

## Conflicts Handling Styles Used by Professionals at Pre-Contract Stage of Building Construction Projects in Sri Lanka

**Piyanwada De Silva**

Sri Lanka Institute of Information Technology  
Malabe, Sri Lanka.  
[priyanwada.d@slit.lk](mailto:priyanwada.d@slit.lk)

**Y.G. Sandanayake**

University of Moratuwa  
Katubedda, Sri Lanka  
[ysandanayake@uom.lk](mailto:ysandanayake@uom.lk)

### ABSTRACT

Conflicts between design team professionals is a common experience in building construction projects in Sri Lanka. Depending on the way they are been handled, these conflicts bring either positive or negative impacts to the project. Thus, this paper investigates the conflict-handling styles that the professionals use to handle different types of conflicts among themselves at pre-contract stage of construction projects in Sri Lanka.

The study on different types of conflicts and handling styles were derived through quantitative approach by a questionnaire survey designed incorporating Rahim's Organisational Conflict Inventory-II (ROCI-II) with the participation of 42 number of professionals engaged during the pre-contract stage of building construction projects in Sri Lanka. The scope of the study was limited to the building construction projects and only to the conflicts among professionals at the same level. The collected data were analysed using descriptive statistics.

The research findings revealed that there are four types of conflicts: task, relationship, process and status conflicts, occur in different frequencies among the professionals. The task conflicts occur very often, and process conflicts occur often whilst relationship and status conflicts occur rarely among professionals during the pre-contract stage. This study revealed that professionals use different conflict handling styles to handle these four types of conflicts among themselves during the pre-contract stage of building construction projects in Sri Lanka. Further, majority of professionals use integrating style often to handle conflicts among themselves, and they use avoiding style very rarely to handle the conflicts among themselves except for relationship conflicts. However, to handle relationship conflicts, professionals use dominating style as the last option.

The study would assist the industry practitioners to identify their personnel conflict handling style and the outcome of using each style with their supervisors when handling conflicts during the pre-contract stage.

**KEYWORDS:** *Conflicts, Conflict-Handling Styles, Conflicts With Professionals, Construction Industry, Pre-Contract Stage.*

### 1 INTRODUCTION

Conflicts have been developed as a fundamental behaviour of human beings (Slabbert, 2004) and they are inevitable in the human lifestyle (Rahim, 1986). Conflicts have an impact on individuals, teams as well as organisations. In an organisational context, conflicts reduce the productivity, the satisfaction of the employees and impact the routines of production. However, it also enhances the quality of decision making, performance and the creativity of the products by contributing to the progress of the productivity and the organizational culture (Jehn, 2005). In contrary, unaddressed conflicts lower the moral, job satisfaction and increase the tension between individuals resulting a poor working environment (Hastings, Kavookjian, & Ekong, 2018). Thus, in an organisational view, recognising and

addressing conflicts properly may bring benefits to the organisation as well as to the personals involved (Silverthorne, 2005).

With the unique nature of construction projects, conflicts appear as a common problem (Zhu, Wang, Yu, & Yang, 2020) in every construction project. It compels the project stakeholders to accept conflicts and manage them (Zhang & Huo, 2015). Improper management of conflicts could lead the construction workforce to cause loss of opportunities (Brown, 1983). On the other hand, ignorance of conflicts could lead to problems with serious impacts on the project as well as on the relationships maintained throughout the years (Augsburger, 1992). However, a study on Chinese construction projects revealed that inter-organisational conflicts with moderated conflict management strategies add value to construction projects (Wu, Zhao, & Zuo, 2017). Another study has shown that intra-group conflicts boost innovation, constructive decision providing, learning and development opportunities for different levels of construction industry (Senaratne, Udawatta, & Gunasekara, 2013).

There are many dynamics to construction conflicts. Recognizing these dynamics and signifying the relationships among them at the beginning may assist the project stakeholders to study the conflicts and address them accordingly (Charkhakan & Heravi, 2019). Therefore, as a phase that decide the fundamentals and a stage that arrive at important decisions, hassle free environment during pre-contract stage of a construction project is very crucial. Thus, the multidisciplinary team engaged in pre-contract stage has a great influence over the success of the project (Senaratne, Udawatta, & Gunasekara, 2013).

However, when handling conflicts, the management has to choose the most suitable conflict handling style that brings the best solution to the conflict (Ogunbayo, 2013), as it assists to meet the set goals and objectives as planned. Therefore, each conflict should be handled carefully by using the suitable conflict handling style. In comparison with other sectors, due to complex nature, construction industry has become a fertile ground for conflicts. However, only few studies have been offered investigations on construction conflicts and conflicts handling styles, identifying their impacts on different aspects both in global and local construction contexts.

In terms of global construction context, impact of conflicts on cross-functional project team innovation (Guo H. , Zhang, Huo, & Xi, 2019), impacts of conflicts on project team motivation in Nigerian construction industry (Ogunbayo, 2013), impacts of conflicts on construction project added values in Chinese construction industry (Guangdong, ZhaoJian , & Zuo, 2017) can be identified. Considering the local context, conflicts and management styles in Sri Lankan commercial building sector (Gunarathna, Yang, & Fernando, 2018) and intragroup conflicts in the pre-contract stage of construction projects (Senaratne, Udawatta, & Gunasekara, 2013) can be highlighted.

With the alliance of professionals in different disciplines, conflicts in pre-contract stage, can heavily impact the success of the project. Considering the Sri Lankan construction projects, conflicts have become a common experience (Senaratne, Udawatta, & Gunasekara, 2013). In terms of Sri Lankan construction industry, three types of conflicts, i.e., task conflict, process conflict and relationship conflict are highlighted by the previous research (Gunarathna, Yang, & Fernando, 2018; Senaratne, Udawatta, & Gunasekara, 2013).

In spite of time-tested conflict management styles that use to handle these conflicts, in the local context, the sensibleness, pertinence, and appropriateness of each style in each project get varied as they may cause different consequences that affect the progress of the project. Among the research conducted on construction conflicts, a gap is observed in examining the conflict handling styles that address different types of conflicts during the pre-contract stage of Sri Lankan building construction projects. Thus, this study aims to investigate the conflict-handling styles used by professionals at pre-contract stage of building construction projects in Sri Lanka.

## **2 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 An introduction to conflict**

Conflict is a common phenomenon to every individual's life and unable to avoid at any cost (Hussein, Al-Mamary, & Hassan, 2017). Throughout these years, many authors have taken attempts to define the concept of conflict using different parameters. Different interests, technical proficiency, environment and precedence of stakeholders, a conflict can mold with different framework, political and statutory influence, economic, cultural and social background to name a few (Irfaan, Thaheem,

Gabriel, Malik, & Nasir, 2019). However, the modern model identifies the conflict as a concept that deals with functionality of the person or the organization that impacts to its growth (Alper, Tjosvold, & Law, 2000). Considering the fact, based on their outcomes and processes, several researchers have introduced different classifications of conflicts.

Conflicts can be natural and functional. At the same time, it can be constructive or unnatural. In contrast, it can also be dysfunctional, destructive and unproductive (Gardiner & Simmons, 1992). Conflicts among individuals and groups can appear as an interpersonal conflict, intrapersonal conflict, intra-group conflict or intergroup conflict (Axley, 1996). Adding more to this classification, it was found that except for the above four types, it can also appear as an inter-organizational conflict (Thakore, 2013). In another perspective, conflicts can be collaborative and competitive (De Dreu, 2007). It also can be classified as cognitive and affective (Amason & Sapienza, 1997) or functional and dysfunctional (Gorse, 2003). Conflicts can bring either a positive or a negative impact depend on the way they are being handled (Johari, Morni, Bohari, & Sahari, 2013). In terms of organizational conflicts, addressing these conflicts consist of a series of tasks that begins with diagnosis, intervention at different levels and use of conflict handling styles to handle them (Rahim, 2003).

Considering the different sectors of the world, construction industry and the construction projects are also considered as vulnerable grounds for conflicts. Thus, these temporary multi-organizations can be impacted constructively or destructively by different types of conflicts (Tabassi, Abdullah, & Bryde, 2019). Among the attempts taken to classify construction conflicts, one of the classifications that widely used is task conflicts, relationship conflicts and process conflicts (Jehn & Mannix, 1997; Senarathna and Udawatta, 2013; Gunarathna, Yang, & Fernando, 2018). Adding more to this classification, Bendersky and Hays, (2012) identified the fourth type as status conflicts (Bendersky & Hays, 2012). The speedy development of construction industry had led itself into interorganizational conflicts (Tabassi, Abdullah, & Bryde, 2019) and branded as being vulnerable to conflicts (Ofori, 2013).

## 2.2 Types of conflicts

A **task-based conflict** can create due to a disagreement on a decision taken, due to different perspectives and opinions, personnel insights among the members of the group or individuals (Rahim, 2002; Suifan, Alhyari, & Sweis, 2019). It assists wise decisions, strategic planning (Amason, 1996), improves innovation (Kiernan, Ledwith, & Lynch, 2020) and facilitates information flow among the group members whilst enhancing the group's effectiveness (Zhang & Zhang, 2012; Kiernan, Ledwith, & Lynch, 2020). However, task conflicts could make serious impacts on the satisfaction of team members. They could also strengthen the conflict and reduce the functionality of the team as they are not directly associated with affective reactions (Jehn, 1995). **Relationship conflicts** are sequential and re-occur very often among parties to the conflict (Jehn, 1995). They are linked to the disagreements or incompatibilities of individuals on emotional grounds (Suifan, Alhyari, & Sweis, 2019). It negatively impacts the ability of thinking and analyzing new information (Jehn, 1995). Individuals with relationship conflicts feel destructive, doubtful, annoyed, or angry (Rahim, 2002). therefore, it can delay the performance (Shawa, Lello, & Ntiyakunze, 2018) and bring irresolvable issues, affect decision quality and reduce the commitment to the group (Roloff, Miller, & Malis, 2007). **Process conflicts** create due to mismatch of opinions on the method of the work to be carried out (Suifan, Alhyari, & Sweis, 2019). Poor communication, failure to obey rules and regulations, unable to agree on methods of work, distribution of workload, issues in scheduled work are the key causes of process conflicts that mainly related to contractual documents (Gunarathna, Yang, & Fernando, 2018). Process conflicts could lower satisfaction (Suifan, Alhyari, & Sweis, 2019) and lead the group to inefficiency. **Status conflicts** occur due to the attempts taken to secure or promote individual's own status. (Bendersky & Hays, 2012). The key reason for status conflict is the disagreement on the extent of dominance experience in the social life of an individual (Gould, 2003). Since a construction project is considered as a temporary multi-organization (Gonzalo, de Blois, & Latunova, 2011), these four types of conflicts that describes the behavior of individuals in an organizational context is used for further analysis of conflict handling styles used by the professionals during per-contract stage of building construction projects in Sri Lanka.

### 2.3 Conflicts in Pre-contract stage

In the perspective of construction industry, a construction project creates more conflicts among the different stakeholders assigned and within the project itself from the beginning to its end (Irfaan et. al, 2019; Zhu et. al, 2020). These conflicts create different forms in different stages throughout its life cycle (Wu, Zhao, Zuo, & Zillante, 2017). Among these conflicts, the conflicts between design entities can make a significance impact on the performance schedule (Safapour, Kermanshachi, Nipa, & Kamalirad, 2019). In exchanging of resources, knowledge and information, due to the complexity and multidisciplinary involvement, the project participants get into various conflicts during the project implementation stage (Wu, Zhao, & Zuo, 2017). Conflicts can occur due to stakeholders of the pre-contract activities (Shin, 2005). The effect of these conflicts on the members of the team can impact the construction project either positively or negatively (Tabassi et. al, 2019). Poor communication, lack of trust and misinterpretation of contract, unawareness of their roles and responsibilities, poor risk management in the contract, mainly lead the construction projects and its team to conflicts in the pre-contract stage (Shin, 2005).

### 2.4 Conflict handling styles

Conflicts can be handled using different conflict handling styles (Rahim & Magner, 1995). Depending on the conflict management style used, the outcome can either be positive or negative (Wang, Wu, Gu, & Hu. L., 2021). However, the general idea of all these management styles is to minimize the negative effects whilst maximizing the positive effects on the parties engaged (Rahim & Magner, 1995). Examining its' nature, outcome and impacts, many researchers have introduced different techniques to control these conflicts (Johari, Morni, Bohari, & Sahari, 2013). Corporation and Competition Model by Deutsch (1949), Knudson, Sommers and Golding Theory (1980), Mary Follet Theory (1940), Putnam and Wilson Theory (1982), Blake and Mouton Managerial Grid (1964), Thomas and Kilmann Two-dimensional Model (1976), Rahim Model (1985) and Pruitt and Rubin Model (1986) to name a few. Among them, Rahim's two-dimensional model developed referring the theory of Blake and Mouton managerial grid (1964) and Thomas-Kilman two-dimensional model (1976), analyses the concern on our self against on others with five conflict handling styles. They are **integrating style**: trying to arrive at a solution by valuing both goals and relationships, **obliging style**: arriving at a solution valuing relationship over goals, **avoiding style**: value avoiding the conflict over their goals or relationship, **compromising style**: attempting to arrive at a solution concerning both their goals and relationships moderately and **dominating style**: trying to find a solution valuing their goals over relationships (Rahim, 1985). Among them, significant number of researchers of conflict management regard the Rahim's two-dimensional model as a successive mode of discussing the behavioural pattern of individuals as it claims user friendliness, unambiguous interpretation and fruitful predictions comparing to other theories. It provides a clear picture as well as firm yet flexible approach for conflict management (Gunarathna, Yang, & Fernando, 2018). Thus, this study used the Rahim's two-dimensional model to analyze the usage of conflict handling styles by the professionals during the pre-contract stage of building construction projects in Sri Lanka.

### 2.5 Conflict handling instruments

To study the behavioural patterns of individuals and groups against set of conflict handling styles discussed in different models, many researchers have developed conflict handling instruments. Hall's Conflict management survey (Hall, 1969), Thomas and Kilmann's MODE: Management of Difference Exercise (Thomas and Kilmann, 1974), Putnam and Wilson's Organizational Communication Conflict Instrument (Putnam and Wilson, 1982), Ross and DeWine's Conflict Management Message Style Instrument (Ross & DeWine, 1982), Rahim's Organizational Conflict Inventory (ROCI) (Rahim, 1983) to name a few. Among these, the commonly used Rahim's Organizational Conflict Inventory-II (ROCI-II) measures how the members of the organization handle conflict with Supervisor, peers and subordinates through a questionnaire consist of 28 phrases. The questionnaire discloses the personnel conflict handling style that an individual would naturally use to handle conflicts with others (Rahim, 1983). Hence, this research used the well established ROCI-II as the basis for the data collection to achieve the research aim.

### 3 METHODOLOGY

With the knowledge gathered through a comprehensive literature survey on conflict types, conflict handling styles and instruments, the research was continued further with the quantitative approach to examine the resistance of different types of conflicts against the frequency of usage of conflict handling styles established by Rahim (1985). The study was focused on the conflict types and their handling styles used by the professionals during the pre-contract stage of building construction projects in Sri Lanka. Since conflict is a global concept and solely depend on the individual preference, a questionnaire was developed to identify the individual preference of conflict handling styles. The questionnaire was designed, incorporating the ROCI-II, Form C – handling conflicts with professionals at the same level (peers), a pre-defined and time-tested questionnaire on the behaviour of individuals in handling conflicts. It is designed to measure the conflict handling styles in an organizational context. Further, ROCI-II is a simple and a time saving instrument that a reader can easily fill out.

The questionnaire was distributed among 67 construction industry professionals (Adjudicator, Architects, Cost Managers, Engineers, Project Managers and Quantity Surveyors) engaged in pre-contract stage of building construction projects in Sri Lanka, selected through purposive sampling. However, only 42 out of 67 questionnaires returned back. In assessing the occurrence of different types of conflicts and usage of different conflict handling styles when handling conflicts between peers during the pre-contract stage of building construction projects, two different 5-point Likert scales were introduced as shown in Tables 1(a) and 1(b) respectively.

Table 1(a): Likert scale for assessing occurrence of different types of conflicts

	Value	Range
Never	1	1.00 – 1.80
Very rare	2	1.81 – 2.60
Rare	3	2.61 – 3.40
Often	4	3.41 – 4.20
Very often	5	4.21 – 5.00

Table 1(b): Likert scale for assessing usage of different conflict handling styles

	Value	Range
Strongly disagree	1	1.00 – 1.80
Disagree	2	1.81 – 2.60
Moderate	3	2.61 – 3.40
Agree	4	3.41 – 4.20
Strongly agree	5	4.21 – 5.00

The collected data were analyzed using mean, standard deviation (SD), frequency and percentage counts to study the usage of conflict handling styles used by professionals to handle different types of conflicts with other professionals in the same level during the pre-contract stage of building construction projects of Sri Lanka.

### 4 DATA ANALYSIS

#### 4.1 Demographic Information of Respondents

The respondents were professionals of construction industry engaged in the pre-contract stage of building construction projects in Sri Lanka. Table 2 shows the classification of respondents and their number of years of experience in construction industry.

Table 2: Classification of professionals against the years of experience in construction industry

Experience	Engineer	Architect	Quantity Surveyor	Project Manager	Cost-Manager	Adjudicator
< 5 Years	3					
5 - 10 Years	3	2	12		1	
11 - 15 years	3		5			
16 – 20 years	1		4	1		
> 20 Years	1		4		1	1



According to Table 2, the highest number of (42%) of professionals possess, 5 to 10 years of experience in the construction industry followed by 19%, 16%, 14% and 7.14% possess 11-15 years, 16-20 years, over 20 years and below 5 years of experience, respectively.

From the collected data, the experience of different professionals in pre-contract stage of the construction industry is graphically illustrated in Figure 1.

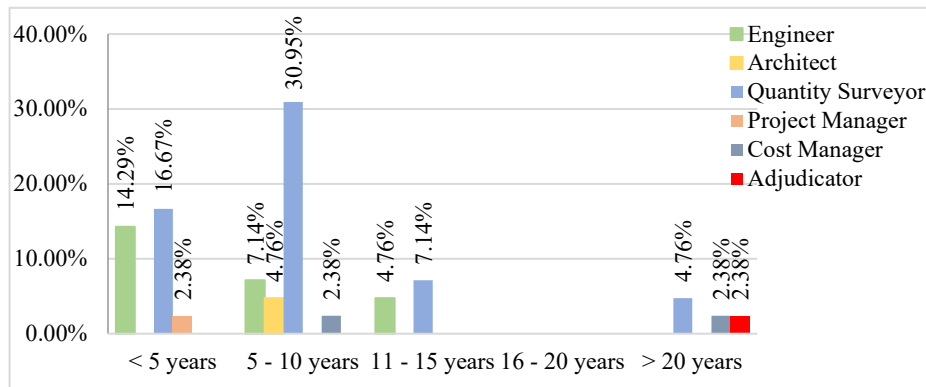


Figure 1: Classification of professionals against the years of experience in pre-contract stage

Figure 1 indicates that the majority of 45.23% of professionals possess 5-10 years of experience in the pre-contract stage of building construction projects. However, no professional possesses 16-20% years of experience. Further 9.52% of the professionals have more than 20 years of experience in the pre-contract stage.

According to Table 3 given below, 78% of professionals experience conflicts with their peers and over 90% of professionals have experience in resolving the conflicts with their peers.

Table 3: Experience of having conflicts and resolving with peers

	Experience of having conflicts	Experience in resolving conflicts
With Peers	78.57%	90.48%

#### 4.2 Handling disagreements of conflicts with peers

To investigate the behaviour of the construction industry professionals engaged in pre-contract stage, when handling conflicts with their peers, ROCI-II - Form C was used. ROCI-II contains 28 phrases that study the behaviour of professionals handling conflicts with their peers. To determine the general conflict handling style, by score, a scoring key with five independent dimensions is given. The observations of professionals' behaviour during handling the conflicts with their peers is summarised in Table 4.

Table 4: Average agreement for usage of ROCI-II phrases against conflict-handling styles

Phrase		Mean	SD
<b>Integrating</b>			
1	I try to investigate an issue with my other party to find a solution acceptable to us	4.02	0.30
5	I try to work with my other party to find solution to a problem that satisfies our expectations	3.90	0.39
12	I exchange accurate information with my other party to solve a problem together	4.07	0.40
22	I try to bring all our concerns out in the open so that the issues can be resolved in the best possible way	4.24	0.41
23	I collaborate with my other party to come up with decisions acceptable to us	4.10	0.40
28	I try to work with my other party for a proper understanding of a problem	4.14	0.39
<b>Obliging</b>			
2	I generally try to satisfy the needs of my other party	4.00	0.38
11	I give in to the wishes of my other party	3.14	0.34
13	I usually allow concessions to my other party	3.17	0.42
19	I often go along with the suggestions of my other party	2.74	0.33
24	I try to satisfy the expectations of my other party	3.24	0.38
<b>Dominating</b>			
8	I use my influence to get my ideas accepted	3.12	0.36
9	I use my authority to make a decision in my favor	3.17	0.35
18	I use my expertise to make a decision in my favor	2.93	0.28
21	I am generally firm in pursuing my side of the issue	2.71	0.30
25	I sometimes use my power to win a competitive situation	3.26	0.33
<b>Avoiding</b>			
3	I attempt to avoid being "put on the spot" and try to keep my conflict with my other party to myself	3.26	0.36
6	I usually avoid open discussion of my differences with my other party	3.07	0.28
16	I try to stay away from disagreement with my other party	3.31	0.33
17	I avoid an encounter with my other party	2.69	0.35
26	I try to keep my disagreement with other party to myself in order to avoid hard feelings	3.24	0.36
27	I try to avoid unpleasant exchanges with my other party	3.33	0.37
<b>Compromising</b>			
4	I try to integrate my ideas with those of my other party to come up with a decision jointly	2.95	0.33
7	I try to find a middle course to resolve an impasse	3.43	0.40
10	I usually accommodate the wishes of my other party	3.64	0.41
14	I usually propose a middle ground for breaking deadlocks	3.52	0.41
15	I negotiate with my Supervisor so that a compromise can be reached	3.81	0.41
20	I use "give and take" so that a compromise can be made	3.40	0.38

Table 4, to handle conflicts between them and their peers , professionals use all five styles of Rahim’s two-dimensional model during the pre-contract stage of building construction projects in Sri Lanka. Moreover, the phrases under integrating style claim over all high mean values comparing to the phrases under other conflict handling styles.

### 4.3 Frequency of the occurrence of types of conflicts during the pre-contract stage of a construction project

Figure 2 and Table 5 show the frequency of occurrence of conflicts during pre-contract stage of construction projects.

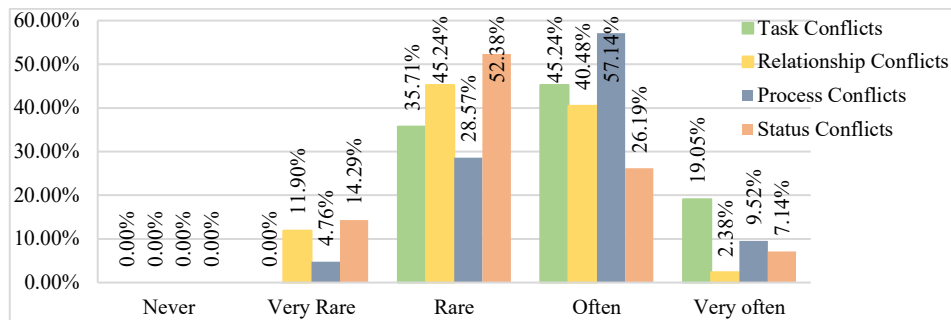


Figure 2: The occurrence of types of conflicts during the pre-contract stage of Sri Lankan building projects.

Table 5: Average of occurrence of different types of conflicts during pre-contract stage of Sri Lankan building construction projects.

Type of Conflict	Average of occurrence during pre-contract stage (w.a.)
Task Conflicts	3.83
Relationship Conflicts	3.33
Process Conflicts	3.71
Status Conflicts	3.26

During the pre-contract stage of building projects in Sri Lanka, task conflicts are the most common types of conflicts that occur very often. The process conflicts occur often. However, the data reveals that the status and relationship conflicts are rare during the pre-contract stage.

### 4.4 Frequency of conflict-handling styles used to resolve the types of conflicts with Peers

Table 6 shows the frequency of usage of different conflict handling styles used to handle different types of conflicts by the professionals during the pre-contract stage of building construction projects.

Table 6: Frequency of conflict-handling styles used to handle status conflicts.

Type of conflict	Integrating style	Obliging style	Dominating style	Avoiding style	Compromising style
Task Conflicts (w.a.)	3.67	2.88	2.71	2.45	2.74
Relationship Conflicts (w.a.)	3.38	2.90	2.50	2.52	2.83
Process Conflicts (w.a.)	3.67	2.88	2.71	2.43	2.81
Status Conflicts (w.a.)	3.52	2.74	2.71	2.48	2.69

Table 6 indicates that professionals often use integrating style to handle task conflicts with their peers. Moreover, it signifies that obliging style, compromising style and dominating styles are rarely used in the pre-contract stage. However, avoiding style is rarely used in handling task conflicts. In terms of relationship conflicts, professionals rarely use integrating, obliging and compromising styles and very rarely use avoiding and dominating styles to handle conflicts with their peers during pre-contract stage.

According to data, to resolve process conflicts with their peers, professionals often use integrating style and very rarely use avoiding style. However, data indicates obliging style, compromising style and



dominating styles are used rarely to handle conflicts during the pre-contract stage. In terms of status conflicts, professionals use integrating style often, whilst they use obliging, dominating and compromising styles rarely. Moreover, the data indicates that they very rarely use avoiding style to handle status conflicts with their peers.

## 5 DISCUSSION

Construction industry is a pool of conflicts and they are common in every construction project. It also indicates that professionals experience different types of conflicts with their peers during the pre-contract stage of building construction projects. Reinforcing the research findings, the literature proved that the term conflict and many of the associated concepts and ideas appear as a part of the nature of a construction project (Gardiner & Simmons, 1992). According to the literature, conflicts are classified in terms of their sources, causes, organisational levels of organisations, based on groups, their performance which are relevant to the construction industry. Among these classifications, task conflict, relationship conflicts, process conflicts and status conflicts can identify as a classification that attracts the attention of researchers and also the construction industry practitioners (Bendersky & Hays, 2012). Similarly, the research findings indicate that the professionals experience task, relationship, process and status conflicts in different frequencies during the pre-contract stage of building construction projects in Sri Lanka. Furthermore, the research findings indicate that task conflicts occur very often during the pre-contract stage. Accordingly, the literature showed that the members of the team never hesitate to oppose the others believe, attitudes and ideas of tasks related to design and innovation (Kiernan, Ledwith, & Lynch, 2020). Further, the findings indicate that, process conflict occur often among the professionals at the same level. The literature proved that, throughout the task fulfillments, process conflicts emphasize the process differences (Kiernan, Ledwith, & Lynch, 2020). However relationship conflicts and status conflicts appear to be rare in building construction projects in Sri Lanka. Similarly, Gunarathna and team (2018), revealed that due to task related matters, Sri Lankan construction industry faces relationship conflicts (Gunarathna, Yang, & Fernando, 2018).

Moreover, the research findings revealed that, during the pre-contract stage of building construction projects, professionals use all five conflict handling styles of Rahim's two-dimensional model: integrating style, obliging style, avoiding style, compromising style and dominating style in various instances during the pre-contract stage to handle conflicts with their peers. Similarly, the literature indicates that all these five styles are being used to handle conflicts in the Sri Lankan construction industry (Gunarathna, Yang, & Fernando, 2018). According to research findings, the mean scores that include each of five styles in form C (Conflict handling with peers) respectively are integrating: 4.07; obliging: 3.10; dominating: 3.05; avoiding: 3.16; and compromising: 3.60. Similarly, the norm established by Rahim (1983) confirms the mean scores as integrating: 4.24; obliging: 3.24; dominating: 3.16; avoiding: 2.72; and compromising: 3.59 (Rahim, 1983).

In terms of the relationship between conflict-handling styles and types of conflicts with peers, the research findings indicate, professionals use integrating style frequently to handle task, relationship, process and status conflicts with their peers during the pre-contract stage of building construction projects in Sri Lanka. Similarly, the literature proved that integrating is an opportunity of problem solving where every team member is respected by each other that open negotiations (Cheung & Chuah, 1999). It shows the keenness of professionals to maintain their relationships with their peers and at the same time whilst valuing their goals. The professionals use avoiding style seldom to handle task, process and status conflicts with their peers. However, to handle relationship conflicts, the results indicate that professionals use avoiding and dominating styles seldom. Similarly, the literature proved that, compromising, competing and avoiding styles highly distract fruitful results in negotiating (Cheung, Yiu Yiu, & Yeung, 2006). Thus, the statement reinforces the behaviour shown by the professionals when handling conflicts with the same level professionals (peers) during the pre-contract stage of building construction projects in Sri Lanka. Further, the literature indicates that the acceptance of conflict handling styles increases in the scale of dominating, compromising, avoiding, obliging and integrating (Cheung, Yiu Yiu, & Yeung, 2006).

The following Table 7 shows the summary of frequency of usage of conflict handling styles by professionals to handle different conflict types with their peers during the pre-contract stage of Sri Lankan building construction projects.

Table 7: Frequency of usage of conflict-handling styles to handle different conflict types

Conflict Type	Integrating Style	Obliging Style	Avoiding Style	Compromising Style	Dominating Style
Task Conflicts	Often	Rare	Very rare	Rare	Rare
Relationship Conflicts	Rare	Rare	Very rare	Rare	Very rare
Process Conflicts	Often	Rare	Very rare	Rare	Rare
Status conflicts	Often	Rare	Very rare	Rare	Rare

Table 7 indicates the varied preference of professionals of conflict handling styles in Rahim's two-dimensional model to handle different types of conflicts with their peers during per-contract stage of building construction projects.

## 6 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Immaterial of the extent of experience, conflict is a common concept among every individual and group. Temporary endeavours such as building construction projects can easily create variety of conflicts at the pre-contract stage as it claims the alliance of multidisciplinary professionals at the initial stages to design and plan the building project. The analysis conducted between the different conflict types and different conflict handling styles of professionals at the same level, may assist the professionals to identify their personnel conflict handling style they prefer when handling conflicts with their peers and assess each style and use during different occasions where they are applicable. Further, the study elaborates the behavioral pattern of professionals with different types of conflicts and different styles of conflict handling during the pre-contract stage of building construction projects. Moreover, the study reveals what kind of an impact that they could make on the project by using each style in different situations. Additionally, it confirms that integrating is the best style for a fruitful solution for a conflict occurs between peers. It is believed that the findings would assist the construction professionals to identify the conflicts they encounter with their peers and to go for a fruitful solution by using an effective conflict handling style whilst minimizing the impact on the building construction project.

During the study it was found that there are many research gaps yet to be filled related to conflicts and conflict handling styles. The research findings and conclusions in this research are moderately biased towards the behavioral pattern shown by Quantity surveying professionals during the pre-contract stage of building construction projects in Sri Lanka as the majority of 59.25% of questionnaires received, represents the community of Quantity Surveying. Therefore, the research can also be performed for other design team professionals for further research. As of other areas, Investigation of conflict-handling styles used during the construction stage of building construction projects in Sri Lanka, Investigation of the effect of conflict-handling styles on the satisfaction of design team members during the construction stage of building construction projects in Sri Lanka, can be identified.

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