

## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE NEED FOR COGNITIVE CLOSURE, EMOTIVE CONTROL AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION STRATEGIES AMONG ADOLESCENTS

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### Abstract

Interpersonal interactions may be characterized by various kinds of conflicts, disagreements, disapprovals, and confrontations. Many studies show that interpersonal conflicts are very often one of the most prominent sources of distress. Due to possible negative consequences on social relations and personal well-being, it is important to explore factors that contribute to the lack of assertiveness and destructive conflict outcomes. The goal of this research is to explore the relationship between the need for cognitive closure, emotional regulation, and conflict resolution strategies. The sample consists of 504 young people in Italy (aged 18 – 35), and they responded to a questionnaire distributed online, containing several scales (Need for cognitive closure, Emotional regulation, and conflict management styles (accommodating, avoiding, collaborating, competing, and compromising).

Multiple regression analyses confirmed the relevant role that the need for closure can have in conflict management, especially in interaction with emotional regulation. It was found that individuals with high NCC and low emotional regulation use to a higher level competing style in conflict management. In addition, it emerged that individuals with low NCC and high emotional regulation use more compromising style, whereas those with low NCC and low emotional regulation use less compromising style. Last but not least, we found that the individuals with low NCC and low emotional regulation use less collaborating style in conflict management.

**Keywords:** *Conflict resolution strategies, need for cognitive closure, emotive control.*

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### 1. Introduction

Interpersonal conflict is defined as “a process in which one party perceives that its interests are being opposed or negatively affected by another party” (Wall & Callister, 1995, p. 517) or as “a phenomenon that occurs between interdependent parties as they experience negative emotional reactions to perceived disagreements and interference with the attainment of their goals” (Barki & Hartwick, 2001, p. 198). Interpersonal conflicts are one of the most prominent sources of distress (Bolger, DeLongis, Kessler, & Schilling, 1989). The *Dual concern model* (Blake & Mouton, 1964) distinguished five styles of conflict management strategies: (1) accommodating conflict style (also labeled “yielding” or “smoothing”) is a tendency to give in to the other’s concerns while giving up one’s own needs and interests; high concern for people and low concern for productivity; (2) avoiding (inaction” or “withdrawing”) refers to evading interactions with the opponent (low concern for both, people and productivity); (3) collaborating style (“integrating” or “problem solving”) is characterized by a willingness to exchange information openly, to address differences constructively, and to make every effort to pursue a solution that will be mutually acceptable; high concern for both people and productivity; (4) competing (“dominating”, “forcing” or “contending”) is characterized by the use of forceful tactics such as threats, an unwillingness to move from one’s initial position, and a focus on defeating the opponents; low concern for people and high concern for productivity; (5) compromising (represents a moderate efforts to pursue an outcome that is mutually acceptable, mutual “give and take” until a middle course is found; moderated concern for both people and productivity).

Several studies confirmed that the choice of conflict management strategies is predicted by emotional regulation (Laslo-Roth & Schwarzwald, 2016; Montes et al., 2012). Emotional regulation refers primarily to attempts by an individual to manage the generation, experience, or expression of disruptive emotions (Gross, 1999), and it may have implications for social interactions and well-being (e.g., Berg, Skinner, & Ko, 2009).

This study hypothesizes that the choice of conflict management strategies may be predicted also by a motivational factor, such as the need for cognitive closure (NCC). NCC is defined as a desire for a definite answer to a question, any firm answer, rather than uncertainty, confusion, or ambiguity (Kruglanski, 1989). It can vary across individuals and situations. NCC may influence the way a person thinks or feels, and it is often associated with simplified and accelerated processing of information (e.g., Dijksterhuis, van Knippenberg, Kruglanski, & Schaper, 1996). People with high levels of NCC may display greater cognitive impatience, rigidity, impulsiveness, and reduced information processing (Kruglanski & Webster, 1996). Some studies have already confirmed a significant relationship between NCC and conflict management strategies. For example, it was found that a high NCC reduces the tendency to compromise in negotiation, and increases the tendency to act in an aggressive, competitive way (De Dreu, Koole, & Oldersma, 1999). It was also found that individuals with low NCC, who are more tolerant of opposing opinions, are more receptive to compromise (Shan, Kruglanski, & Thompson, 1998). However, the relationship between NCC and conflict management strategies has not been studied through the prism of emotional regulation.

## 2. Objectives

This study aims to examine the relationships between NCC, emotional control, and conflict management strategies. We hypothesized that emotional control may moderate the relationship between NCC and conflict management strategies. We expect that the participants with high NCC will prefer the conflict management styles that allow a fast closure in conflicting situations (e.g., accommodating, avoiding, and competing) especially when they have low emotional control.

## 3. Methods

### 3.1. Participants

This study involved 504 young people (62.5% females) from Italy. The participants' age varied from 18 to 35 ( $M=21.67$ ,  $SD=3.70$ ). Data were collected through a Google form. Students attending the course in social psychology were asked to respond and send the link to the questionnaire to their friends using the "snowball method". The research was approved by the Ethical Research Committee.

### 3.2. Measures

*The Dutch Test of Conflict Handling - DUTCH* (21 items; Janssen & van de Vliert, 1996) measures five conflict management strategies: accommodating, problem-solving, compromising, avoiding, and forcing. Responses were given on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). We calculated five indexes of conflict-handling styles.

*Emotional regulation scale* (10 items from the Multidimensional Social Competence Scale - MSCS; Trevisan, Tafreshi, Slaney, Yager, & Iarocci, 2018). Responses were given on a 4-point scale (0 = *strongly disagree* - 3 = *strongly agree*). The Principal Axis factor analysis showed a mono-factorial solution. An index of emotional regulation was created after reversing negative items ( $\alpha = .80$ ). Higher scores indicate a higher level of emotional regulation.

*The Revised Need for Cognitive Closure scale: (Rev NfCS, Pierro & Kruglanski, 2005)*. This 14-item scale measures NCC as a unitary construct trait. The participants were asked to rate the extent by which they agreed with statements on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree) (e.g., When I find myself facing various potentially valid alternatives; I decide in favour of one of them quickly and without hesitation). An index of NCC was created with higher scores indicating higher NCC (Cronbach  $\alpha = .85$ ).

*The Need for Closure Scale--short version* (14 items; Roets & Van Hiel, 2011). This measure is based on the Need for Closure Scale (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994). Items are rated on a 6-point rating scale (1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree). Ex.: I don't like uncertain situations; I dislike questions that could be answered in many different ways. An index of NCC was created with higher scores indicating higher NCC (Cronbach  $\alpha = .87$ ). The correlation between the two indexes of NCC is .57 and thus we calculated an average index of the need for closure.

## 4. Results

We checked for ceiling or floor effects by looking at the values of skewness and kurtosis for each variable of interest. All the variables presented acceptable values of both indices (no lesser than -2 or greater than 2; see George & Mallery, 2010). Then we calculated the correlations between the variables (Table 1). The analysis showed that the need for closure is associated positively with

accommodating, avoiding, and competing styles of conflict management, and negatively with emotional regulation. Emotional regulation is associated negatively with gender (females perceive lower emotional regulation), and positively with age, with collaborating, and with compromising styles of conflict management.

We ran five regression models using the statistical software SPSS 27. We considered as the criterion variables the conflict management styles, and we included as the predictors the need for cognitive closure, emotion regulations, the interaction between them and socio-demographic variables (gender and age). All the predictors and the outcome variables were standardized before the analysis. The results of the regression analyses are reported in Table 2.

In the first analysis, we considered collaborating (problem-solving) style in conflict management as a criterion variable. This model explained a significant portion of the variance ( $R^2_{adj} = .14$ ,  $F = 27.75$ ,  $p < .001$ ). There was a significant and positive effect of emotional regulation ( $\beta = .38$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and an effect of interaction between emotional regulation and NCC ( $\beta = -.08$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Individuals who have high levels of emotional regulation use more collaborating style in conflict management. We conducted a simple slope using SPSS to analyse the effect of interaction. We found a significant correlation between NCC and collaborating style only for the individuals with lower emotional regulation ( $\beta = .14$ ,  $p < .01$ ). As you can see from Figure 1, the participants with low NCC and low emotional control use the less collaborating style in conflict management.

In the second analysis, the competing style was considered as a criterion. This model explained a small portion of the variance ( $R^2_{adj} = .03$ ,  $F = 4.13$ ,  $p < .001$ ). We found a positive effect of NCC ( $\beta = .13$ ,  $p < .005$ ), a negative effect of emotional regulation ( $\beta = -.10$ ,  $p < .04$ ), and an effect of interaction between emotional regulation and NCC ( $\beta = -.11$ ,  $p < .02$ ). From the simple slope analysis emerged a significant correlation between NCC and competing style only for the individuals with low emotional control ( $\beta = .26$ ,  $p < .001$ ). We found that the individuals who have high NCC use more competing style in conflict management if they have low emotional regulation (Figure 2).

In the third analysis, we used the compromising style as a criterion. This model explained a significant portion of the variance ( $R^2_{adj} = .16$ ,  $F = 19.5$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Here emerged a significant and positive effect of emotional regulation ( $\beta = .37$ ,  $p < .001$ ), of gender ( $\beta = .14$ ,  $p < .002$ ), and an effect of interaction between emotional regulation and NCC ( $\beta = -.18$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Females and individuals who have high levels of emotional regulation use more compromising style in conflict management. From the simple slope analysis emerged a significant negative correlation between NCC and compromising style for the individuals with high emotional regulation ( $\beta = -.11$ ,  $p < .04$ ) and a positive correlation for the individuals with low emotional control ( $\beta = .19$ ,  $p < .001$ ). We can see that the individuals with low NCC and high emotional regulation use more compromising style, whereas those with low NCC and low emotional control use less compromising style (Figure 3).

In the following analysis, we used accommodating style as a criterion. It explained a small portion of the variance ( $R^2_{adj} = .02$ ,  $F = 2.5$ ,  $p < .03$ ). Here emerged only a significant effect of NCC ( $\beta = .12$ ,  $p < .009$ ), and of age ( $\beta = .09$ ,  $p < .04$ ). Individuals with a higher level of NCC and those who are a bit older use more this style of conflict management.

In the last regression, the avoiding style was used as a criterion variable. This model also explained a small portion of the variance ( $R^2_{adj} = .05$ ,  $F = 6.06$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Here emerged a significant effect of NCC ( $\beta = .21$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and of emotional regulation ( $\beta = .11$ ,  $p < .02$ ). Individuals who have higher NCC and higher emotional regulation use more this style of conflict regulation. However, we did not find a significant effect of interaction between these two variables.

## 5. Discussion / conclusions

We hypothesized that the participants with high NCC prefer the conflict management styles that allow a fast closure in conflicting situations (e.g., accommodating, avoiding, and competing) especially when they have low emotional control. Our results confirmed the relevant role that the need for closure can have in conflict management, especially in interaction with emotional regulation. It emerged that individuals with high NCC and low emotional control use more competing styles in conflict management. In addition, it emerged that the individuals with low NCC and high emotional regulation use more compromising styles, whereas those with low NCC and low emotional control use less compromising styles. Last but not least, we found that the individuals with low NCC and low emotional control use less collaborating styles in conflict management. However, we have not found an interaction effect between NCC and emotional regulation for accommodating and avoiding styles. We think that there could be additional factors that may interact with NCC and emotional regulation that should be taken into consideration in future studies.

Table 1. Correlations between the variables.

	1)	2)	3)	4)	5)	6)	7)	8)
1) NCC	-							
2) Emotional regulation	-.15	-						
3) Gender	-.01	-.15**	-					
4) Age	.05	.11*	-.18	-				
5) Accommodating	.13*	.04	.01	.09	-			
6) Avoiding	.22**	.09	.05	.03	.35**	-		
7) Collaborating	.01	.36**	.15*	-.02	.21**	.22**	-	
8) Competing	.16**	-.11	.01	-.01	-.11	.03	.23**	-
9) Compromising	-.02	.35**	.08	.05	.35**	.35**	.58**	.17**

Table 2. Results of Multiple Regression Analysis for conflict management styles.

	Collaborating		Competing		Compromising		Accommodating		Avoiding	
	$\beta$	<i>p</i>	$\beta$	<i>p</i>	$\beta$	<i>p</i>	$\beta$	<i>p</i>	$\beta$	<i>p</i>
NCC	.07	ns	.13	.005	.03	ns	.12	.009	.21	.001
Emotional regulation	.38	.001	-.10	.04	.37	.001	.04	ns	.11	.02
Gender	.05	ns	-.01	ns	.14	.002	.03	ns	.07	ns
Age	.01	ns	-.02	ns	.04	ns	.09	.04	.01	ns
NCC x Emotional regulation	-.08	.05	-.11	.02	-.18	.001	-.04	ns	.07	ns

Figure 1. Collaborating style of conflict management in relation to NCC and emotional regulation.

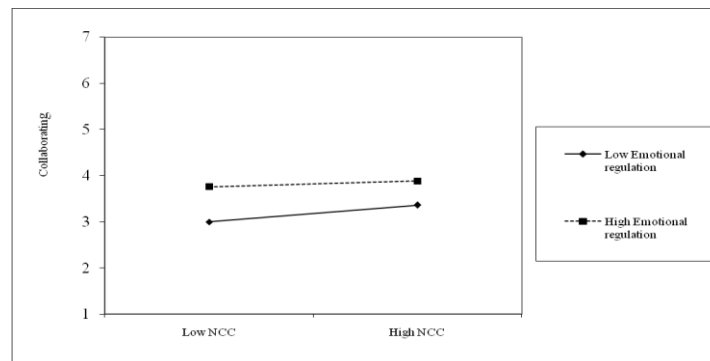


Figure 2. Competing style of conflict management in relation to NCC and emotional regulation.

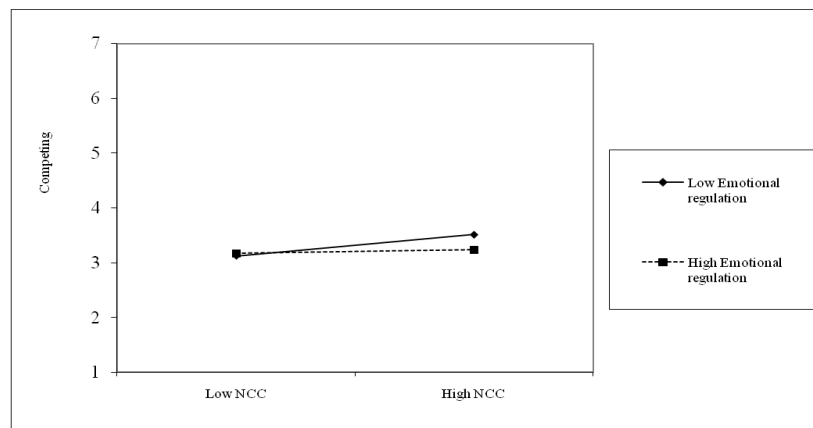
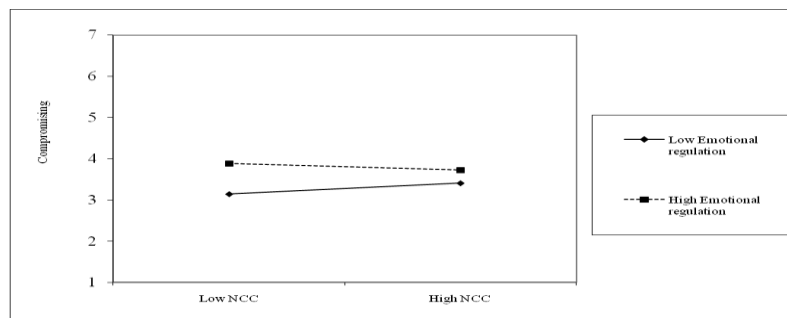


Figure 3. Compromising style of conflict management in relation to NCC and emotional regulation.



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