they developed a new, simple, practical and psychometrically sound measure of EI which could satisfy organizational research purposes. This WLEIS comprises 16 items and has been used by several researchers (Shih and Susanto, 2010). The response format was a seven-point Likert scale with 1 representing strongly disagree and 7 representing strongly agree. The coefficient alpha of EI scale was 0.908.

Conflict Management Styles (CMSs). In this research, CMSs refer to the conflict management strategies between colleagues. As to the conflict management scale, we adopted a 26-item scale derived from the Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory-II (ROCI-II) to measure the five types of conflict management. Each respondent was asked about their way to deal with task conflict with their colleagues. Sample items included "I try to work with my colleague to find solutions to a problem which satisfy my expectations" (integrating), "I give in to the wishes of my colleagues" (obliging), "I am generally firm in pursuing my side of the issue" (dominating), "I usually avoid open discussion of my differences with my colleague" (avoiding) and "I use 'give and take' so that a compromise can be made" (compromising). A seven-point Likert scale was used, 1 indicating strongly disagree and 7 standing for strongly agree. Reliability estimates for the five types of CMSs: integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding and compromising which were 0.890, 0.918, 0.844, 0.869 and 0.813, respectively.

Innovation performance. This research is conducted in the Chinese context and so a scale is used which was developed in a similar context. The scale measuring innovation performance of employees was adopted from Han's research about individual innovation performance in the Chinese context (Han *et al.*, 2007). Their scale is based on the scale of Janssen (2000, 2001) and Janssen and Van Yperen (2004), who developed a nine-item scale of individual innovative behavior in the workplace. This scale was also used in the study of Shih and Susanto (2010) to measure the innovation performance of employees, which turned out to be available and reliable. This scale contains eight items, aiming to measure three dimensions, namely, the willingness of innovation, the behavior of innovation and the result of innovation. Sample items include "How often do you create new ideas for improvements?", "How often do you mobilizing support for innovative ideas?", "How often do you search out new working methods, techniques, or instruments?", etc. Each item used a seven-point Likert scale. The coefficient alpha of the eight items was 0.909.

Control variables. Several control variables were considered in this research, including the demographic traits of employees, namely, gender (one means male and two means female), educational background (one refers to Bachelor, two refers to Master and three refers to PhD or above), working experience (1 equals to less than 5 years, 2 equals to 5-10 years and 3 equals to more than 10 years) and position (one means chief engineer or business manager, two means department manager and three means general employee). The ability-based model defines EI as a type of intelligence, and it should overlap with cognitive ability (Mayer *et al.*, 2000; Joseph and Newman, 2010). A number of theoretical and empirical research have indicated the link between cognitive

ability and creativity (Sternberg and O'Hara, 1999). Thus, we measured cognitive ability as a control variable. With time constraints, it is difficult to directly measure IQ. Proximal variables like GPA, SAT verbal and SAT math are often used as indicators of cognitive ability (Kuncel *et al.*, 2005). Considering the Chinese context in this research, education background is considered as a proxy of cognitive ability, which may produce influences on innovation. In addition, we also took into account the ownership type (one means state-owned company and two means private company). We included these control variables in the testing of hypotheses to maximize internal validity and rule out some alternative explanations.

Common method variance

There is a potential for common method variance as with all self-report data in this research. We first conducted a Harmon's single factor test to check it. Then, we did an exploring factor analysis on all scales in the questionnaire. The unrotated result shows that the top seven factors (we measured seven variables through the questionnaire) can explain 62.93 per cent of total variance, which is more than 60 per cent, and there is not one factor which can explain more than 30 per cent of the total variance. To further confirm the results of Harmon's single factor test, we then added a method factor to our theoretical model and loaded all the indicators onto the method factor in confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to verify the extent of the model fit changing. While the method factor did improve model fit, it only changed X2/df for 9.9 per cent, GFI for 8.5 per cent and CFI for only 6.4 per cent. More specifically, the proportion of the total variance that the method factor can explain is about 14.9 per cent, which is lower than the average level of 25 per cent observed by Williams *et al.* (1989) and 16 per cent of Carlson and Perrewé (1999). Therefore, common method variance is not a significant concern of this study.

Results

Firstly, a CFA was conducted using the AMOS statistical package to examine and validate the five dimensions of CMSs in this research: integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding and compromising styles. Results show satisfactory support for the five-factor model (CFI = 0.896, TLI = 0.883, GFI = 0.794, RMSEA = 0.076, CMIN/DF = 1.904). This indicates that the scale of CMSs is appropriate to measure the construct in this research.

Table II displays the means, standard deviations and correlations among the variables in this research. Among the five CMSs, the highest value of means refers to the integrating style (5.38), followed by compromising style (4.95) and dominating style (4.31). The least chosen one is the avoiding style (3.57). It is interesting to note that the avoiding style becomes the least preference of employees and the dominating style also has a moderate level of value. Seen from the correlation coefficients, we can find that dominating style is correlated to compromising style, which is an interesting finding due to the reason that compromising style is considered as a cooperative style while dominating style is competitive and uncooperative.

Multiple hierarchical regressions were applied to test the developed hypotheses. The results are shown in Table III. Among the five demographic variables, working experience is positively related to integrating style ($\hat{a} = 0.183$, $p < 0.05$) and innovation performance ($\hat{a} = 0.185$, $p < 0.05$). But Model 2 shows that with EI in the regression

Table II.
Descriptive statistics and correlation matrix of all variables

Variable	Means	SD	Gender	Educational background	Working experience	Type of company	Position	Emotional intelligence	Integrating	Obliging	Dominating	Avoiding	Compromising	Innovation performance
Gender			1											
Educational background			−0.033	1										
Working experience			0.023	0.072	1									
Type of company			−0.091	−0.096	−0.090	1								
Position			0.095	−0.074	−0.472**	−0.003	1							
Emotional intelligence	5.17	0.820	−0.111	0.114	0.196*	−0.047	−0.110	1						
Integrating	5.40	0.983	−0.056	0.012	0.179*	0.106	−0.071	0.513**	1					
Obliging	4.16	1.103	−0.057	0.002	−0.055	0.117	−0.020	0.086	0.200**	1				
Dominating	4.32	0.971	−0.090	−0.087	−0.003	0.008	−0.077	0.286**	0.138	0.382**	1			
Avoiding	3.55	1.148	0.012	0.010	−0.120	0.200*	0.020	−0.102	−0.140	0.675**	0.223**	1		
Compromising	4.93	0.971	−0.046	−0.015	0.102	−0.042	−0.043	0.307**	0.690**	0.376**	0.300**	0.162*	1	
Innovation performance	5.11	0.970	−0.015	0.060	0.238**	0.055	−0.211**	0.582**	0.484**	0.182*	0.207**	−0.005	0.362**	1

Notes: $^{*}p < 0.05$; $^{**}p < 0.01$

Table III.
Result of hierarchical regression analysis

	Dependent variable												
	Integrating		Obliging		Dominating		Avoiding		Compromising		Innovation performance		
Independent variable	Model 1 β	Model 2 β	Model 3 β	Model 4 β	Model 5 β	Model 6 β	Model 7 β	Model 8 β	Model 9 β	Model 10 β	Model 11 β	Model 12 β	Model 13 β
Gender	−0.071	−0.014	−0.040	−0.029	−0.084	−0.049	0.037	0.028	−0.054	−0.020	0.000	0.065	0.045
Educational background	−0.011	−0.058	0.012	0.003	−0.095	−0.123	0.036	0.044	−0.028	−0.056	0.045	−0.008	0.062
Working experience	0.183*	0.089	−0.067	−0.086	−0.040	−0.096	−0.124	−0.109	0.106	0.050	0.185*	0.079	0.111
Type of company	−0.097	−0.081	0.108	0.111	−0.013	−0.003	0.196*	0.193*	−0.040	−0.031	0.075	0.093	0.117
Position	0.020	0.022	−0.046	−0.046	−0.094	−0.093	−0.038	−0.039	0.010	0.011	−0.120	−0.118	−0.115
Emotional intelligence		0.499***		0.099		0.303***		−0.078		0.301***		0.566***	
Integrating													0.450***
Obliging													0.045
Dominating													0.133
Avoiding													−0.009
Compromising													−0.012
R^2	0.045	0.279	0.019	0.029	0.023	0.109	0.054	0.060	0.015	0.100	0.076	0.376	0.309
DR^2		0.234		0.009		0.086		0.006		0.085		0.300	0.233
F	1.458	9.813***	0.607	0.749	0.720	3.108**	1.747	1.608	0.466	2.823*	2.523*	15.292***	6.624***
DF		49.283***		1.445		14.721***		0.915		14.401***		73.188***	9.985***

Notes: *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$; $n = 159$

model, working experience is irrelevant to integrating style. The similar situation is also indicated in Model 12. See from the correlation between working experience and EI ($r = 0.196$, $p < 0.05$), these two variables are significantly correlated. Thus, EI may play a mediating role on the relationship between working experience and integrating style, as well as between working experience and innovation performance.

H1 implies that EI is positively associated with integrating, compromising and obliging styles, whereas negatively related to dominating and avoiding styles. The results shown in Models 2, 6 and 10 indicate that EI is positively related to integrating style ($\hat{a} = 0.499$, $p < 0.001$), dominating style ($\hat{a} = 0.303$, $p < 0.001$) and compromising style ($\hat{a} = 0.301$, $p < 0.001$), respectively. In addition, the positive relationship between EI and obliging style (Model 4, $\hat{a} = 0.099$, $p > 0.05$) and the negative relationship between EI and avoiding style (Model 8, $\hat{a} = -0.078$, $p > 0.05$) are not significant. Therefore, a positive relationship between EI and dominating style is unexpectedly found and *H1* is thus partly supported.

H2a-H2e hypothesize that integrating and compromising styles were positively related to innovation performance, while obliging, dominating and avoiding styles had a negative relationship with innovation performance. However, as seen in Model 12 in Table III, only the integrating style is positively and significantly associated with employees' innovation performance ($\hat{a} = 0.450$, $p < 0.001$). Thus, only *H3a* is fully supported. It was assumed in *H3a* that there is a positive relationship between EI and innovation performance. The regression results displayed in Model 13 suggest that EI is positively and significantly associated with innovation performance ($\hat{a} = 0.566$, $p < 0.001$), in accordance with *H3a*.

To test the mediating roles of CMSs as stated in *H3b*, we adopted the indirect effect test methods recommended by Preacher and Hayes (2008), as Baron and Kenny's (1986) classic three steps method – the causal steps approach – is criticized for many reasons. Researchers pointed out that the causal steps approach does not measure the indirect effect itself, which instead uses the significances of other statistics to infer the indirect effect of a mediator. This can raise the possibility to make an estimate error. Also, it cannot give the confidence interval of the mediating effect. Another mediating test method called Sobel test can overcome some of the shortcomings of the causal steps approaches. But Sobel test has a rigorous requirement that the data must be normally distributed. Out of the reasons above, we conducted a bootstrap over Sobel test, following the suggestion of Preacher and Hayes (2008), to test the indirect effects of mediating variables in our multiple mediator models. We put the indirect effect testing syntax developed by Preacher and Hayes into SPSS Processor, and run the test with all the five CMSs together in one model. The data are bootstrapped for 5,000 times, and the results show that only integrating style has a partial but significant mediating role between EI and innovation performance at the confidence level of 90 per cent (BCa CI = [0.006, 0.247], BC CI = [0.008, 0.249], Percentile CI = [0.001, 0.241]). The mediating roles of other four CMSs are not significant as their 90 per cent confidence intervals include zero (Table IV).

Discussion

The results in Table II show that employees prefer to use an integrating style to manage interpersonal task conflict in their workplace in the construction industry, followed by compromising. The integrating and compromising styles are more likely to be used,

Table IV.
Result of bootstrap analysis

Variables	Indirect effects of IV on DV through proposed mediators (ab paths)				Bias corrected and accelerated confidence intervals		Bias corrected confidence intervals		Percentile confidence intervals	
	Data	Boot	Bias	SE	Lower	Upper	Lower	Upper	Lower	Upper
Total	0.1498	0.1508	0.0011	0.0661	0.0420	0.2606	0.0429	0.2617	0.0437	0.2628
Integrating	0.1220	0.1199	−0.0022	0.0735	0.0061	0.2471	0.0083	0.2493	0.0009	0.2414
Compromising	0.0206	0.0222	0.0016	0.0411	−0.0355	0.1004	−0.0364	0.0996	−0.0401	0.0951
Obliging	0.0080	0.0108	0.0027	0.0184	−0.0066	0.0556	−0.0063	0.0570	−0.0100	0.0474
Avoiding	−0.0010	−0.0026	−0.0016	0.0148	−0.0337	0.0157	−0.0332	0.0163	−0.0301	0.0191
Dominating	0.0001	0.0007	0.0006	0.0285	−0.0465	0.0467	−0.0469	0.0466	−0.0457	0.0474

which corresponds to former research (Trubisky *et al.*, 1991; Shih and Susanto, 2010). China is a country with strong collectivistic cultural heritage, which is different from the Western context of individualistic orientation (Xiao and Tsui, 2007). Chinese individuals are inclined to safeguard and focus on the interests of the collective, team or their organizations, to maintain social identity (Tinsley and Brett, 2001). Researchers also believed that culture plays a vital role in molding people's perceptions, attitudes and appraisals of conflict and its management (Ting-Toomey, 1985; Brew and David, 2004). An emphasis on harmony, respect for hierarchy, focus on context and dynamics, a salient sense of face-giving and reciprocity, long-term perspective and emphasis on tactics are all characteristics of Chinese culture influencing conflict management behaviors (Ding, 1996). Therefore, for Chinese employees, having a good relationship with colleagues seems to be important (Hofstede, 1980) if they want to maintain a harmonious atmosphere in workplace. Due to the influence of traditional culture norms and values, it is reasonable that integrating and compromising styles are preferred by Chinese employees to handle interpersonal task conflict.

But it is unexpected yet interesting that the dominating style ranks third among the five types, followed by obliging and avoiding. Confucianist philosophy in China places emphasis on harmony and advises individuals to adopt a harmonious approach and to avoid confrontation and competition when faced with conflict. Influenced by this cultural value, harmony is likely to lead individuals to resort to conflict-avoidance tactics to maintain long-term interpersonal relationships (Leung *et al.*, 2002). Scholars argued that Chinese individuals tend to use avoiding or compromising CMSs due to collectivism, the desire for harmony, the concern to save social face and the strong commitment to interpersonal relationship (Ting-Toomey *et al.*, 1991). However, our results present a different picture. The difference may be due to the fact that China is changing and developing. There is a growing individualization of China and people's expectations of freedom and individuality are increasing (Hansen and Svarverud, 2013). With the globalization of the economy, more and more people are being influenced by the Western individualistic culture, which encourages people to focus on themselves and pursue their own goals. Research by Chen *et al.* (2012) indicated people's preference of conflict management strategies in the Chinese context, namely, integrating, compromising, avoiding, obliging and dominating, but they did not take account of the fact that their sample was from 18 companies in different industries. Thus, another possible reason resulting in such difference may lie in the characteristics of the construction industry. Employees in construction projects are likely to be specialized at their work and tend to be more competitive. Further research may need to find out the potential influence of industry differences.

The findings also reveal that employees' EI is significantly and positively associated with their innovation performance, as indicated in *H3a*. This is, to some extent, consistent with many previous studies testing the relationship between EI and organizational outcomes, such as job performance (Shih and Susanto, 2010), employees' satisfaction, organizational commitment and turnover intention (Goleman, 1998; Wong and Law, 2002; Law *et al.*, 2004). Emotionally intelligent individuals are good at controlling emotions of themselves and have a better understanding of people's emotions and feelings, which help them better maintain long-term and cooperative relationship with their colleagues and create harmonious atmosphere in workplace, which is the basis for creativity and innovation (Suliman and Al-Shaikh, 2007).

In addition, it was assumed that EI was positively related to more cooperative CMSs, namely, integrating, compromising and obliging styles. But the findings revealed that EI is significantly associated with integrating, compromising and dominating styles. The relationship between EI and integrating and compromising styles is consistent with previous research (Gross and Guerrero, 2000; Shih and Susanto, 2010), which believed emotionally intelligent people are likely to put other people's interests as an important consideration when solving conflict. The findings also correspond to the model of EI (Goleman, 1988), which includes social skills as one cluster, which is defined as effective handling of interpersonal relationships. This social skill cluster comprises various emotional competencies, one of which is conflict management, namely, negotiating and resolving disagreements (Hay/Mcber, 2002). However, the positive relationship between EI and the dominating style is worth consideration. If we try to find out the common characteristic of these three styles, they all have a high level of "concern for self" (Figure 1). The social skills aspect of EI includes several points, one of which is "Influence", meaning to wield effective tactics for persuasion (Goleman, 1998; Hay/Mcber, 2002). Employees with high EI are thus likely to persuade others to accept their points and aim to achieve their objectives, just related to the dominating behavior. EI, characterized as "solving problems and making wise decisions using both thoughts and feelings or logic and intuition (Brackett *et al.*, 2011)", can, to some extent, be regarded as a leadership quality (Wong and Law, 2002). Individuals with high EI will not only have a good understanding of their emotions as well as those of others but also are good at regulating and using emotions to facilitate thinking when involved in activities, such as reasoning, problem solving and interpersonal communication (Mayer and Salovey, 1997). Hence, emotionally intelligent employees tend to use an effective way – dominating style – to solve problems. Additionally, Jordan and Troth (2004) also found a significant relationship between EI and dominating tactics, indicating that at some point in team tasks, emotionally intelligence individuals may need to dominate to complete the task in the required time. Therefore, using dominating style is also understandable.

As to the relationship between various CMSs and innovation performance, we also found that integrating style has a positive and significant influence on innovation performance, which is in accordance with former research (Chen *et al.*, 2012). People adopting an integrating style are likely to create an open discussion and think up of creative ideas to solve problems, thus resulting in innovation. Integrating style also indicates a high level of concern for self, which droves individuals to express his suggestions and ideas. This to some extent corresponds to the disagreeable qualities, which is positively related to idea promotion of innovation process (Hunter and Cushenbery, 2014). However, the relationship between compromising and innovation performance is not supported. This may due to the reason that compromising employees will sacrifice some needs for a mutually acceptable decision (Rahim, 2002), instead of coming up with the best or perfect solutions to problems. Research of Shih and Susanto (2010) also failed to verify the relationship between compromising style and job performance. Therefore, employees may not be highly motivated to generate creative and innovative ideas to solve problems when using compromising style. In addition, we assumed that there is negative relationship between dominating, avoiding, obliging styles and innovation performance, which are not supported. The theory of contingency may be applied to explain this and more investigations may be needed. As indicated in the hypothesis developing, creative individuals are low on agreeableness and often refuse to adapt to others but insist on their own way (Hoff *et al.*,

2013). On the other hand, dominating individuals often refuse to take different points of views or information sources from others to bring forth new knowledge, which is harmful to innovation process. Thus, it is difficult to determine the relationship between dominating style and innovation performance.

The partially mediating role of integrating style indicates that EI has both direct and indirect impacts on innovation performance in the construction industry. Emotionally intelligent employees are good at controlling their emotions and dealing with daily matters at work, thus maintaining a good relationship with other colleagues. They can face uncertainty stably and will be less troubled by bad or negative emotions, which can influence their job performance (Shih and Susanto, 2010). In this way, EI can directly influence innovation performance. On the other hand, employees with higher level of EI can make decisions based on his or her own emotions and the emotions of others. When conflict occurs, it is likely that they will choose more cooperative integrating conflict management strategies (i.e. integrating and compromising) which can satisfy both parties' needs. While, integrating individuals may express freely their thoughts and ideas to create harmonious environment where knowledge and information are flowing. Innovation performance is thus likely to be promoted. In addition, integrating style does not mean that individuals would always be agreeable to others. Integrating employees with high levels of EI tend to express their suggestions or maintain their ideas in a harmonious way which will not harm the relationship among the group members. Thus, integrating style could explain the relationship between EI and innovation performance.

Conclusions

This research is an effort to figure out the relationship among EI, CMSs and innovation performance of employees in the construction industry in the Chinese context, as well as test the mediating roles of CMSs. This research is mainly conducted to test the mediating influences of different types of CMSs on the relationship between EI and employees' innovation performance. Thus, a picture about the relationship among EI, CMSs and innovation performance of employees is formed. Data analyses from 159 employees indicate that an integrating style seems to be the most preferred choice of employees when faced with interpersonal conflict in workplace, followed by compromising and dominating styles. EI is significantly and positively related to integrating, compromising and dominating styles and is also an important predicator of employees' innovation performance. Additionally, we also confirm the mediating role of integrating style between EI and innovation performance, which is considered as the main contribution of this research.

This research has both theoretical and practical implications. First of all, this research provides additional empirical evidence in the construction industry for relationship between EI and CMSs, as well as CMSs and individual innovation performance. Our research also provides empirical evidence that EI is positively associated with innovation performance, adding to the overall body of knowledge relating to EI and innovation performance. Employees with higher levels of EI are highly recommended, for such individuals are likely to manage conflict appropriately, solve problems effectively and bring about higher levels of innovation performance. Moreover, the mediating role of integrating style on EI and innovation performance has lacked attention before. This research helps us further understand how EI influences individual innovation performance, shedding light on the innovation theory and conflict management literature.

This research has some practical implications for managers, especially for employees and managers in the construction industry in China, by suggesting some ways to improve innovation performance through the increasing of EI and adaptation of appropriate CMSs. Both employees and managers should recognize the importance of EI and pay more attention to it. Scholars find that appropriate training and development could enhance employees' EI (Goleman, 1998). Managers could provide proper EI training programs if they want to motivate the employees' job outcomes. In addition, conflict is a common phenomenon where people are involved and managers should also pay attention to employees' EI levels, which may influence their ways of handling conflict. Specific training should be provided to encourage employees to learn to use cooperative CMSs, especially the integrating style. Managers should be aware of the situation that employees can not only be trained with EI programs but also with conflict management programs.

Limitations and future research

Though this research indicates the importance of EI and adds new knowledge to the innovation literature, it has several limitations. First of all, the size of sample is limited and all the data were all from the construction industry in the Chinese context. The research findings should also be interpreted with great caution due to the generalizability of these results. Though we started to notice that industry differences may matter the way employees choose conflict management strategies, we did not compare the CMSs or innovation performance among various industries. Thus, further research should consider extending sample size and collecting data to have a comparison study within different industries. The second limitation is the measurement of cognitive ability. Concerning the Chinese context in this research and time constraints as well, we only measured education background as a proxy of cognitive ability. Though this may to some extent rule out the influence of cognitive ability on innovation performance, we expect more appropriate proxy of cognitive ability in the Chinese context. Future study can use specific measurement of cognitive ability. Additionally, the bootstrap results show that the mediating role of integrating is very partial with coefficient of EI on innovation performance decreasing from 0.704 to 0.554. This further indicates that there might be other mediating roles, such as cooperative behaviors, communicating styles, knowledge sharing, etc. Future study could introduce other mediating roles to explain and reveal the relationship between EI and individual innovation performance.

Furthermore, the questionnaire survey used a self-rating assessment to measure EI, CMSs and innovation performance, which may have some shortcomings such as misleading self-perception, social desirability, common method variance, etc. (Law *et al.*, 2008; Shih and Susanto, 2010). However, we tried to deal with the drawbacks in several ways. The anonymity of the questionnaires was rigorously maintained. We also randomly assigned the measurement items in the questionnaire. Further research may consider multiple ways to collect data to minimize such bias, such as interviews or measurement from other people. Meanwhile, considering the potential effect of common method variance caused by measuring items with one single method and in one single questionnaire, we conducted a Harmon single factor test to determine the extent of variance. As indicated in the method section, analyses show that common method variance in not a big concern in this paper. Future research had better use more procedural remedies to settle common method variance systematically, following the suggestions of Podsakoff *et al.* (2003).

Additionally, further studies are needed in this field before reaching some general agreements about the relationship among EI, CMSs and employees' innovation performance, as well as other job outcomes or attitudes. Previous research has identified the positive relationship between compromising style and job satisfaction, the negative relationship between avoiding style and innovation performance (Chen *et al.*, 2012), the former of which is not considered in this research and the latter is inconsistent with findings of this research. Meanwhile, the assumed negative relationships between EI and avoiding style as well as avoiding and obliging styles and innovation performance are not supported in this research. Therefore, more underlying reasons are needed to be examined to get a complete picture about the relationship among EI, CMSs and job outcomes in different contexts. One finding of this research is that EI may play a mediating role the relationship between working experience and integrating style, as well as between working experience and innovation performance. Future study can be conducted to explore this underlying relationship. We also find an interesting point which is about the correlation between dominating style and compromising style, further research are needed to explain this abnormal phenomenon.

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