Goal Pursuit Perspective on Conflict Resolution and its Relationship with Psychological Well-being

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Abstract

It is proposed that goal pursuit is related to how we resolve conflicts with others, and with our psychological well-being. The aim of the current study was to investigate whether there is an association between individual’s interpersonal goals (compassionate and self-image goals), conflict management style (integrating, compromising, obliging, dominating and avoiding), and psychological well-being. To further investigate the role of interpersonal goals, we designed a self-report questionnaire to measure the preference of compassionate goals as opposed to self-image goals in social conflict situations. Seventy university students completed an on-line questionnaire. The results showed that compassionate goals are negatively associated with dominating style, and positively associated with integrating, compromising and obliging style. Self-image goals correlated positively with dominating style, and negatively with integrating style. Furthermore, individuals with higher levels of self-image goals have a consistent way of dealing with conflicts in different situations. There was no statistically significant association between psychological well-being and interpersonal goals or conflict management style. The results are discussed in light of previous findings and concrete suggestions for further research are presented.

Keywords: conflict management style, interpersonal goals, compassionate goals, self-image goals, psychological well-being
Sammanfattning


Nyckelord: konflikthanteringsstilar, interpersonella mål, medkännande mål, självbildsmål, psykiskt välmående
Goal Pursuit Perspective on Conflict Resolution and its Relationship with Psychological Well-being

Conflict in social relationships is an unavoidable part of individuals’ lives. When it comes to psychological well-being, it is not the conflict in itself that seem to matter, but how people try to resolve the conflict (Tou, Baker, Hadden, & Lin, 2015). The psychological health is not only important for the individual itself, but also for the society. A well-functioning and healthy population contributes to lower healthcare costs and better life prosperity (Duhl & Sanchez, 1999). A better understanding of contributing factors to psychological well-being may lead to more sufficient programs to improve and enhance individual's psychological well-being. In the current study, we will investigate psychological well-being and its relationship with conflict management style from the perspective of interpersonal goals, more specifically, compassionate and self-image goals.

Psychological well-being

Well-being is a complex construction that has been referred to as an “umbrella” term for individuals’ perceived psychological and physiological well-being, quality of life and validation of experience of events (Brann et al., 2017). The concept of well-being is not unitary, but can refer to both positive and negative aspects. Psychological well-being has been identified as, satisfaction with life (positive), and lack of internal discomfort or distress (negative) (Gray, Ozer, & Rosenthal, 2017).

The level of psychological well-being within an individual, is affected by numerous factors, including living environment, life-situation and different types of relationships (Duhl & Sanchez, 1999). The focus of the present study is on the relationship of psychological well-being with social conflict, and its resolution, and more specifically one’s interpersonal goals. This will be explained into more detail in the following.

Interpersonal goals can increase individuals’ psychological well-being. Interpersonal goals are influential forces that comes from within the individual, and motivates the person to
strive for development and achievement in life. When individuals achieve their goals, they receive positive life outcomes, which enhance their psychological well-being. While as, hindered or interfered goal pursuit can decrease the individual's psychological well-being. Additionally, individuals’ who engage more often in goal conflicts, tend to have lower levels of psychological well-being (Gray et al., 2017).

**Conflict and conflict resolution**

Interpersonal conflicts are results of disagreements between two individuals, and exists in everyday-life. Wickham, Williamson, Beard, Kobayashi, and Hirst (2016) stresses that interpersonal conflicts are seen to be among the most troublesome and pervasive daily stressors.

Individuals use different methods to resolve the conflicts. There are five suggested conflict management styles that individuals use to deal with or resolve conflicts. The conflict management styles are integrating, avoiding, dominating, compromising, and obliging (Rahim, 1983). The integrating style has as predominant characteristic, cooperation, and refers to facing the problem directly and find creative solutions to it, that benefit both the person itself and others involved. People exhibiting this management style, are open for learning from their peers and try to understand their reasons, before making decisions. The avoiding style, refers to avoiding or postponing the conflict rather than taking it directly. This way of dealing with conflicts is proved to be appropriate when handling with minor problems, or when two parties need some time to think, before dealing with a more complex issue. The dominating style refers to doing whatever it takes to achieve one’s goals and getting what one needs rather than contemplating the needs of others. For individuals resolving conflicts in this style, a win-lose strategy is commonly used, and they pressure the other party till they give in. This style is also used when decision that must be done, but may not be well-received by others, is necessary. The compromising style refers to giving up something to have a better
chance in the future to win something else. Compromising style is marked by a limited amount of information exchanged between two parties, and no side is completely satisfied, which can lead to future arguments. The *obliging* style, refers to focusing more on similarities than differences, and satisfying others’ needs before one’s own. Individuals with this type of style reports less effectivity in school and other areas of their lives (Redmond, Jameson, & Binder, 2016).

An individual does not only have one conflict management style, but depending on the individual's past and present, they usually have a preferred conflict management style. When solving a conflict, individuals actively choose a management style that is suitable for their persona, goals and adjusted to the situation (Tou et al., 2015).

**Interpersonal goals, compassionate and self-image goals**

Depending on how the individual choose to handle their interpersonal conflicts, has been suggested to rely on their interpersonal goals (Gray et al., 2017). Gray et al. stresses that personal goals provide structure and meaning to the individual’s life, as well as they identify what is most important for the individual, and what outcomes are desirable and undesirable. Individuals can hold different goals at the same time, but some goals are more appealing than others.

In the current study, we will deal with two personal goals called compassionate and self-image goals, since the study is depending on students and their social life, and therefore are likely to have one or both goals.

*Compassionate goals* refer to care and concern for one’s peers’ well-being, without any desire to get something out of it that can promote oneself. People that score chronically high on compassionate goals tend to feel more responsibility and spiritual interconnectedness towards others, that extends across generations and society. Their view of interpersonal relationships is more of non-zero-sum in nature, which refers to experience success in one
relationship, does not mean detraction in another one. They tend to have higher levels of private self-consciousness and self-compassionate (Crocker & Canevello, 2008).

Individuals with compassionate goals have an advantage in social situations, because their social goal motivation fosters a mindset of caring and supporting of others. The development of a cooperative and collaborative mindset is more of a function of the individual’s own compassionate goals, than goals of individuals, which one is interacting with. Individuals with compassionate goals, also tends to live much more satisfying lives, than those of self-image goals (Canevello & Crocker, 2017).

In previous research, compassionate goals are often associated with positive outcomes, rather than with negative outcomes. Crocker, Olivier and Nuer (2009) stresses though, that developing supportive relationships, and learn about self-regulation takes time, and can be perceived as a cost in a short-term perspective. The resource investment and immediate gratification that the individual needs to keep in mind, to increase the likelihood of obtaining the desired relationship, can affect the individual’s well-being negatively.

Self-image goals refer to get recognition and idolization, through self-presentation, by close others. Self-image goals tends to occur through a sense of insecurity in how one is perceived by others, when the person is uncertain about his or her self-worth. People who pursue self-image goals are constantly searching for other people’s approval, then from awareness of own needs (Tou et al., 2015). Individuals with chronically high levels of self-image goals tend to see social interactions as zero-sum, either the friendship is profitable, or unrewarding. They also tend to have higher levels of public self-consciousness, social anxiety and lower levels of compassion for oneself, which are tangible contributors to their apparent conflict management styles, and lower psychological well-being (Crocker & Canevello, 2008).
In social situations, individuals with more self-image goals than compassionate goals, tends to have greater issues with interpersonal relationships. Their goals hinder them from creating healthy social relationships with others, because their focus is only on constructing and defending their own self-images (Crocker & Canevello, 2008). Individuals with these kinds of goals are also more psychologically fragile and their self-esteem can easily get damaged if they do not achieve their self-images goals. Their response to the interrupted goal pursuit, can lead to conflicts with individuals who acted in an undesirable way (Moeller, Crocker, & Bushman, 2009).

Although previous research has shown that self-image goals essentially results in negative consequences, as affecting the individual's interpersonal relationships and capacity of acting in social situations negatively, positive consequences do exist. In the beginning of an inclusion into an interpersonal relationship, group, or organization, self-presentation is one of the most important parts to attract other people. An inclusion into an organisation can be a job interview, where the interviewer expects the applicant to have the required qualities, and good self-presentation, in form of dressing, behaviour and speaking. People that engage in self-presentation and impression management do not have the intention to deceive other people to like them, but convey an accurate, but somewhat glorified, image of themselves that they genuinely think is true (Crocker et al., 2009).

There are some indications from previous research suggesting associations between interpersonal goals and conflict management style (Tou et al., 2015). Tou and colleagues found a positive correlation between compassionate goals and integrating, obliging and compromising conflict management styles, and a negative correlation between compassionate goals and dominating conflict management style. They also found a positive relationship between self-image goals and dominating and avoiding conflict management styles. With other words, people with more compassionate goals prefer to reach a conflict resolution with
their peers through cooperation, compromising or focus on other individuals’ needs. While as, individuals that have more self-image goals prefers to solve conflicts, either by putting one's own needs first and not consider others’ opinions, or avoiding the conflict situation completely. In this previous study, psychological well-being was not considered.

The purpose of the current survey was to investigate the relationship between students’ personal conflict management style in social conflict situations and psychological well-being from a goal pursuit perspective by taking interpersonal goals (compassionate and self-image goals) into account. For the purpose of the current study, we developed a new questionnaire to measure the preference of compassionate goals over self-image goals in different conflict situations with peers or friends.

There are previous studies that have shown a statistically significant correlation between individuals’ interpersonal goals and conflict management style, but not between conflict management style and psychological well-being, from a goal pursuit perspective. Therefore, the question is, is there any relationship between individuals’ interpersonal goals, conflict management styles and psychological well-being?

In accordance to previous research we hypothesize that (1) individuals having compassionate goals will more likely have an integrating, compromising and obliging conflict management style, but less likely a dominating style; (2) The individuals having self-image goals will more likely have dominating and avoiding styles. The next two hypotheses concern interpersonal goals, conflict management styles and how they predict psychological well-being. If the individuals can, through their interpersonal goals, resolve their conflicts in a desirable fashion, they are more likely to experience higher level of psychological well-being. Therefore, we hypothesize that (3) Individuals with self-image goals using dominating and avoiding conflict management styles will have higher levels of subjective well-being; (4)
Individuals with compassionate goals using integrating, compromising and obliging conflict management style will have higher levels of subjective well-being.

**Method**

**Participants**

Seventy students from a Swedish university participated, 46 females (65.7 %) and 24 males (34.3 %). Age ranged between 19 and 31 (\(M = 24, SD = 2.90\)). Fourteen participants considered their ethnicity to be partly Swedish and non-Swedish, respectively, eight partly Swedish and six non-Swedish. Thirty one participants studied within School of Humanities, Education and Social sciences. Also, 34 participants reported their relationship status as single. A convenient sample was used, and all participants met the inclusion criteria (Student at a Swedish University and good language skills in English) based on self-report. Participation was voluntary and in exchange for free fika.

Four participants were outliers in age, with age ranging from 33 to 57 (based on 1 D boxplot) and were therefore excluded from further analyses. The final sample consisted of 66 participants.

**Measures**

The survey consisted of four different scales, in English, about conflict management style, interpersonal goals, interpersonal goals in conflict situation and subjective well-being.

**Compassionate and self-image goals scale (CSGS).** The CSGS (Crocker & Canevello, 2008) assesses whether people have more compassionate goals or self-image goals. Compassionate and self-image goals are not defined by the content, but by the process of simultaneous goals pursuit and interaction with friends. This questionnaire consists of two different scales, focusing on either compassionate and self-image goals in interaction with
friends or roommates. In the current study, only the friendship scale was used, since the focus is on relationships with peers.

This scale consists of 13 items describing seven compassionate goals and six self-image goals. Every item was preceded by the statement “In the past week, in the area of friendships, how much did you want or try to” followed by either a compassionate or self-image goal item, such as “avoid doing something that would be harmful to others” (compassionate goal), or “convince others that you are right” (self-image goal).

Participants asked to rate on a 5-point scale 1 (never) to 5 (always) Likert scale to what extent they agree with each statement. Higher total scores on, either compassionate goals or self-image goals, indicated the predominant interpersonal goals among the participants. Hence, individuals could have both goals at the same time. The measurement has undergone psychometric validation and reliability tests successfully (Crocker & Canevello, 2008). In the current study, the reliability (Cronbach’s α) for compassionate goals and self-image goals were .73, and .75, respectively.

**Compassionate and self-image goals in conflict scale (CSGCS).** For the purpose of the present study we developed a questionnaire to assess whether the participant prioritizes compassionate goals over self-image goals (or vice versa) in social conflict situations. The development of the new measurement was based on the notion that, there was no scale that was measuring individuals preferred interpersonal goals in conflict situations. The structure of the questionnaire was based on the Goal pursuit questionnaire as developed by Karsdorp and Vlaeyen (2011) to assess achievement and pain-avoidance goals.

More specifically, our questionnaire consisted of eight items, and each item contained a statement and a thought. The statement represented a common conflict situation in everyday life of a student, either in a school setting or a leisure time activity. Such a statement could be, “You and your study group have an assignment due to tomorrow. Your group members are
satisfied with the result, but you are not”. The thought portrayed two possible ways of handling the conflict situation in the statement that were based on compassionate and self-image goals. The participants were asked to rate the thought, in concern to the statement, on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (Totally disagree) to 6 (Totally agree). The statement presented, was followed by the thought, “I think it is more important to keep my thoughts to myself because they can hurt others, than getting rejected by my group members”. If the participant agreed with this thought, he or she preferred to solve the conflict through focusing on others’ needs (compassionate goals), rather than one’s own self-presentation (self-image goals).

**Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS).** Life satisfaction and psychological well-being was measured by the SWLS scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). The scale consists of five items; “In most ways my life is close to my ideal”. The participants answered to the items on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree). This scale has been used and been validated in previous studies and is a well-used measurement within the field of psychological well-being research. In 2008, the scale was assessed and evaluated with the result of acceptable psychometric properties (Kobau, Sniezek, Zack, Lucas, & Burns, 2010). In the current study, the Cronbach’s α was .85.

**The Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory-II (ROCI-II Form C).** ROCI-III (1983) was used to measure conflict management style in relation to peers. The questionnaire consists of 28 items, with five different styles, such as integrating (7 items), obliging (6 items), dominating (5 items), avoiding (6 items), and compromising (4 items). The participants rated each item on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Higher self-reported scores on a given conflict style, indicated that the participant commonly use one style more than others. Before taking the questionnaire, each participant was instructed to think about recently occurred conflicts with peers, and how they tend to resolve them. Sample items included “I try to work with my peers to find solution to a problem that
satisfies our expectations” (*integrating*), “I give in to the wishes of my peers” (*obliging*), “I use my expertise to make a decision in my favour” (*dominating*), “I avoid an encounter with my peers” (*avoiding*), and “I use "give and take" so that a compromise can be made” (*compromising*). Further information about psychometrics, ROCI-II scale has been used in several studies to assess individuals conflict management styles in different circumstances (Antonioni, 1998; Redmond et al., 2016; Tou et al., 2015). In the current study the Cronbach’s $\alpha$ for obliging, avoiding, dominating, compromising and integrating subscale scores were .76, .85, .83, .68, and .81, respectively.

**Procedure**

The survey was completed via a secure, online survey system (Artologik software for the web: Survey&Report). The program is used to create professional surveys and we got access through the University. A link to the survey was spread via a social media with supervision for students of the University. Our strategy for boosting our recruitment further after the online survey was to put up flyers on bulletin board across the university (including a QR code and snapchat link to the survey).

The survey started with general information on participation (anonymous, voluntary, can be stopped at any time without negative consequences) and inclusion criteria (Student at the university of interest and good language skills in English), in accordance to the American Psychology Association’s ethical guidelines (2017). Their language skills were not tested before the entering of the survey, but validated by the participants themselves. This was followed by the four questionnaires, in the order *The Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory-II, (ROCI-II Form C)*, *Compassionate and self-image goals scale (CSGS)*, *Compassionate and self-image goals in conflict scale (CSGCS)*, and lastly *Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS)*. In order to submit the questionnaire all, the questions had to be answered. The survey took approximately 10 minutes to complete. After submitting the survey,
participants automatically received a confirmation message that their answers had been successfully registered.

**Statistical Analyses**

The items in each questionnaire (ROCI-II, CSGS, CSGCS & SWLS) were categorically grouped and computed as means scores. More specifically, there were five subscales generated from the ROCI-II questionnaire, obliging, compromising, integrating, dominating and avoiding, two subscales from the CSGS, compassionate goals and self-image goals, two subscales from the CSGCS, compassionate goals and interpersonal goals, and one in the SWLS. The procedure was in accordance to previous research and their way of computing the different subscales in the questionnaires. Every item in our own measurement contained both a compassionate and self-image goal, therefore, we had to take another approach, when computing the two subgroups, then in CSGS. For our own measurement, we executed a two-step procedure. The first step was to recode all the compassionate items into self-image items, to further combine all the items and computed a mean score. Step two, was operated in accordance to the first step, but all the self-image items was instead recorded to compassionate items, and then computed as a mean score. This two-step procedure generated two subgroups, as in the compassionate and self-image goals scale (CSGS). The procedure was conducted to investigate whether individuals prefer one goal over the other one in a specific conflict situation.

We conducted a bivariate correlation analysis (Pearson’s product-moment correlation coefficient) to see whether there were linear associations between interpersonal goals (compassionate and self-image goals), conflict management styles (integrating, obliging, compromising, dominating and avoidant), interpersonal goals in conflict situation, and psychological well-being. The assumptions for this type of analysis were met. More precisely,
continuous variables, non-missing data, normal distribution, absence of outliers, and linearity.

The variables in the current study did not correlate with psychological well-being, and therefore, no further analysis was conducted after the bivariate correlation analysis.

**Results**

The results of the descriptive analysis, presented in Table 1, gives an overview of the current sample’s level of psychological well-being, interpersonal goals and conflict management styles. The participants were “slightly satisfied” with their life. The most frequently used conflict management style, among the participants, is *integrating* management style, which follows by *compromising* management style, *obliging* conflict management style, *avoiding* conflict management style, and lastly, *dominating* conflict management style. Furthermore, there were more participants with higher levels of compassionate goals in the CSGC scale, than self-image goals in CSGC scale. Lastly, the result with the compassionate goals and the self-image goals in the CSGCS scale showed that the participants preferred the compassionate goals in conflict situations as well.

**Table 1**

*Means (M) and standard deviations (SD) for the variables, psychological well-being, conflict management style, interpersonal goals (CSGS), and interpersonal goals in conflict (CSGCS)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Psychological well-being</td>
<td>5.09</td>
<td>1.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict management styles</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrating</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compromising</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obliging</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>0.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoiding</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominating</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>0.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal goals (CSGS)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compassionate goals</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>0.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-image goals</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>0.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal goals in conflict (CSGCS)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compassionate goals</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>0.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-image goals</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>0.54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To compare the new measurement of interpersonal goals with the existing scale (CSGS) we calculated Pearson correlations between self-image goals (CSGS), compassionate goals (CSGS), self-image goals (CSGCS) and compassionate goals (CSGCS). The results showed a statistically significant correlation between self-image goals (CSGS) and self-image goals (as opposite to compassionate goals) (CSGCS), $r(65) = .33, p < .01$.

Furthermore, there was a statistically significant negative correlation between self-image goals (CSGS) and compassionate goals (CSGCS), $r(65) = -.33, p < .01$. However, there was no statistical significant correlation between compassionate goals (CSGC) and the self-image goals (CSGCS), or compassionate goals (CSGS) and compassionate goals (CSGCS).

The correlations between compassionate (CSGS), self-image (CSGS), integrating, compromising, obliging, avoiding, dominating, compassionate (CSGCS), self-image (CSGCS) and psychological well-being were calculated with a two-tailed Pearson bivariate correlation analysis and are presented in Table 2. There were no statistically significant relations between conflict management styles and psychological well-being.

The results showed statistically significant negative correlation between compassionate goals (CSGS) and dominating management style, $r(65) = -.33, p < .01$, and between self-image goals (CSGS) and integrating management style, $r(65) = -.33, p < .01$. There was also a statistically significant positive correlation between compassionate goals (CSGS) and obliging management style, $r(65) = .31, p < .05$, compromising management style, $r(65) = .37, p < .01$, and integrating management style, $r(65) = .44, p < .01$. Further, there was a statistically significant positive correlation between self-image goals (CSGS) and dominating conflict management style, $r(65) = .31, p < .05$. There were no other significant relations between interpersonal goals (CSGS) and conflict management styles.

The results of the self-image goals (CSGCS) and integrating conflict management style showed a statistically significant negative correlation, and negative statistical significant
correlation between the compassionate goals (CSGCS) and dominating conflict management style was found. In addition, there was a positive correlation between self-image goals (CSGCS) and dominating conflict management style, and a positive correlation between compassionate goals (CSGCS) and integrating management style. Finally, the result showed no other statistically significant correlation between the variables.

Table 2
Bivariate correlations of interpersonal goals, conflict management styles and psychological well-being (N = 66)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Compassionate goals (CSGCS)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.31*</td>
<td>.37**</td>
<td>-.33**</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.44**</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>-.33**</td>
<td>.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Self-image goals (CSGCS)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-.18</td>
<td>-.23</td>
<td>.31*</td>
<td>-.33**</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>-06</td>
<td>.33**</td>
<td>-.15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Obliging</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.39**</td>
<td>-.16</td>
<td>.25*</td>
<td>.39**</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Compromising</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.59**</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>-.20</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Dominating</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-.30*</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.29*</td>
<td>-.29*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Avoiding</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>-.00</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Integrating</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>-.38**</td>
<td>.38**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Psychological Well-being</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Self-image goals (CSGCS)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.1**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>10. Compassionate goals (CSGCS)</td>
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Note. *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001

Discussion

The present study examined the relationship between conflict management style and psychological well-being, from the perspective of interpersonal goals. The results can be summarized as follows.
First, we observed the expected relationships between compassionate goals and integrating, obliging, compromising and dominating conflict management style. More specifically, in line with our first hypothesis, there was a positive association between compassionate goals and integrating, compromising and obliging conflict management style, and a statistically significant negative correlation between compassionate goals and dominating conflict management style. Second, in partial support for the second hypothesis, we found a positive/negative association between self-image goals and dominating style, but there was no significant correlation between self-image goals and avoiding style. Third, in contrast with our hypotheses, there was no significant relationship between psychological well-being in individuals with self-image and dominating or avoiding conflict management style. Lastly, there was no significant relationship between individuals with compassionate goals and integrating, compromising and obliging conflict management style and psychological well-being. Additionally, an interesting result to consider, regarding our own measurement, was a positive correlation between the compassionate and self-image goals scale’s (CSGS) self-image goals items, and the self-image goals in our own measurement (CSGCS).

The observed associations between interpersonal goal pursuit and conflict management style support previous research with a Taiwan students sample (Tou et al., 2015) showing that students with higher levels of compassionate goals engage in less defensive behaviours towards conflicts than individuals with higher levels of self-image goals. However, in contrast to Tou et al., we found no correlation between self-image goals and avoidant conflict management style. The most prominent explanation according to us for this latter finding, involves the critical thinking that we are encouraged, as students in Sweden, to engage in. Critical thinking refers to, making independent and critical assessments, identifying and solving problems, and be prepared to meet changes in one’s own working life. In contrast
to Sweden, students in Taiwan and countries in their vicinity, have difficulties with understanding the implication of critical thinking. Eastern countries’ institutions are, more than often, based on a hierarchical system, where the teacher is the knowledge giver and the student the knowledge taker. Their teaching methods do not encourage “reflection”, to the same extent as western schools does (Chiu & Cowan, 2012). With this said, we cautiously draw the conclusion that the participants in the present study have learned that avoiding a conflict, is neither advantageously for themselves, nor for others.

The positive correlation between our own scale (CSGCS) and the compassionate and self-image goals scale, suggests that individuals with higher levels of self-image goals tends to act in accordance to their interpersonal goals in conflict situations. Surprisingly individuals with higher levels of compassionate goals, were not consistent in their way of dealing with conflict situations (that is, there was no correlation between compassionate goals in CSGS and CSGCS). This means, that even though they perceive themselves as caring of others, unselfish, and making decisions in others favour, they might have other goals when it comes to dealing with actual conflict situations. Therefore, their believed behaviours towards others, moderated by their interpersonal goals, are not compatible with their actual behaviours in different conflict situations.

The compassionate and self-image goals in the conflict scale that we developed, touches a rather new, unsearched area, although there is some previous research dealing with self-image goals, and how individuals with higher levels of self-image goals tends to handle their life-events (Moeller et al., 2009). As mentioned in the introduction, individuals with higher levels of self-image goals focus on positive self-presentation (Crocker & Canevello, 2008). When the participants with predominant self-image goals answered to the items in the compassionate and self-image goals in conflict scale, their focus was probably on how to present themselves in the most favourable way.
Another possible explanation for the correlation between the self-image goals in the CSGS and the CSGCS, is based on the positive association between dominating conflict management style and self-image goals. Individuals with dominating conflict management style do not compromise or try to find a middle ground for a conflict resolution, but convince others that they are right and do anything to achieve their goals (Tou et al., 2015). The features of dominating style and self-image goals have much in common, and why individuals choose to resolve conflicts in this way, is based on their fundamental understanding of how to reach a conflict resolution with highest possible beneficial outcome for the own self.

The result suggest that psychological well-being is not related to conflict management styles or interpersonal goals. This might be due to the fact that we only used the satisfaction with life scale to measure individual’s psychological well-being. Even though, it is a well assessed and well-known measurement (Kobau et al., 2010), previous studies has, in contrast to our study, used the SWLS along with other health oriented measurements to emphasise the different details of psychological well-being, and their relationship to conflict management style and interpersonal goals. For the current study, only the SWLS was assessed, in order to avoid the risk of lower responding rate. This, due to the previous, extensive, detailed questionnaires, that investigates the individual’s conflict management style and interpersonal goals.

The results from the satisfaction with life scale, shows that the mean score of the participants is in the category “slightly satisfied”. Even though it is a relief that most the participants are satisfied with their lives, the query about the cause of the participants’ moderate level of psychological well-being remains.
Limitations and future directions

Notwithstanding its new interesting insights in the field of interpersonal goals and conflicts and further support for associations between interpersonal goals and conflict management styles, there are some limitations to the current study that warrant some further discussion.

Firstly, the sample size in the present study was relatively small, largely due to a rather short time for data collection. For future studies, we would suggest a larger sample, in regard to more accurate and generalizable results. There are 15,000 students at the studied university, and with normal distribution and confidence level in mind, a representative sample would be around 600 participants. The sample in the current study is not a representative sample of the population. Therefore, we cannot comment on the proliferation of the population's conflict management styles, interpersonal goals or their level of psychological well-being. There would be necessary with a larger sample to be able to determine whether, a specific, conflict management style, interpersonal goal or level of well-being, is more prevalent, than another one.

Furthermore, there was several individuals that did not complete the survey (e.g. difficulty with English language). For forthcoming research, we would recommend translating the questionnaires to the participants’ mother tongue, to increase the response rate and understanding of the items.

Secondly, the data were collected online without the presence or assistance of the investigators. Therefore, it cannot be excluded that the participants interpreted the questions in the correct or same way, but this is an inherent problem with on-line surveys.

Thirdly, the new measurement (CSGCS) that we developed to measure the topic of interest, elicited interesting questions about the association between interpersonal goals and conflict, and brought light to a new interesting area. Even though it correlated with self-image
goals in CSGS and self-image goals in CSGCS, we cannot say, with certainty, that the scale measures, what it is designed to measure. A systematic psychometric evaluation (Falk, Persson, & Wijk, 2007) of the measurement is necessary before usage, since there are some components of the measurement that could need some further improvements. The measurement is based on observed natural situations among peers in Sweden. To further understand whether the situations we used are accurately picturizing naturally occurring conflict situations in everyday life, a quantitative research is required. Every question is bound to the situation, previous event might influence how they interpret the conflict.

Furthermore, our own measurement only measures interpersonal goals in different conflict situations, but not individuals’ preferred ways of resolving different conflicts. As mentioned in the introduction, individuals’ can have several conflict management styles, and we cannot comment on whether individuals’ methods of solving conflicts are consistent or situationally dependent (Rahim, 1983). We cannot draw the conclusion that the participants hold a predominant conflict management style, that extends across different conflict situations.

Fourthly, another important aspect to consider in future studies, is the order of the questionnaires. We choose to put all the conflict and interpersonal goals questionnaires (ROCI-II, CSGS and CSGCS) first, and then the psychological well-being questionnaire (SWLS). Since the focus of the current study was on the outcome of each conflict management style and interpersonal goals on psychological well-being, the questionnaires were ordered in this fashion. A reflection, post data collection, is that the order might have biased the results. In the first three questionnaires, they urge the participant to think about recently occurring conflict situations, which can decrease the person’s perceived general well-being, if he or she has engaged in many destructive conflicts lately. We would recommend placing the Satisfaction with Life Scale first, then the Rahim Organizational Conflict
GOALS, CONFLICT AND WELL-BEING

Inventory-II, Compassionate and Self-image Goals Scale, and lastly, Compassionate and Self-image Goals in Conflict Scale.

Lastly, another important factor to take into account, when considering individuals’ adopted conflict management style, is the cultural aspect. For instance, Sweden scores much higher on conflict avoidance than other European countries (Meyer, 2014). The main considered nationality of the participants in the current study, is Swedish or partly Swedish (n = 46). When consider the cultural studies about Swedish people’s conflict management style, and what is often mentioned in various social medias, our result is not consistent with what is believed to be the predominant conflict management style, according to these sources. Swedish people are known to be conflict avoidant, both internationally and within the own country (Daun & Teeland, 1996).

Also, the focus of the current study was on one's own conception of conflict resolution, where the results showed that integrating was the most predominant conflict management style among the participants. However, what is speculative, is whether the concept of conflict avoidance is rather a misconception of one’s own behaviours in resolving conflicts. The individual’s behaviour might be seen as avoidant from another person’s point of view, while as the person itself, may refer to it as caring for others, and avoiding hard feelings. Individuals with integrating conflict management style, focus more on other’s needs and how to resolve the conflict in the most sufficient way, that benefits both (Rahim, 1983).

Advantages

Regarding the focus of the current study, one of major strengths with the participants’ profile, is the age. Their age ranged between 19 and 31, and can therefore be classified as adolescents and younger adults. Previous research has shown that older individuals tend to report less goal conflict than younger participants (Gray et al., 2016). The participants are
therefore more likely to have interpersonal goal conflicts, and consequently, is a more relevant group for the current study.

Another strength within the participant's profile, is their choice of academic alignment. The majority of the participants are studying within the field of Humanities, Education and Social sciences. The courses within this institution, provides the students with knowledge about humans, and their behaviours, within and outside the group. Therefore, we believe that their broader knowledge of components of group dynamics, and sociality, creates a self-awareness, that contributes to more thought through answers to the items in the survey.

The usage of the *Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory-II* (Rahim, 1983) in the present work, served a vital part in the determination of individuals' conflict resolution habits. The measurement was originally developed for assessments in organizations, and the employee’s conflict management styles. Anyhow, Weider-Hatfield and Hatfield (1995) stresses that this measurement is more suited for psychological studies, because it treats communication in conflict from the individual's point of view, rather than the group dynamic. As mentioned in the introduction, the measurement has been used in several psychological studies, and the usage of the scale in the current study, served an essential part in the process towards determination of individuals desired ways of dealing with conflicts.

For the current study, as mentioned, we created our own measurement. Previous measurements have only measured individuals believed way of acting, in accordance to their interpersonal goals, towards others during a conflict situation. Since we are interested in people's actual behaviours in conflict situations, and what interpersonal goal that underlies their actions, the establishment of a new measurement was highly necessary. What separates this measurement from previous ones, is the emphasis on investigating individual's preferred interpersonal goal in a specific conflict situation. More precisely, whether an individual prefer one goal over another one, when trying to reach a resolution to a conflict with peers. There is
no previous work that has dealt with this matter before, and this might be an introduction to a whole new research field within the, rather unstudied, psychological area of underlying goals in conflict approach.

Conclusion

These results contribute to new essential knowledge about the relationship between interpersonal goals, conflict management style, and psychological well-being. Individual’s (interpersonal) goals predict their ways of dealing with conflicts, and individuals with self-image goals, in conflict situations, acts consistently, in accordance to their goals. Furthermore, individual’s conflict management style and interpersonal goals, do not anticipate a certain level of psychological well-being.

With this knowledge, and our nuanced method of measuring conflicts in real-life setting, we have introduced a novel way of investigating individuals’ behaviours that can lead to future breakthroughs within the field of human health.
References


Appendix A. Compassionate and self-image goals scale (CSGS)

**FRIENDSHIP COMPASSIONATE AND SELF-IMAGE GOALS SCALE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In the past week, in the area of friendships, how much did you want or try to:</th>
<th>Not at All</th>
<th>A little</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>A lot</th>
<th>Extremely</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. avoid doing things that aren’t helpful to me or others</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. avoid the possibility of being wrong</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. get others to recognize or acknowledge your positive qualities</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. avoid being selfish or self-centered</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. have compassion for others’ mistakes and weaknesses</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. avoid being rejected by others</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. avoid taking risks or making mistakes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. be constructive in your comments to others</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. avoid showing your weaknesses</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. avoid doing anything that would be harmful to others</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. be supportive of others</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. make a positive difference in someone else’s life</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. convince others that you are right</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B. Compassionate and self-image goals in conflict scale (CSGCS).

**Situation 1:** Your study group has an assignment due tomorrow. Your fellow students are all satisfied with the current version, but you are concerned that the current version does not yet meet the standards for the course.

Thought: For me it is more important to give constructive comments to further improve our assignment (Compassionate), than to avoid being criticized by my fellow students (self-image).

To what extent do you agree with this thought?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Totally disagree</th>
<th>Disagree somewhat</th>
<th>Disagree slightly</th>
<th>Agree slightly</th>
<th>Agree somewhat</th>
<th>Totally agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Situation 2:** You are in a lecture. One of the students is making irritable sounds and movements which disturbs the lecture.

Thought: For me it is more important to pretend that I am not disturbed by this person’s behaviour (self-image), than to restore the harmony in the classroom. (compassionate)

To what extent do you agree with this thought?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Totally disagree</th>
<th>Disagree somewhat</th>
<th>Disagree slightly</th>
<th>Agree slightly</th>
<th>Agree somewhat</th>
<th>Totally agree</th>
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</table>

**Situation 3:** Your friend is calling you because (s)he wants to discuss his/her problems now, but you have an assignment that has to be hand in today.

Thought: For me it is more important to support my friend despite my deadline (compassionate), than to show that I am not easily distracted from my studies. (self-image)

To what extent do you agree with this thought?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Totally disagree</th>
<th>Disagree somewhat</th>
<th>Disagree slightly</th>
<th>Agree slightly</th>
<th>Agree somewhat</th>
<th>Totally agree</th>
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<td>4</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
**Situation 4:** You are at your friend’s birthday party. A person that you are not on good terms with is there as well.

Thought: For me it is more important to avoid bringing all of us in an uncomfortable situation (compassionate), than to show my friend that I am a social and assertive person. (self-image)

To what extent do you agree with this thought?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Totally disagree</th>
<th>Disagree somewhat</th>
<th>Disagree slightly</th>
<th>Agree slightly</th>
<th>Agree somewhat</th>
<th>Totally agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Situation 5:** You and a new friend are on the bus. An old man enters the bus and you stand up so that the man can sit down. However, your new friend takes the place and sits down before the elderly can do so.

Thought: For me it is more important to avoid being criticized for interfering too much (self-image), than to help the elderly. (compassionate).

To what extent do you agree with this thought?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Totally disagree</th>
<th>Disagree somewhat</th>
<th>Disagree slightly</th>
<th>Agree slightly</th>
<th>Agree somewhat</th>
<th>Totally agree</th>
</tr>
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<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
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</table>

**Situation 6:** You are supposed to work on an assignment with a fellow student. (S)he lets you know that (s)he feels really sick today and cannot work on the assignment. An hour later, you encounter this student on the gym, healthy and well.

Thought: For me it is more important to make the student clear that this behaviour is really not ok (self-image), than to save his/her face (compassionate). (to save face; to keep a person’s reputation and the respect of other people)

To what extent do you agree with this thought?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Totally disagree</th>
<th>Disagree somewhat</th>
<th>Disagree slightly</th>
<th>Agree slightly</th>
<th>Agree somewhat</th>
<th>Totally agree</th>
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<td>6</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
**Situation 7**: You are home alone. When you are checking one of your social media you see that your friends have posted a picture of them hanging out. You were not invited.

Thought: For me it is more important that my friends do not notice that I feel sad about this (self-image), than that they might feel uncomfortable about the situation. (compassionate)

To what extent do you agree with this thought?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Totally disagree</th>
<th>Disagree somewhat</th>
<th>Disagree slightly</th>
<th>Agree slightly</th>
<th>Agree somewhat</th>
<th>Totally agree</th>
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</table>

**Situation 8**: You are discussing course information with another student. You are very sure that your information is correct but your fellow student disagrees.

Thought: For me it is more important to prove that I am right (self-image), than to avoid that my fellow student feels criticized (compassionate).

To what extent do you agree with this thought?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Totally disagree</th>
<th>Disagree somewhat</th>
<th>Disagree slightly</th>
<th>Agree slightly</th>
<th>Agree somewhat</th>
<th>Totally agree</th>
</tr>
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</table>
### Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory—II, Form C

Strictly Confidential

Please check the appropriate box after each statement to indicate how you handle your disagreement or conflict with your peers. Try to recall as many recent conflict situations as possible in ranking these statements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. I try to investigate an issue with my peers to find a solution acceptable to us. ........................................

2. I generally try to satisfy the needs of my peers. .................................................................

3. I attempt to avoid being “put on the spot” and to try to keep my conflict with my peers to myself. .................................................................

4. I try to integrate my ideas with those of my peers to come up with a decision jointly. ........

5. I try to work with my peers to find solution to a problem that satisfies our expectations. ....

6. I usually avoid open discussion of my differences with my peers. ...........................................

7. I try to find a middle course to resolve an impasse. .................................................................

8. I use my influence to get my ideas accepted. .................................................................

9. I use my authority to make a decision in my favor. .................................................................

10. I usually accommodate the wishes of my peers. ..................................................................

11. I give in to the wishes of my peers. ..................................................................................

12. I exchange accurate information with my peers to solve a problem together. ..................

13. I usually allow concessions to my peers. ...........................................................................

14. I usually propose a middle ground for breaking deadlocks. ..................................................

15. I negotiate with my peers so that a compromise can be reached. ........................................

16. I try to stay away from disagreement with my peers ...........................................................

17. I avoid an encounter with my peers. ..................................................................................

18. I use my expertise to make a decision in my favor. .................................................................

19. I often go along with the suggestions of my peers. .................................................................

20. I use “give and take” so that a compromise can be made. ....................................................

21. I am generally firm in pursuing my side of the issue. ..........................................................

22. I try to bring all our concerns out in the open so that the issues can be resolved in the best possible way. .................................................................

23. I collaborate with my peers to come up with decisions acceptable to us. ............................

24. I try to satisfy the expectations of my peers ..........................................................................

25. I sometimes use my power to win a competitive situation ..................................................

26. I try to keep my disagreement with my peers to myself in order to avoid hard feelings. ......

27. I try to avoid unpleasant exchanges with my peers. .............................................................

28. I try to work with my peers for a proper understanding of a problem. .................................