Connecting information-processing styles and subordinate perceptions of transformational leadership and conflict-handling styles.

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Bachelor of Arts in Psychology with Honours

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This thesis is presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Psychology with Honours, Murdoch University, 2013.
I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work, which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary educational institution.

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Christine Swee
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Abstract

Conflict is a double-edged sword producing either constructive or destructive outcomes. This study aimed to investigate the mechanisms behind how rational and experiential-constructive information-processing systems (thinking preferences), according to the Cognitive-Experiential Self-Theory (CEST), drive effective transformational leadership behaviors, which in turn, could promote constructive conflict management. This study sought to examine whether there is a mediating effect of leadership behaviours on the relationship between thinking preferences and five conflict-handling styles. Survey data for 58 leader-subordinate dyad pairs were analyzed. Leaders completed self-report measures of thinking styles, while subordinates completed other-report measures of leadership and conflict-handling styles. Transformational leadership was found to be significantly and positively related to both behavioural coping (a concept of constructive thinking), and also the integrating and compromising conflict-handling styles. Laissez-faire leadership showed a significant positive relationship with the avoiding conflict-handling style. However, findings failed to establish a connection between conflict handling styles and information processing styles and, thus, did not find compelling evidence for a mediating relationship. It is suggested that future research should investigate whether emotional intelligence is a latent variable that may connect thinking, leadership and conflict-handling styles.

Key words: constructive conflict management, conflict-handling styles, perceptions, leadership, information-processing, cognitive-experiential self-theory, CEST.
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