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Thai Conceptualizations of Forgiveness Within a Work Context and Comparison with  
Western Models

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## Abstract

Research has focused almost exclusively on forgiveness in individualistic Western culture despite acknowledgement of the importance of cultural factors. Conflict at work is relatively common yet studies of forgiveness in work contexts are rare, as are qualitative studies. To address these short-comings, this study conceptualizes the forgiveness process based on the experiences of Thai nurses in a hospital context within a collectivist culture heavily influenced by Buddhism. Thirty nurses were interviewed and qualitative methods (Miles & Huberman, 1994) were used to identify participants' cognitions, emotions, and behaviors in relation to the offensive event. Four continuous stages of the forgiveness process were identified: an experiencing stage, re-attribution stage, forgiveness stage, and behavioral stage. There were similarities with Western individualistic models but also some crucial differences in the ordering of events and a clear distinction between decisional and emotional forgiveness. The study also addressed the meaning of forgiveness as defined by participants, thus providing a Thai understanding of forgiveness. Five dimensions of forgiveness were identified: overcoming negative approaches towards the offender, abandonment of negative judgment, fostering of positive approaches and loving-kindness towards the offender, awareness of the benefits of forgiveness, and forgiveness as incorporated within Buddhist beliefs. Social factors within the work environments and the influence of Buddhist beliefs were also discussed as factors facilitating forgiving behavior. The cultural differences identified encourage reflection on the applicability of Western intervention models across cultures and can help inform the practice of counseling psychology.

*Key Words: defining forgiveness, forgiveness process, work context, Thailand, Buddhist perspectives.*

## Thai Conceptualizations of Forgiveness Within a Work Context and Comparison with Western Models

The ability to forgive is conceptualized within positive psychology as an important virtue found in all cultures. There is now a considerable body of research on forgiveness recognizing its importance in conflict resolution. However, most of this work is quantitative and focuses almost exclusively on forgiveness in Western culture, despite researchers and clinicians being encouraged to explore the roles of cultural and contextual factors in forgiveness (Sandage, Hill, & Vang, 2003). This study addresses some of the deficiencies in the literature by adopting qualitative methods to explore the meaning and process of forgiveness within Thai culture which has a more collectivist focus framed within the Buddhist religion. The fit of the forgiveness models generated in the West to the Thai data will be examined so we begin by reviewing the main Western models.

### **Western Models of Forgiveness**

Competing models of forgiveness have emerged in the Western literature. The earliest and still the most detailed is the cognitive process model of Enright where forgiveness is the outcome of an interplay between cognitions, emotions, and behavior. The wronged individual begins with negative feelings, thoughts, and wishes to respond negatively but over time these are replaced with more positive ones (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000). The model has been developed as an intervention to develop forgiveness and a 20-step process is outlined which involves four phases, an uncovering phase, where the individual examines the event and feels the pain associated with it; a decisional phase involving exploring the possibility and making the cognitive commitment to work towards forgiveness; a work phase involving reframing the event, exploring the motivations of the offender and becoming more empathic towards him/her, accepting the associated pain and becoming more compassionate towards the offender; and finally the outcome phase where through giving forgiveness the individual is

healed (Enright, 2001; Enright, Freedman, & Rique, 1998). However, there is as yet no empirical evidence for all the applicability of all the stages in the process of becoming forgiving (Freedman, Enright, Knutson, 2005).

McCullough, Worthington, and Rachal, (1997) developed a model which included nine steps to forgiveness focusing on becoming more empathic towards the offended, cognitively reframing the offence, reflecting on one's own short-comings and the needs of the offender. The nine phases are in essence all included within the Enright model so will not be considered separately in the comparisons with the Thai model. Baskin and Enright, (2004) conducted a meta-analysis of intervention studies utilizing both models and concluded that both were effective in promoting change. However both models focus on forgiveness within an individualistic culture. This conceptualization of forgiveness involves the individual being upset for some injustice done to him/her and then working through the psychological process either on their own or with the help of a counselor. The focus is on the self as with most of Western psychology, and the decision to forgive is a personal one.

McCullough and his various colleagues have conceptualized forgiveness as involving a refocusing of motivations (McCullough, 2001; McCullough, Pargament, & Thoresen, 2000; McCullough, & Witvliet, 2002; McCullough, & Worthington, 1994). Reliable scales to measure these motivations have been developed and here forgiveness is conceptualized as involving an increase in benevolent motivations, and a decrease in grudge holding and revenge motivations. DiBlasio (1998) introduced the concept of decisional forgiveness, which involves a change in will-power within the individual so that they no longer think badly of the offender and seek to harm him/her. Worthington (2003) has expanded on this conceptualization by making a distinction between decisional and emotional forgiveness, suggesting that decisional precedes emotional and that the latter is more difficult to achieve, taking time and possibly the intervention of a counselor. There is also a wealth of research

on individual differences in forgivingness and on variables thought to influence the process but it is all located within the Western model of individualistic psychology.

### **Forgiveness in the Workplace**

With the exception of the intervention studies, most of the research participants have been students, studied within an educational context. There is very little theory and empirical research on forgiveness in the workplace (Aquino et al., 2003; Madsen, Gygi, Hammand, & Plowman, 2002). Madsen et al. (2002) suggested that understanding forgiveness in the workplace is a complex undertaking. Relating to others inevitably exposes people to the risk of being offended or harmed by those other people (McCullough, 2001). Relationships among co-workers are sometimes interrupted by interpersonal offences that can easily escalate into more serious conflicts and even violence among workers (Aquino, Grover, Goldman, & Folger, 2003; Struthers, Dupuis, & Eaton, 2005). Regardless of the scale, conflict may be an inevitable workplace problem (Butler & Mullis, 2001).

Forgiveness is one positive strategy that may moderate workplace conflict and stimulate cooperation (Butler & Mullis, 2001). Using forgiveness as a problem-solving strategy can reduce feelings of anger, resentment, and negative judgment regarding the offender (McCullough & Worthington, 1994). It is argued that forgiveness should be an important concern of organizational theorists and managers in the workplace (Aquino et al., 2003; Stone, 2002). Moreover, at the individual level, forgiveness is associated with better health and personal well-being of the workers (McCullough & Witvliet, 2002). To address the dearth of research on forgiveness in the workplace, this research explores case studies of conflict situations in the workplace within nursing teams in Thailand described by nurses during one-to-one interviews.

In Thailand, nurses must operate collaboratively within their own profession and with other medical staff through teamwork in order to care for their patients. Such teamwork in

health care environments has been shown to be stressful and is likely to lead to high levels of work conflict (Yuthvoravit, 2007). However, according to traditional Thai culture, conflict and associated displays of anger and other associated emotions should be avoided.

Complaining directly to the transgressor is considered to be rude. Complaints are dealt with very subtly perhaps via a third party known to both. It is frowned upon to attempt to apportion blame. Status is important with lower status individuals being less likely to challenge higher status individuals. Age is respected so that it is rude to challenge an older person. Being of a higher status in a situation also brings greater expectations that high standards of behavior should be demonstrated. Protecting face is important and loss of face should be avoided if at all possible. In terms of dealing with conflict situations the Thai phrase, "mai pen rai" translated as "it doesn't matter" is commonly used reflecting the Buddhist perspective on the attitude to adopt to conflict (Hofstede, 2001). Despite these cultural prohibitions, Yuthvoravit (2007) found that work conflict did occur in nursing teams and tended to involve senior nurses. The causes of these conflicts were poor communication, conflicts of interest, and differences in competencies. Some previous Thai research reported that individuals attempt to use constructive and cooperative ways to resolve their work conflicts but did not examine forgiveness (Wannapaktr, 1994; Jaroenbootra, 2004). By focusing on instances of work conflict where the need for forgiveness arises and how this is handled by individual nurses, this research will produce a model of the process of forgiveness in Thai nurses. This model and definitions of forgiveness produced by the Thai sample will then be compared with those in the Western literature for fit and any cultural influences will be highlighted so that they can inform the counseling process.

## **Method**

In this study, qualitative inquiry and analysis was used to understand and identify the concepts of forgiveness from the experiences of Thai nurses. The researcher conducted qualitative methodology as recommended by Miles and Huberman (1994). They suggested that “we think that social phenomena exist not only in the mind but also in the objective world and that some lawful and reasonable stable relationships are to be found among them”. Moreover, they present their approach as “Transcendental realism”, which aims to explain the causality and to investigate to prove that each entity or situation is an example of explanation (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 4). Further details of the method are given later.

### **Participants**

The participants for this study were selected using multiple-case sampling with type of organization (government and private hospital) and medical specialism as the sampling parameters (Miles & Huberman, 1994) to ensure a range of conflict situations. This resulted in thirty cases (28 female, 2 male). Eighteen participants were employed in government hospitals and 12 in private hospitals. With regard to medical specialism, 8 worked in critical care, 7 in inpatients, 5 in outpatients, 4 in emergency, 2 in community psychiatry, 2 in surgery, 1 in internal control, and 1 in obstetrics. Sixteen participants were aged under 30 years, 9 were aged 31-40 years, 4 were aged 41-50 years, and one was over 50 years at interview.

### **Procedure**

Permission to conduct the research was given by the heads of the hospitals and ethical approval was given by the university. Semi-structured tape-recorded interviews were conducted in the participants’ workplace after their shifts. They lasted thirty minutes on average. Participants were asked to recall a work event where they had been offended and the need for forgiveness arose. The interview schedule then explored the participants’



experiences about the offensive event and forgiveness following the guidelines in Lawler-Row, Scott, Raines, Edlis-Matityahou, and Moore (2007). For example, details were requested about the nature of the offence, who had committed it, how they felt about it, how seriously they rated it, and whether and how fully they had forgiven the offender. Once the offensive experience had been discussed, participants were asked to supply a definition of forgiveness. The goal was to collect instant real working definitions of forgiveness with a focus on real world events. Finally, they were asked about the necessity of reconciliation for forgiveness in the work context.

### **Data Collection**

Interviews were conducted in the participants' workplace when they had finished their shifts. The researcher officially requested permission to conduct the research from the heads of the hospitals of the interviewees. The schedule for the interview sessions were individually by contacting each of the interviewees in the various operational units. In the interview session, the interviewer asked the participant for permission to record his or her conversation, and the rationale and research aims were informed to clarify the interview's objectives. Each nurse allowed and signed the consent form for the researcher to conduct the interview about their experiences of forgiveness in the workplace. The researcher constructed an interview schedule following the guidelines in Lawler-Row, Scott, Raines, Edlis-Matityahou, and Moore (2007) which aimed to explore the participants' experiences about the offensive event and forgiveness. For example, the nurses are asked to describe a time "when a colleague at work deeply hurt or disappointed you and you later forgave him/her for doing it". Then, the following details were included: "Who deeply hurt you or caused you to feel angry?", "His/her behaviors or actions that caused you feel angry or painful?", and rating of seriousness, "How long did you feel angry or ruminate on this offense?", "How did you deal with your anger or desire for revenge?", "How fully have you forgiven the offender?". After

receiving a response from the nurse, the interviewer may then ask “Why did you forgive him/her/them?” After being asked about the offensive experience and whether they had forgiven, the researcher also asked them about their definition of forgiveness, saying “what does forgiveness mean to you?” The goal is to collect instant real working definition of forgiveness, rather than memorized conceptualisations or purely linguistic definitions. By having participants first describe a time when they forgave, and why, researcher hopes to activate any underlying cognitive schemata. Finally, the question “Is reconciliation necessary to forgive others in the work context?” was asked to understand the behavioural outcome of forgiveness in the context of work.

The conceptual framework of this study was achieved, figure 1, in order to identify the critical points to be studied, for instance key factors, constructs, and the presumed association among them. The researchers attempted to capture the data from each participants wishing to answer the questions that: what are the offense experiences among Thai nurses?; How could they cope with an emerging conflict situation?; Do they all forgive?; Why do they forgive?; What does forgiveness mean to them?; and Is reconciliation necessary on forgiveness of other within the workplace?.

*Insert figure 1 about here*

## **Data analysis**

The analytic steps employed in this study are consistent with the recommended analytical methods from Miles and Huberman (1994). They suggested that data analysis consists of three flows of activity of case analysis: data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusion and verification. These steps are interrelated and iterative activities. Data reduction is continuous even after the first case was reported from data display. The later

iterations of reducing and displaying data still be continued until the preliminary conclusion are drawn presenting the common themes in each case and comparable across cases.

*Data reduction.* Audio files of the interview conversations were translated into text form. Due to every conversations being in Thai, the researcher then translated the transcripts into English and they were then checked by a native English speaker. These data served as primary documents for further analysis. The analysis was begun with the process of selecting, addressing, simplifying, and transforming the data transcribed from the participants (Miles & Humberman, 1994). Reducing the data was continuing until a final case was completed. The researchers made a decision on which of the data were included or pull out utilising with the conceptual framework. Codes were labeling from a set of transcribed documents reflecting meanings from data and used to retrieving and organising for further display.

In this step, descriptive codes were generated on the first round of case analysis. (Saldana, 2009). These resulted more than a hundred codes emerged. Secondly, the research re-read the transcription and its referred codes in order to achieve more interpretive codes. Descriptive code and interpretive code were used to summarise segment of data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Finally, the pattern coding was conducted to group the summarised codes into smaller number of set constructs and themes. This coding process was implemented interchangeably with the next step of data display.

*Data display.* After sufficiently reducing data, data display was drew and verified the descriptive conclusions about themes and pattern showing interactions between constructs of participant's experience in forgiveness. The research decided to apply a systematic visual format of displaying to this step. Format of data display presented the detailed situation, the behaviours of participants in various kinds of work-related conflict, and the interplay of on conceptual variables (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The network type of data displaying, with a

series of nodes or variables with associations between them, was applied enabling the researchers to focus on more than a few variables at a time.

For each participant as a single case, cognitive map coupled with causal networking method for within-case analysis were conducted (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 134). With this single case method, the researchers could display the participant's representation of concept about a conflict-forgiveness phenomenon. These methods could clarify the researcher's ideas about the process and meaning of forgiveness drawing from interview transcription of each participant. The conceptual framework of the study was used to alert the researchers while conducting a causal networking; resulting on the plot of directional relationships and associated analytic text which identified the meaning of the association among the variables within the network.

After implementing each of single case display, later case was compared with the previous case. This is a cross-case explanation which moves from a single specific explanation to the results that link to the discovery of forgiveness construct. The multiple cases approach enabled this study to increase the generalisability of the conclusions and to investigate process and meaning of forgiveness across the different cases (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Four steps of a cross-case analysis using causal networking were conducted (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 228-232). Firstly, as a result from single case analysis, the causal networks which represent the blocks listed of core variables, constructs, and their linked network concerning forgiveness were assembled. Secondly, the researchers began to identify the predictors of forgiveness and its conditions for one case. Thirdly, the pattern matching was discovered considering whether a pattern found in one participant was replicated in other ones as well. Finally, the verification for the similar outcome was achieved qualifying by the rules that the core predictor variables are the same, sequences are

consistency, and the quotes within the variables in the network confirm the similarity across cases.

*Drawing and verifying conclusions.* Several tactics were used to test and to confirm meanings, reducing bias, and the quality of conclusions after gathering the preliminary findings through case comparisons (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 245-274). To ensure the quality of meaning generated from the data, three tactics were used. The first was tactic of noting pattern and themes. The researchers found out the evidence of the same pattern or recurring regularities among categories and patterns of processes regarding to forgiveness process and meaning. The patterns of variables involving similarities and the contrasting evidences were identified. Secondly, during the drawing of network for a case, the researchers attempted to ensure a conclusion looked reasonable and make a good sense reflecting a plausibility of the conclusion. Thirdly, the counting tactic was conducted based on the patterns or themes which identified a numbers of times and consistently happened in the specific way. The computer software, ATLAS.ti, was used for this analysis facilitated this as numbers of patterns could be tracked, allowing some assessment of how frequent responses were among the participants. The counting tactic has several advantages including analyzing speedily from a large pool of coded data, verifying a conceptual linkage found from the cases, and to keep the researchers away from the bias and stand more honest.

Furthermore, in order to verify and confirm the conclusions, several tactics were used. The research checked for the representativeness of participants. The cases were selected which saliently represented the process of forgiveness among nurses within the context of work-related conflict with their colleagues, not with their patients. Also, the researchers checked for research effect by making sure that each participant understood an intention of the interview, kept thinking on the conceptually, re-checking the transcriptions and codes with another researchers on how we are being misled. Moreover, the triangulation by data

sources was addressed included persons and places. The researchers collected data from participants who were working in public and private hospitals; large and small hospitals; and tried to find a source from various working units. This was help to ensure the generalisability of the findings. Moreover, during drawing a conclusion, making If-then test tactic was implemented. The researchers used the conditional future tense for If-then statement facilitating to formalize propositions for testing. Finally, some of the conclusions were compared and contrasted with the current literatures to determine if the findings were in consistency.

## **Results and Discussion**

Four stages in the ongoing process of forgiveness emerged from the data: an experiencing stage, a re-attribution stage, a forgiveness stage, and a behavioral outcome stage, as shown in figure 2. These stages and the factors that influence each will be presented in turn.

### **Experiencing Stage**

This first stage refers to the situation that victims face when the offence occurs in their workplace and they feel that they are being harmed by the offender. Victims then assess the severity of the offence, while experiencing negative thoughts and emotions towards the offenders. After that, they seek coping strategies to deal with the conflict as a reaction towards the perceived threat.

**Description of the offence.** Various causes of offence in work situations were identified as shown in table 1. From the table it can be seen that the offender's misunderstanding of the interviewee was the most frequent cause of work conflicts (8 cases). This is in accord with previous research in Thailand where communication issues were the main cause of conflict in nursing teams (Yuthvoravit, 2007).

The excerpt below is from B9, one of eight interviewees who experienced misunderstanding:

The doctor spoke to me in an unfriendly manner asking why I let the assistant nurse wake him up and why we had come out so suddenly with the schedule. He said to me "How many years have you been working here? Why did you not call to confirm with me before letting the patient in?" I said that I had called the staff already. He said that he could not accept that he was woken up by other nurses but only by his own staff. He wanted to report me to the inspector.

The second most frequent offensive situation involved implied professional incompetence (5 cases) with younger nurses or new comers reporting being harmed by senior nurses or doctors. For example, B15, when first starting work said that:

I was always being scolded by my senior nurse. Though, it was meant to be teaching, I sometimes felt that I was criticised by my senior nurse. She (senior nurse) came to me and began to lecture me, about the seriousness of our work.

There were three cases indicating that the injustice of their workload caused them to feel offended, for example A22, queried why she had to care for a patient when there were a few other senior nurses available, saying:

While I was working at my desk, there was a patient who was not my case, asking for attention. My senior colleague (offender) spoke loudly saying, "Why is there no one to answer this patient's request?" I felt that she wanted to blame me in a way that made others know that it was my fault. It was because I was a younger colleague who had first responsibility for doing the collective work.

This also involved loss of face for the junior colleague and includes a status element with junior staff taking on more work if they are free even if it is not their direct responsibility.

The other conditions that lead to the victims' being offended are summarised in Table 1 illustrating that there are a wide range of circumstances that can potentially create conflict at work even in Thai culture.

**Victims' perception of the offence.** Perceptions of being offended vary depending on the interviewee's interpretation of the offender's behavior and these are displayed in Table 1. Verbal attack was commonest (11 cases). B14 perceived the verbal attack from her offender as being quite serious, as it involved criticising her to her face and to others, saying:

She spoke to me and said to others in the unit that I was a swine....She said that I have a dog's mouth (It is a Thai idiom meaning speak badly). ..

The next most frequent perception related to a perceived lack of dignity involving loss of face, especially if it contradicted their work status (7 cases). B13 felt verbally attacked by a doctor who is accepted to be of a higher professional status in Thailand. She said:

I followed him to check on one of our patients. He asked me, "Has the patient already been examined for one of his symptoms?" I said that I was not sure because I had just come on to the shift. I could not make a decision. Then, he turned to ask the patient.

When I heard what the patient said, he said to me, in front of the patient, "The patient knew but you did not know anything"

As well as as differences in professional status, some of participants reported that they experienced loss of face from colleagues within their own profession who were of different work status or seniority. One of the nurses, A4 said:

I attempted to talk to Jane about why the quality administrative unit wanted her to write her name on the urine bag. When I talked with Jane, she acted like I was not her senior nurse. She did not respect me. My status is senior and I wanted to talk rationally with her.

Perceived betrayal was the next commonest perception of being offended (4 cases).

For example, B18 felt that she was betrayed by her senior colleague. She said:

She was my senior. She was assigned by my supervisor to observe my performance. I felt terrible because I found out that she reported me on false grounds and it led my



supervisor to misunderstand me I felt angry towards her.

The rest of the perceived offences found in this study are due to social loafing, displaying an unfriendly manner, behavior that is not within that which is expected, perceived injustice, and a mistake by a team member.

**Perceived severity.** Participants rated their perception of the severity of the offence and some differences were found as shown in Table 1. More than half of participants (16 cases) rated their offence as being quite serious, with verbal attacks being most frequent. A20, said, "Quite seriously, I did not like him misunderstanding me. My intention was good and positive, but how he acted towards me was negative."

**Victim's thoughts.** Two categories of thinking emerged: thoughts towards the offender, and thoughts towards strategies for dealing with the emerging offensive situation. In the first, the victim attempted to think about the reasons behind the offender's transgression. Several participants (5 cases) explained that they wondered why the offender had acted unreasonably. A2, said "I felt that it was not reasonable and wondered why she had dealt with me like that." Also, A4 classifying the offender's behavior as being unreasonable said:

I think she was this way because she is really self-centred. Why didn't she think? Was it my fault that I had to give this instruction? She did not accept what I had said to her and she tried to verbally retaliate.

Some victims tried to understand the offender's reasons using self-reflection followed by re-attribution of responsibility to themselves, what Weiten, Lloyd, Dunn, and Hammer (2009), term self-attribution. A1 was verbally attacked by her supervisor. Minutes after the offence, she began to think about how her behavior may have contributed to the misunderstanding:

She (the supervisor) perhaps thought that I had suddenly come into the room and took the work from another nurse who was already on duty. It's like I did not prepare

myself for work and wanted to snatch the workload of another nurse who was already on duty. But I did not think like that I just did not know that the shift had changed. Perhaps she thought that I was irresponsible.

Some participants (3 cases) sought understanding by trying to take the perspective of the offender. A4 tried to understand her younger colleague's aggressive behavior:

How can I deal with this problem? I think that, firstly, she maybe had her own personal problem with her supervisor. Secondly, perhaps she felt inferior, and also she always tends to act like this to others.

In the second approach, victim's focussed their thoughts on strategies to deal with the offence. Four interviewees thought that they should avoid retaliating against the offender, and the word "End" is found in their interviews reflecting their desire to end the situation. A2 said, "The end is the end. I don't want to keep it in my thoughts." B9 said, "He wanted to report me to the inspector. I wanted to end this problem, so I decide to apologise to him first. Though it was not my fault, I had to end this conflict."

The results above are consistent with Williamson and Gonzales (2007) who reported that their American participants also tried to understand why the offender had harmed them and why them in particular. However, the focus on simply ending the incident without any attempt to understand it further reflects the Buddhist concept of a conflict situation not being important, and just being accepted and moving on.

**Victim's emotions.** When individuals are faced with unexpected harmful acts from offenders, their negative feelings emerge, as an emotional reaction against the transgressors. Various types of emotions are present in participants' narratives such as anger, hurt, disappointment, dissatisfaction, and fear. Offences perceived as verbal attacks mainly caused feelings of anger (7 from 11). A21 was angry towards someone who criticised her senior nurse, "I felt angry. She should speak to me in a polite manner and reasonably." B11

reported, "I felt angry towards him because he asked why no one had written on the patient records and why as he was a doctor, did he have to wait for this to happen?" Anger as the most reported emotion is consistent with Williamson and Gonzales (2007) findings in an American sample.

Five cases, reported that they were disappointed in their offenders, like A3, whose allocated task was suddenly taken by a younger colleague. She said, "I felt so sad and disappointed about her saying that she wanted to do all the work by herself." Other emotions found were dissatisfaction, hurt, and fear.

**Victim's behavior.** To deal with the immediate offensive event, two broad patterns of coping behavior were reported, non-oppositional and oppositional behavior. Non-oppositional behaviors were found in most reports, where at the moment of the offence, individuals respond by not retaliating against their offenders. The commonest behavior reported was staying calm (17 cases). A1 said, "After my supervisor's response to me, I became calm and did not say anything, and just washed my hands." Similarly, B8 said "I stayed calm. Though I felt I wanted to retaliate against her, but I chose better. To stay calm, I think it wasn't proper to confront her." This fits with Thai cultural expectations. Staying calm in Thai culture, is not conceptualized as withdrawal behavior but instead individuals take this time to manage their negative emotions, which are likely to lead to more serious conflict if left uncontrolled. This reaction reflects a distinctively Buddhist response which is perceived to be an appropriate and even desirable way of coping. Our nurses were almost all female, and the American females in Williamson and Gonzales (2007) also displayed more non-oppositional behaviour than did males. A future study could explore whether non-oppositional behavior was commoner in Thai men than American men perhaps due to Buddhist influences.

Eight cases chose to avoid the offensive situation. A7 said she had to escape from the conflict situation in order to let her emotions calm down, "I had to walk away from her... If I

had stayed in the meeting, it would have led to more serious problems." Some victims (7 cases) described how they kept greater distance from the offender. B14 said, "After that, when she spoke to me, I also spoke to her politely but my distance is not the same. I did not initiate conversation with her."

Five cases said they attempted to focus on work to avoid thinking of the offence. A1 said, "I just paid attention to my tasks, doing my best, trying hard, not to think about this offence... I would not think outside the task."

Another type of overt reaction, found in a small number of narratives, is oppositional behavior. Five cases showed assertive responses to their transgressor by explaining their reasons for being offended. B15 said, "I had explained my reasons and the facts to her." Likewise, A21 reported, "I ordered some wrong things due to there being a lot of brands. I couldn't decide which one was correct. I gave my reasons to her and left the situation." There are just two cases where interviewees retaliated verbally to the offender. B5 challenged his senior colleague who had kept him late on his shift. He said, "I spoke to her quite loudly asking why she did not allow me to go out after the shift."

The analysis of this first experiencing stage has demonstrated that conflict in the workplace was caused by a variety of factors with misunderstandings as the commonest. Victims' perceptions differed as did their cognitions, emotions, and behaviors but the rate of challenge of the offender by victims was very low reflecting cultural influences on dealing with conflict.

### **Re-Attribution Stage**

The experiencing stage is followed by what we have labelled a re-attribution stage. This refers to the cognitive process of transformation to neutralise negative thoughts, and/or increase more positive thoughts about the offence. It is an important phase which can lead to forgiving behavior. The time taken for re-attribution to occur varies from a minute to several

months; individual's negative thoughts remain as rumination. This ruminative thinking inhibits a positive approach towards the offender. To facilitate more constructive thoughts, individuals must change their thinking, so called re-attribution, towards both the offender and the offence. Western models suggest that through re-attribution the ruminations become more empathetic cognitions, emotions and behaviours, including the emergence of forgiveness towards the offender (Enright & Coyle, 1998; Glaeser, 2008). However we found the process influenced by the work environment, religious beliefs, and values. Details of this stage are as follows.

**Rumination.** This refers to the process where repetitive thoughts about past events re-occur. It emerges after an experience such as anger resulting from conflict. Rumination then partially maintains and can even strengthen the anger (Sukhodolsky, Golub, & Cromwell, 2001). Rumination towards the offender and the offence is negatively associated with forgiveness (Barber, Maltby, & Macaskill, 2005; Burnette, Taylor, Worthington, & Forsyth, 2007).

**Re-attribution of thoughts.** As a result of reframing their thoughts, individuals change their views about the incident resulting in a reduction of negative obsessing and more neutral or positive cognitions. Victims achieve this transform by displaying empathy and taking the perspective of their offenders as now described.

**Victim's perspectives towards the offender.** From table 1 it can be seen that 18 cases tried to seek to understand the offender's reasons. This involves adopting an empathic approach towards the offender. Individuals take the offender's perspective with the aim of understanding the causes of the offence from the offender's viewpoint. Sometimes they empathised with the offender's character traits. For example B12 said:

I thought we had different backgrounds, experiences so our character traits were not

the same. At that time, perhaps she was pre-occupied with her thoughts. I understood her character. I decide to let it go.

Several cases reported that they put themselves in the other's place to clarify the offender's view. A23 explained, "I thought that maybe he didn't know what I had been doing while he was waiting for the bed....I thought he maybe thought it was late because of me." Victims also attempted to understand the offender by analyzing the situations. A2 said, "At that time she (the offender) was sitting on the chair and having her lunch. Perhaps she was hungry or even tired. These were my thoughts."

Seven interviewees explained that they thought about their ongoing relationship with the offender, especially if they had received positive responses from the offender since the offence. A19 said, "My bad attitude towards her went due to the fact that she had been good with me. Later, she came and spoke to me politely. She did not hate me." Also, A20 said, "Days later, he came to me and spoke to me politely so I let my anger go. My colleague was surprised that I spoke to him politely. I was soft-hearted."

Five cases did not categorise what offenders had done to them as wrongful acts, thus allowing victims to abandon their negative thoughts towards the offenders. For example, A3 did not categorise her younger colleague's behavior as wrong, "I did not mind what she had done. She worked hard. I think, perhaps she is a little negligent."

The final category is relinquishing negative thinking towards the offenders (4 cases). Individuals abandon their negative judgment with regard to the offender's behaviour. For example, A26 after being treated beneath her professional image and dignity by an inpatient doctor said, "It was not a serious problem. If I didn't think that it was serious, I would be ok. I had to stop by myself." B8 said:

When my colleagues told me she gossiped about me, I said to my colleagues to let her do it because it was just her thoughts, not the truth. I forgave her because she did not

benefit, or have any influence on my life. The people who benefit me are my family and my closest friends.

**Victim's perspectives towards the offence.** Another approach involved victims re-attributing their thoughts and then reframing their views of the offence. As shown in table 1, three ways of perspective-taking towards the offensive situations were reported, retaliation is not useful, conflict would affect their future work negatively, and the offence is not a personal issue

Twelve cases felt that retaliation was not useful for them. This reframed thinking was used by victims in order to evaluate the potential negative outcomes of retaliation. They then relinquish their intention to retaliate, seeing retaliation as unhelpful. For example A7 said, "I thought it was useless if I retaliated against her. There would only be a bad result." A24 said, "I thought that retaliation against him was not good for me or him. It would result in us not being able to face each other." Similarly, B13 reported, "I thought that if I retaliated against him, it was not a good outcome for me and him. I tried not to want revenge."

Seven cases indicated that they anticipated that continuing conflict would negatively affect their work. B9 explained that if she continued the conflict:

I was afraid that my work would not go smoothly. I wanted to work cooperatively with him and also wanted him to cooperate with me as well because we live within the same organization.

A4 did not want to carry on the argument as it would damage the image of their profession. Her thoughts reflect Thai culture which is described as a high collectivist culture. Individuals who work in collective cultures feel strongly that they belong to an in-group, act according to the interests of the group or the normal expectations in such a society (Hofstede, 2001). As she said:

I thought that if the conflict became more serious, it would affect the health

professional image in our hospital. I thought we can manage this conflict within our nursing team.

Four cases defined the offence as not being a personal issue. This is called distancing. They thought that the transgressions did not directly relate to them, rather they concerned work, an example of distancing. For example, A6 explained, "She improved her performance as I have said. It was not a personal issue. It was directly about the task". B11 reported that "It was ok because I thought that I spent as much time as it needed. I understood that it was a computer error."

**Social support and work environments as they affected re-attribution.** Social support refers to the mental and emotional support given by the victims' family members and/or colleagues. This buffers the negative impact of stressful offensive events and also provides informational resources for reframing their thoughts positively towards the offence. Sixteen cases were supported by their colleagues and family members after being offended at work. A3 said "I talked to my senior nurse and my immediate supervisor. My senior nurse told me that there was not a problem, and I had to forgive her." Similarly A28 reported, "I talked to my husband and my intimate colleague. They also said that I had to stay calm, not be assertive or retaliate. I had to behave the same with her." Both examples of advice giving comply with Thai cultural expectations. Some respondents received emotional support. A27 said, "After the meeting, my colleagues came and appeased me. I thought it was quite serious for me." Social support seems to be a vital factor providing advice and emotional support to individuals as they choose forgiveness because they wish or need to restore their relationship with the offender. Seeking support as a facilitating factor in forgiveness after an offence is consistent with Glaeser (2008) in his American sample although the nature of the advice is influenced by culture here.

Social norms and status present a cultural influences on the victim's ability to re-



attribute their thoughts towards the offender. These social factors exert pressure on the individuals to conform to norms of what the culture considers to be proper behavior such as not retaliating, forgiving, respecting, etc. Status played a major role in exerting social pressure. In many instances, the words "younger colleague" and "senior colleague" are found from interviewees' narratives. That is to say, Thai culture accepts the hierarchy of status and sees it as very important. Seniority plays a vital part as individuals should respect their elders and people who occupy more superior positions (Klausner, 1993). Not to do so is perceived as behaving improperly. When the victim is more senior to the offender, we found that victims thought that they should be friendlier towards the offender as they then presented as a generous senior colleague. For example B5 explained:

What is the level of experience? If she was senior like me, I would still have some angry thoughts towards her. If she was my younger nurse, I would be more likely to forgive her.

When the victim is less senior than the offender, they have to relinquish their oppositional acts towards their senior colleague and produce benevolent behavior. A7 said, "She was older than me. If I retaliated against her, it would affect the nursing professional image." Here this serves to protect the reputation of the group as well, an important cultural consideration. In another case, A2 said "I apologised to her. I think, whatever, she is still my supervisor. She is more senior than me. I acted like a younger colleague and did not retaliate." This phenomenon reflects cultural norms in the workgroup which dictate how individuals should act and specifically Buddhist influences are further exemplars of this cultural influence. There would appear to be less concern with group members behaving in ways to protect their professional group image in Western culture. Similarly, more senior members of staff are not generally expected to act benevolently towards their junior colleagues in the more individualistic Western culture (Hofstede, 2001).

**Buddhist beliefs as a positive inducement to forgive.** Buddhist beliefs provide constructive methods and resources which can influence the victim's worldview about the offence. These beliefs encourage individuals to decide to forgive their transgressors. Empirically, respondents showed that they were influenced by Buddhist beliefs as a means of dealing with emotional and relational problems. Four cases explained that they practised Dhamma, as taught by Buddha, in order to lose their negative thoughts and emotions, and turn to more positive ways. These practices are intended to purify an individual's mind against their anger and negative thoughts towards the offender, to keep their mind away from rumination and vengefulness, and also to approach the offender with more loving-kindness and compassion as taught by Buddha (Phra Dhammakosajarn (Prayoon Dhammacitto), 2008). A3 said that she had to manage her feelings of disappointment following what she had read from Dhamma books. Also, A7 explained that:

I tried to use the Dhamma to cope with my emotions. I prayed the loving-kindness towards her and stayed calm. I thought that if I could not stay calm, the person who suffered was myself. I talked to myself.

Another Buddhist belief that emerged during thought reframing is belief in Karma. It is the belief in terms of the law of cause and effect operating through action, as good action is rewarded with good and evil action with evil. Buddhists see the world as fundamentally just, and this justice is maintained by Karma. It means that victims who strongly believe in the law of Karma would restore justice by letting offenders receive their own negative feedback in due course. A7 said "I thought what she had done to me; it will come back to her." In a serious case A30, to promote forgiving her colleague responded thus:

I thought forgiveness is the most merit. If I forgive the wrongdoer, one day I may involuntarily do wrong to another. I would then get forgiveness from my victim. (She said the Sadhu... it means she hopes this thought will be effective in the future.)

This quotation from A30 is yet another example of how Buddhist teachings influence the process of forgiveness with the concept of Sadhu. It is an expression that is used at the end of prayers and is loosely equivalent to amen in the Christian religion. It represents the conclusion and the wish to let things happen, a good will message.

Two interviewees took the perspective that ruminating about the offence is causing them to suffer. Respondents included the word “Dukkha” in their narratives which is translated in English as suffering. In Buddhism, suffering refers to a painful experience and the unsatisfactory nature of human life. It can mean either physical or mental suffering, or the suffering which is inherent in change and comparing themselves with others, and also the suffering caused by clinging to things which are impermanent. In fact, Buddhism guides people to an understanding of the causes of suffering (Lake, 2004). Suffering caused by ruminating on the event is seen to be deserved as it is perceived to be unwholesome to ruminate in Buddhism. Some of the participants showed an awareness of this and attempted to relinquish their suffering by forgiving. A3 said "I think everything is immortal. I try to think positively." Also, A4 explained why she had to give up her rumination "I think that anger and resentment cause me suffering. She (the offender) did not suffer like me."

### **Forgiveness Stage**

This stage infers that victims have forgiven their offenders as a result of their re-attributed thoughts. Two types of forgiveness emerged from the nurses' experiences: decisional forgiveness and emotional forgiveness (see table 1). Results showed consistent support for this forgiveness distinction first described by Worthington (2003).

**Decisional forgiveness.** This is when individuals decide to forgive as they have given up any thoughts of retaliation and no longer categorise the event as an offence. Worthington (2003) explained that individuals grant decisional forgiveness and commit to controlling their negative behavior towards the offenders to try to restore the relationship to where it was

before the offence occurred. Victims attempt to eliminate their negative thoughts and emotions. However, this takes time. That is to say, the decision to forgive helps to prevent negative behavior such as retaliation or continuing the conflict, but the some of the negative emotions such as anger, fear, anxiety, or hurt still remain. Two-thirds of interviewees (20 cases) committed to decisional forgiveness. For example, A7, though she said she had forgiven her offender, but negative emotions remained, "I knew that it would be happening repeatedly. I tried to let it go. For this offence, I already forgave her; however, I still worry that she will do it again." Similarly, B12 forgave her senior colleague but the feeling of unjustness still endured in her mind:

I forgave her....I decide to let it go. Sometimes, I thought it was not fair because we had the same status. We just differed in our experiences. Do I have to work as a younger nurse all the time?

**Emotional forgiveness.** This is defined as complete forgiveness where individuals experience positive feelings of good will towards the offender. Worthington (2003) defined emotional forgiveness as "the emotional juxtaposition of positive emotions against a) the hot emotions of anger or fear that follow a perceived hurt or offence, or b) the unforgiveness that follows ruminating about the transgression, which also changed our motives from negative to neutral or even positive" (p.41). For this type of forgiveness, positive emotions such as empathy, love, and compassion replace the negative emotions. One-third of participants (10 cases) showed that they have fully forgiven their offenders. B16 said, "I forgave her....I understand her, it was because she wanted me to learn how to work by myself. She wanted to teach me." A28 explained:

If I we keep fighting amongst ourselves and cannot forgive the other, it would bring me to feel uncomfortable and unhappy when I have to cooperate with her. If we

forgive, let our bad emotions go, and try to think of the good side. I get the benefit as happiness. If I fully forgive her, my mind will be truly happy.

However, the instances of decisional forgiveness are greater than emotional forgiveness in our participants. It does show that decisional forgiveness is necessary to reduce serious continual conflict and to maintain working relationship in healthcare teams. This study has produced useful evidence for its effective as the distinction is not always accepted by forgiveness researchers. It is also useful for counsellors to be able to explore these different processes with their clients. In conflict situations simply deciding to forgive is only the first part of the journey and it is important that both parties are aware of this and know that serious work still has to happen before total forgiveness is achieved. The research literature suggests that emotional forgiveness takes time to occur completely and the conflicts reported in the study were all fairly recent (Worthington, 2006).

**The Offender's previous relationship with and post-offence behavior to the victim as conditions which contribute to emotional forgiveness.** Some conditions promoted emotional forgiveness such as the existence of a previous intimate relationship with the offended. Four cases indicated that they had close relationships with the offenders before being offended. A6 said, "I suddenly forgave her. In general, she is good with me." Similarly, A28 explained that, "I forgave her because I have felt good with her for a long time. She was my intimate colleague and I was fond of her. We used to help each other." Perceiving good intentions from the offender also encourages emotional forgiveness (2 cases). Impoliteness in particular, in daily conversation between the nurses was perceived as offensive. A15, after being offended, realised that her senior colleague had not aimed to harm her but rather wanted to teach her to improve her work, "I thought she wanted me to pass my probation, so I have to learn more about my responsibilities. I thought she had good will towards me." Narratives showed that when the offenders seek to continue the relationship, victims are more

likely to forgive them such as A20, "I intended not to interact with him; but when I met him and he spoke to me politely, my bad attitude went."

### **Behavioral Outcome Stage**

This stage occurs after the forgiveness stage as the emotions of the victim have been transformed into more positive feelings in harmony with their re-attributed thoughts. This then results in more positive motivation towards the offenders in order to maintain working relationships. Most participants felt reconciliation was necessary for maintenance of their working relationships and their performance at work. A few participants implied that they were not continuing their working relationships with their offenders (see table 1).

**Reconciliation is necessary for forgiveness in the workplace.** In every case of emotional forgiveness (10 cases) and nearly every case (14 cases) of decisional forgiveness interviewees saw the necessity of reconciling with their transgressors (see table 1). For instance, individuals who fully forgave their transgressors accepted that re-establishing relationships after being offended is important for them. Like Worthington (1998), who presumed that forgiveness, though some of negative emotion may still remain, results in the victim and the offender restoring their relationship as completely as they can, bringing them back to neutral ground, and coming to rebuild good feelings to resume their relationship. A19 said, "It is necessary as I work in every unit because if we distrust others, it would affect our service." Similarly, A28 said "I think reconciliation is a good thing that I should practice in my daily life." The desirability of reconciliation demonstrated here is consistent with that reported by Macaskill (2005) in a British sample.

In the cases of decisional forgiveness, reconciliation occurred in order to maintain smooth working relationships. A21 explained "I think reconciliation is necessary for the work context. I have to interact with him." Similarly A29 had to reconcile with her doctor after

being upset. She reported, "I thought I have to work with others all of my life. There will be one day that I ask for others' help. I cannot survive by myself."

**Reasons to reconcile.** Most respondents reconciled (10 cases) because they wanted to maintain teamwork. A19 said that:

It is necessary...It would affect our service. The medication service has to work as a team. If we have a serious conflict, it would affect our performance. I have to reconcile and maintain harmony.

The effect on the work performance of the victims themselves was one reason to reconcile (6 cases). A21 said, "I think reconciliation is necessary for my work. I have to interact with him. I want my work to go smoothly." Another reason is that they consider their future career (3 cases). B5 said, "I have to work for a long time. I thought about the bad impact in the future if I retaliated." In three cases reconciliation resulted from the perception of positive intentions from the offenders. For example younger victims being aware that senior nurses wanted them to improve their professional behavior. B16 said, "Yes, because she had good intentions towards me. She wanted me to improve myself." The last reason to reconcile given is that of being in a position of lower power than the offender (2 cases). As mentioned earlier Thai culture values accepting differences in social status which results in compromising more with the person of greater seniority or professional status (Klausner, 1993). B12 reported, "I did not want to retaliate against her because she was my senior nurse. I did not want to exacerbate the problems."

**Reconciliation is unnecessary for forgiveness in the workplace.** In three cases participants could not reconcile with their offender and all were rated as serious incidents. A30 who was verbally attacked by her colleague reported "No, I'm still trying to avoid him but I think I have forgiven. I don't want to contact him." Another instance is A4 who explained that "It is not necessary....It is really difficult to be the same. My actions towards

her are the same such as smiling and greeting her but there is a greater distance."

**Reasons not to reconcile.** B8 showed that she was not reconciled with her offender as she judged that the offender was not central to her life, saying, "She does not benefit nor have an influence on my life." A4 said "I'm afraid that re-offending will occur if I am as close to her as before. The more serious the offence, the greater the distance."

### **Comparison with Western models**

A four-stage model plus a majority view that reconciliation was a component of the forgiveness process emerged from the Thai data as shown in figure 1. Comparing this to the model developed by Enright and his collaborators highlights that while there are similarities, there are also some distinctively Thai elements. Some differences might be expected anyway as the Enright model is an intervention model rather than being based on real-world reported experiences of the process of forgiveness. The initial experiencing stage is equivalent to Enright's uncovering phase, as in both the event is examined and the emotions associated with it are explored. Next Enright in the counselling model describes a decisional phase where the victim makes the decision to forgive. This is then followed by a work phase involving re-framing, developing empathy towards the offender and exploring their motivations, as a result of which cognitions, emotions and behaviour become more positive. This then leads to the final forgiveness phase which may or may not involve reconciliation. However, in the real world Thai sample, the decisional phase comes later after what we termed the re-attribution stage. In this phase the negative thoughts, emotions and behavior becomes more positive, in a manner similar to that described by Enright. The difference in order is possible due to the Enright model describing a therapy process which occurs sometime after the event and presumably the individual has come for counselling because they cannot resolve the issue on their own and require professional help or they may have made a decision to forgive but cannot achieve emotional forgiveness. In the Thai sample,



there was a clear differentiation between decisional and emotional forgiveness providing empirical support for this distinction highlighted by DiBlasio (1998) and Worthington (2003). The final difference from the Enright model was the perception of reconciliation as a necessity for most of the sample. This was the case even when emotional forgiveness had not been achieved. It was considered necessary to reconcile for most people to preserve working relationships and also to protect the cohesiveness and professional reputation of the work group.

The motivational model of forgiveness developed by McCullough and his colleagues is subsumed within the Thai model, which includes reducing the motivation to hold a grudge or seek revenge and increasing feelings of benevolence towards the offender (McCullough, 2001; McCullough, Pargament, & Thoresen, 2000; McCullough, & Witvliet, 2002; McCullough, & Worthington, 1994). However, this model does not comprehensively describe the process of forgiveness. These Western models while being applicable to the Thai experience do not include all the cultural elements and influences that uniquely define the Thai experience of forgiveness in the workplace as we have seen.

### **Results and Discussion Addressing the Meaning of Forgiveness**

When asked to produce definitions of forgiveness at the end of the interview, five categories of definitions emerged with subdivisions within each. These are summarised in Table 2 and where these correspond to definitions in the published literature this is indicated within the table by including the references. Several distinctive meanings and components of the process of forgiveness emerged from the Thai participants' definitions and these are also included in Table 2.

#### **Forgiveness is overcoming negativity towards the offender**

There are two subcategories found in this classification.

**Overcoming negative thoughts.** For six participants forgiveness was overcoming negative thinking towards their offenders. B15 said, "I don't want to hold my negative thoughts, and that resulted in me healing the hurt." B14 said, "Forgiveness is stopping the wish to retaliate against her. Retaliating makes it more serious." Defining forgiveness as letting go the destructive thoughts towards the offenders and not retaliating is included in published definitions and while simply forgetting about the offence, and not ruminating tend not to be components of Western definitions , the numbers including these components are small.

**Overcoming negative emotions.** This definition infers that forgiveness involves the victim trying to decrease their negative emotions such as anger, resentment, grudge holding, or dissatisfaction with the offender and was reported by almost half of the participants and corresponds with Western published definitions. A21 said, "Forgiveness is that I don't hold a bad feeling or a grudge. I don't feel angry towards her." Similarly, B12 stated, "Forgiveness means when I was provoked by someone and she made me feel angry, I don't hold a grudge, or anger, and don't respond negatively."

### **Forgiveness is an abandonment of negative judgment and associated strategies**

The interviewees indicated that forgiveness is a relinquishment of blame towards their offenders and the definitions also included strategies for achieving this. One-third of participants indicated that seeking to understand the offender's motivation was at the heart of forgiveness as it was how they gave up blaming. It appeared qualitatively different from developing empathy as it was less emotionally toned and more pragmatic. A1 said, "It is an acceptance of the reasons that we both had. Someone maybe upset us. We should attempt to listen to the different reasons." Six participants implied that forgiveness is an acceptance of the offender's mistake. A1 said, "In general, everybody must make an error or mistake in their

life." Similarly, B17 said, "Everybody can make mistakes... I think that perhaps she omitted to do something. Everyone has the chance to mess up."

A few interviewees defined forgiveness as thinking about the perspective of the offender and making allowances. A22 said, "When I was dissatisfied or angry with others, I tried to think positively that she or he perhaps didn't know my situation." Eight interviewees defined forgiveness as not categorising what the offenders had done to them as being wrong. A3 said, "Do not think of it as a wrongful act.", also B14 said, "Forgiveness is about not minding the offence" A third of the participants defined it as fully giving up negative blaming of the offender and abandoning negative judgment about them. B18 said "It is a feeling of non-judgment." A25 said, "Forgiveness is giving a condonation and not judging." This last aspect in the only one specifically acknowledged in the literature (Enright et al., 1998). Many of the definitions and the associated strategic components seem particular to the culture and reflect a tendency to try to avoid categorising the event as conflict.

### **Forgiveness is to foster positive approaches and loving-kindness towards the offender**

Here forgiveness is seen as the promotion or motivation to approach offenders in more positive ways, perhaps offering loving-kindness, which is a Thai concept towards their transgressors. Three subcategories emerged here.

**Fostering positive thoughts.** This refers to individuals encouraging themselves to think more constructively about their offenders. Eleven cases defined forgiveness as being about positive thoughts. A3 said "Forgiveness is positive thinking and optimism towards the offender." A2 stated that:

At least, we also have good memories together. This offence is too small. Why should I ruminate over it? When trying to focus on the good side, we would share good feelings.

**Fostering positive emotions.** Here forgiveness is seen as the individual cherishing positive emotions towards his or her offender. Four cases described forgiveness in term of empathy. B11 said, "I have to empathise with him, be as if I were him." B15 defined "Forgiveness is like when I love someone. I have to empathise with her. When I empathise or have good will towards her, I also then will get good will from her." Enright and Coyle, 1998 focus on empathy in their definition and it is also included in the Enright process model of forgiveness although not in his definition (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000).

**Fostering positive acts.** Forgiveness is defined as constructive behavior towards the offender. Victims continue to behave in a friendly manner with their offenders. B13 said "Forgiveness is that I also act politely with him. I don't want to act badly with him as I have to keep our relationship positive. To be positive." B14 said, "I can give the goods or stuff to her. This action would bring her to understand that I am not angry with her. It is the same. It would solve the conflict inside her mind."

### **Forgiveness as the awareness of its benefits**

The interviewees felt that awareness of the benefits of forgiveness is part of its definition. Several participants foresaw the end result when they decided to forgive their offenders. Eight cases suggested that forgiveness leads to happiness. A7 said "I thought in our life we are faced with both happiness and suffering. I had to let it go. I felt sprightly and could concentrate more on being happy" A27 reported, "Forgiveness made me happy because my mind could disengage from the anger that affected my quality of life." Two interviewees expressed that forgiveness involves reciprocity between two parties, victim and offender. They accepted that they forgave because they wanted their offender to learn to forgive them back. A4 said, "Forgiveness is that I forgave her because I want her to consider forgiving me in return." A2, described forgiveness in term of it facilitating her thinking that anger is not useful, saying, "I think our life is not too long, anger and anger rumination towards someone

until we die is not useful." Again these are very different approaches to defining forgiveness from those in the research literature.

### **Forgiveness as Buddhist beliefs**

When the researcher asked participants to define forgiveness, several did so according to their Buddhist beliefs. Two participants view forgiveness as a higher-order merit of the principle of giving which, as taught by Buddha, encourages Buddhists to let revenge go and instead to give the condonation towards the persons who hurt them (H.H. Somdet Phra Nyanasamvara, 2008). A29 stated, "Forgiveness is the greatest, most wonderful gift." A30 said, "Forgiveness is the worthiest merit." B8 defined forgiveness in the sense of Karma reflecting her belief that what he or she faced is a result of their own Karma, perhaps caused from actions in his or her previous or present existence. She stated:

I think it was my destiny to be offended by her. In my previous life or past existence, I may had done a wrongful thing to her, so, in this present life, she maybe came to retaliate on me....However, I have to stay in the present and did not retaliate towards her because it maybe the cause for another Karma which would be attached to my next life.

In summary, all of definitions refer to the sense of forgiveness as an intra-individual psychological phenomenon which focuses on the self in order to respond to interpersonal conflict (McCullough, Pargament, & Thoresen, 2000). Respondents described forgiveness as including components of thought, emotion, and behaviour that they held towards their offenders. Three categories of definition, overcoming negative approaches towards the offender, abandonment of negative judgment, and fostering positive approaches and loving-kindness towards the offender are consistent with previous definition of forgiveness in the research literature as demonstrated in Table2. However, the frequent inclusion of strategies by the Thai sample as part of the definition of forgiveness in the abandonment of negative

judgement category is novel. Forgiveness is seen as individuals' readiness to overcome their negative thoughts and emotions, relinquish their negative judgments, and instead offer more positive views, feelings, and acts towards the wrongdoer.

However, two categories of definition were very different, awareness of the benefits of forgiveness and forgiveness as Buddhist beliefs. These findings demonstrate that participants view forgiveness as having a benefit or positive gain; that is to say, as a motivational concept, where individuals foresee or expect the positive valence of forgiveness as being the good choice for their working life, as it brings benefits such as increased happiness or improved quality of life. Buddhist concepts are contained within their sense of forgiveness. Buddhist utterance such as merit giving (called Dana in Pali), and Karma are found in their definitions of forgiveness. This is consistent with Rye et al. (2000) who suggest that religion influences the psychological process involved in forgiveness through victims' beliefs and practices in their own faiths

### **Conclusions**

Re-attribution is crucial for victims to reframe their thoughts in more constructive ways towards the offence. Cognitive reframing methods used by the participants show the effectiveness of taking the perspective of the offender towards the offensive events in order to let go of their negative emotions and offer more nurturing behavior. These methods include trying to understand the possible reason behind the offence, focusing on work performance as a whole rather than on just the offence, and considering the negative effect of behaving in an oppositional manner. Social support from colleagues and family members seems to be an important factor in facilitating forgiveness. It provides the information about the possible choices for dealing with the conflict although they tend to suggest forgiveness and empathy

as the preferred choice for the victims to maintain working relationships with the offender.

While the stages are similar to that described in the Enright counseling process model

Buddhism influences the process of forgiveness in Thai people. There are several Buddhist teachings on how to deal with emotional conflict with others. For example, the Buddhist anger management process (Mettabrahmavihara) as mentioned in Phra Brahmaganabhorn (P.A. Payutto) (2007) instructs that individuals who feel anger or vengefulness against their opponent, can practice changing their thinking by using the ten steps of reflection such as the disadvantages of being angry, the negative effect of anger, the goodness of the offender, Karma, moral conduct, the good that results from loving-kindness, etc. Another method called thinking wisely or Yonisomanasikara (Phra Brahmaganabhorn (P.A. Payutto), 2009) is taught by Buddha in order to provide the way of right thinking towards the world. One of the so-called 'thinking wisely' methods for dealing with vengeance towards an offender is meritorious stimulation. This method persuades individuals by getting them to focus their cognitions on what is a wholesome or unwholesome way to think and behave, they are then led to be motivated to want the wholesome way and thus accordingly. These Buddhist methods emphasise forgiveness as being the more empathetic choice for dealing with the offence.

The Thai definitions of forgiveness were found to be similar to the Western literature but with some crucial differences in regard to two aspects where individuals defined forgiveness in terms of an awareness of the benefits of forgiving, and forgiveness in the sense of Buddhist concepts. This illustrates how Buddhism influences the daily life of Thai people and how this cultural knowledge is crucial to allow understanding of forgiveness in Thailand. While the

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Table 1

*Selected Categories, Codes, and Their Frequency Derived from Respondent's Narratives*

<b>Category and Code</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>Category and Code</b>	<b>f</b>
<i>1. Description of the offence</i>		<i>3. Perceived severity</i>	
Offender's misunderstanding	8	Very trivial	2
Offender implies professional incompetence	5	Quite trivial	7
Perceived injustice of workload of victim	3	Quite serious	16
Accusation of being ill-prepared for work	2	Very serious	5
Incongruence in perception of work duties	2	<i>4. Victim's perspectives towards offender</i>	
Mistake in job performance	2	Seek to understand offender's reason - empathy	18
Social loafing in group work	2	Continuing his/her working relationship	7
Uncooperative behaviour of offender	2	Does not categorise as a wrongful act - reattribution	5
Other: Offender biased, intoxicated, jealous of victim's performance, takes victim's task/position inappropriately (f=1 of each)	1	Abandon of negative judgment	4
<i>2. Victims' Perception of the offence</i>		<i>5. Victim's perspectives towards the offensive event</i>	
Verbal attack	11	Retaliation is not useful	12
Beneath victim's dignity (loss of face)	7	Conflict affects work negatively	7
Betrayal	4	Distancing- offence is not personal	4
Social loafing	2	<i>6. Level of forgiveness</i>	
Unfriendly manner	2	Decisional forgiveness	20
Behaviour is not within expected behavioral work norms	2	Emotional forgiveness	10
Perceived injustice	1	<i>7. Reconciliation</i>	
Team member mistake	1	Reconciliation is necessary	23
		Reconciliation is unnecessary	3

Note: f = frequency of code within the stories of thirty interviewees

Table 2

*Comparison of Forgiveness Definitions Obtained and their Components with the Literature*


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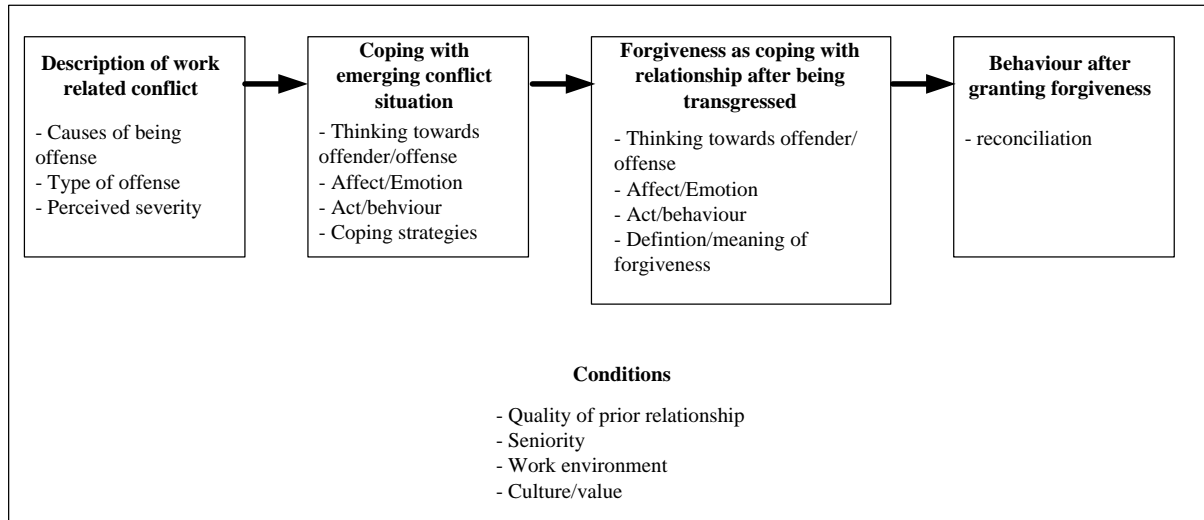
<b>1. Overcome negativity towards offender</b>	
Overcome negative thoughts (Aquino et al., 2003; McCullough et al., 2000)	6
Do not retaliate (Aquino et al., 2003; Enright & Coyle, 1998; Worthington, 1998)	2
Forget about the offence	1
Do not ruminate	1
Let go anger and grudge (Aquino et al., 2003; McCullough et al., 2000; Worthington, 1998)	17
<b>2. Abandonment of negative judgment and associated strategies</b>	
Seek to understand offender's motivation	10
Do not categorise as a wrongful act	8
Accept offender's mistake	6
Perspective thinking	4
Abandon negative judgment (Enright, Freedman, & Rique, 1998)	3
<b>3. Foster positive approaches &amp; loving-kindness towards offender</b>	
Positive thinking towards offender (McCullough et al., 2000)	13
Positive emotions - empathy (Enright & Coyle, 1998)	4
Positive acts - Continue to act in friendly manner (Hargrave & Sell, 1997; McCullough et al., 2000; Worthington, 1998)	11
<b>4. Forgiveness as the awareness of its benefits</b>	
Forgiveness leads to happiness	8
Reciprocal forgiveness	2
Think that anger (as the opposite of forgiveness) is not useful	1
<b>5. Forgiveness as Buddhist beliefs</b>	

Forgiveness is a higher-order merit of giving	2
Forgiveness as a good Karma	1

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Note: f = frequency of code within the stories of thirty interviewees





*Figure 1. Conceptual framework for forgiveness study on work-related transgression*

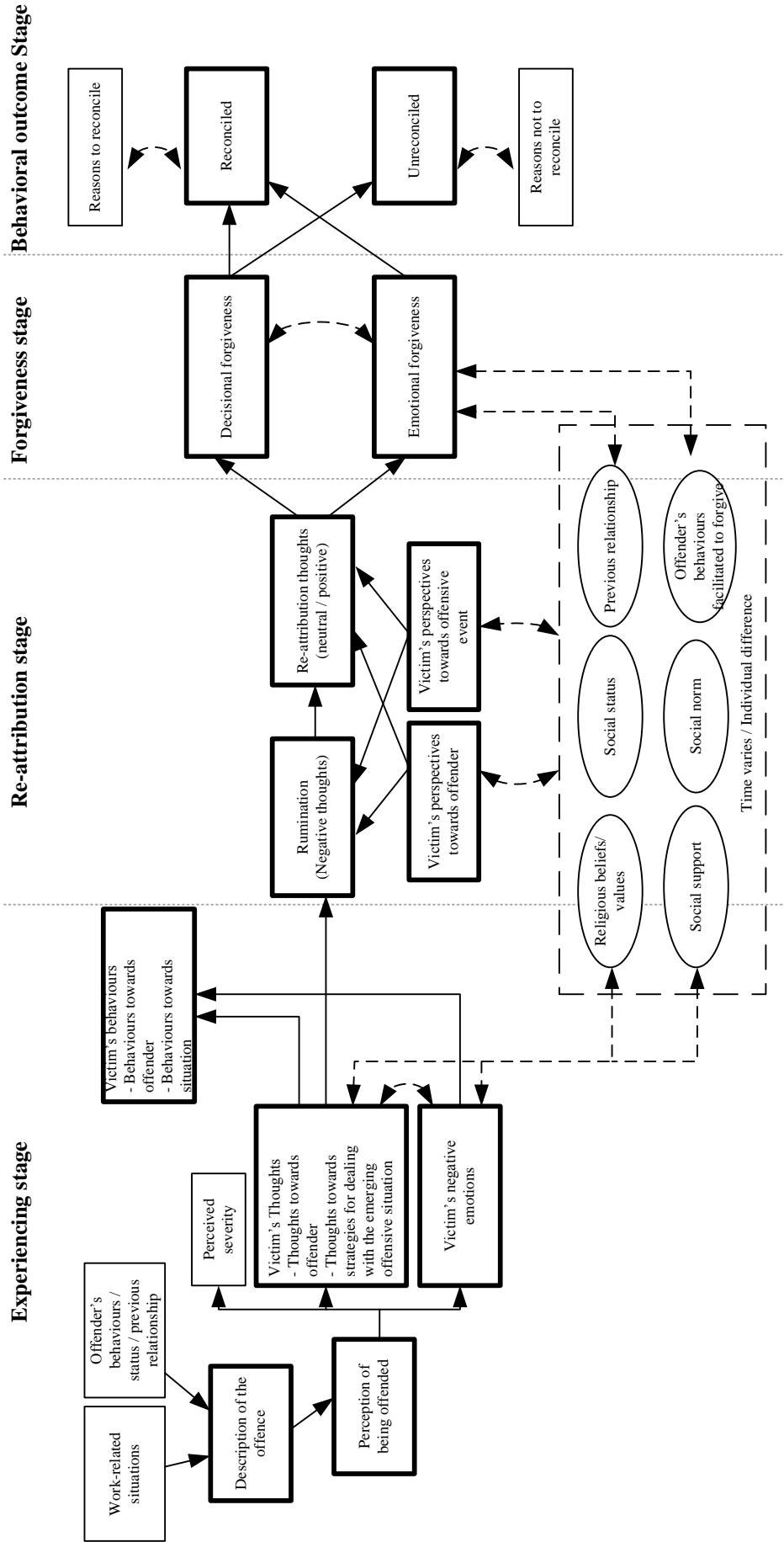


Figure 1. Process of forgiveness in work context.