Exploring the Influence of National Culture on the Intercultural Conflict Management Styles in Virtual Teams

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Article info

Abstract

Conflict is a disagreement between two or more people. It is considered unavoidable and stressful in everyday workplace interactions. It becomes even more problematic when dealing with team members from a different culture and when dealing with them through digital communication tools. Virtual teams are often international and include culturally diverse members, making conflict management more difficult. This research examines the influence of a virtual team leader's cultural background and level of intercultural competence on the choice of conflict management styles in two types of conflicts - task and relationship conflicts - in two situations, with people from their home culture and with foreigners. In this quasi-experimental research, a serious game was used as an innovative data collection method to assess intercultural competence and intercultural conflict management style. The sample consisted of 106 Thai, 114 French, and 119 American participants (339). The results of this study concluded that cultural background and intercultural competence influence the choice of intercultural conflict management style as well as the adaptation of intercultural conflict management style to culturally different team members. Specifically, it was partially confirmed that intercultural conflict management styles vary across cultures, Americans preferred to use dynamic style and accommodation style, while Thai and French teams were similar in using discussion style as their preferred style. A significant relationship was also found between intercultural competence and conflict management styles, as well as the adaptation of conflict management styles to cultural differences and adaptation, Thai and French significantly used the argumentative style more than the dynamic and accommodation style. Meanwhile, Americans significantly used the dynamic style, followed by the accommodation style and the discussion style.

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Introduction

Globalization has brought more attention to intercultural interactions, both interpersonal and virtual, which can take place in one geographic location or across countries (Leigh Anne et al., 2018). It has led to an increase in the complexity of business management, as cultural diversity can lead to different opinions, words, behaviors, or actions while working to achieve a common organizational goal. Currently, virtual teams (VT) are gaining popularity as organizations have begun to envision their ability to use virtual teams and realize its potential benefits (Paul et al., 2004). Virtual teams (VT) refer to "a group of people with complementary competencies who perform simultaneous, collaborative work processes through electronic media without regard to geographic location" and have become a typical organizational structure (Chinowsky & Rojas, 2003). A survey by the Society for Human Resource Management (2012 as cited in Gilson et al., 2015) found that approximately 66% of multinational organizations use VTs, and 80% of the companies in the study confirmed the growing number (Perry, 2008). Even though it is challenging to get diverse groups/teams to work together (Maltarich et al., 2018), having people work virtually has been recognized as leveraging diversity and increasing the ability to develop creativity (Zakaria et al., 2004). In addition, cultural differences can have serious consequences for conflict management, especially in the problem-solving process. The success or failure of international collaborations or global projects depends not only on the management of economic and legal barriers, but also on the effective management of cultural differences (Van Oudenhoven et al., 1998).

Johnson, et al. (2006) emphasized that intercultural competence, or the ability to interact effectively across cultures, is extremely important for success in today's global business environment. Interactions between individuals, organizations, and agencies from different multicultural backgrounds and contexts are becoming more complicated due to misunderstandings, increased transaction costs, friction between project participants, and coordination and communication difficulties (Aarseth et al., 2013). Therefore, global project managers need to be aware of cross-cultural and language differences in order to maximize the value of multicultural teams (Binder, 2007).

In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted regular economic activity and life worldwide (World Trade Organization, 2020). The changes of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 have created a "new normal" of working life, with an exponential increase in virtual communication. Many were unprepared for the mass remote work, but people quickly found out that this is a special condition to which they must adapt. Many countries around the world encouraged their citizens to lock themselves in and work from home. Technologies for a new work norm came through the door, uninvited, but quickly adopted. Similarly, this pandemic proved the possibility of working remotely for many people (World Economic Forum, 2021).

This context has made it even more challenging for virtual teams, especially multicultural virtual teams, to function smoothly. This study focuses on a close look at how multicultural team members deal with different types of conflicts when they arise in different work-related situations.

Objectives

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of team leaders' cultural background on their choice of intercultural conflict management style in multicultural virtual teams. It also investigated the influence of intercultural competence on the adaptation of the intercultural conflict management style to the cultural background of the interlocutor.

The main research question for this study was, "To what extent does the cultural background of team leaders influence their choice of intercultural conflict management style in conflicts among multicultural virtual team members?"

Literature Review

We searched two online journal databases, including Scopus and EBSCO Discovery Service (EDS), for the relevant literature with limited conditions such as English language, full text, and peer-reviewed articles. The following search terms (keywords) were used: ("intercultural competence" OR "cultural dimensions") AND ("intercultural conflict resolution" OR "intercultural conflict resolution style" OR "intercultural conflict management" OR "intercultural conflict management styles") AND ("virtual team" OR "virtual teams") AND ("conflict management styles"). A total of 384 articles were retrieved; 353 articles from the two main online databases and 31 additional articles found through other sources. After removing 16 duplicates, 368 articles

remained. An initial screening of abstracts and exclusion of unrelated literature was then performed, and 69 full-text articles were retained for this study (see Table 1). Furthermore, according to the Scimago Journal & Country Rank website, most journals were listed in the first quartile and nine of them were cited more than a thousand times. Therefore, this research is based on a comprehensive literature review with a systematic approach to strengthen its research quality. A review of the literature on conflict management, intercultural conflict management, cultural background, and intercultural competence is presented next.

Table 1 Descriptions of the articles included in the study (by topic and type of research)

Topic	Qualitative	Quantitative	Mix-methods	No.of articles included
Conflict	7	19	1	27
Intercultural Competence	15	7	0	22
Virtual Teams & leader	12	5	3	20
Total	**34**	**31**	**4**	**69**

Conflict Management

Conflict management is defined as "a set of behaviors in work teams that focus on reducing or resolving tensions" (De Dreu et al., 1999). It is recognized as one of the most critical challenges that members face in virtual environments because it affects various levels of effectiveness: individual, team, and organizational (De Dreu et al., 2001). Effective conflict management is perceived as a significant contributor to the success of multinational organizations (Yuan & Kai Ming Au, 2010).

Workplace conflict has been categorized into three typologies: task conflict, relationship conflict (Jehn, 1995), and process conflict (Jehn, 1997). Task conflict involves different ideas, perspectives, opinions, and viewpoints (Yang & Mossholder, 2004) and disputes over the content and outcomes of the task being performed (Jehn & Bendersky, 2003). Interestingly, researchers have concluded that task conflict helps improve group decisions (Jehn, 1997), team cohesion, team member satisfaction, team member commitment, team performance (Jehn & Chatman, 2000), and effective team outcomes. Relationship conflict involves an affective or emotional response (Hammer, 2001), tensions, disputes over interpersonal incompatibilities such as frustration, anger, and stress (Jehn & Chatman, 2000). It decreases mutual understanding, harms group performance (Wu et al., 2017), reduces collaborative interaction (De Dreu,

2006), damages group effort (Jehn, 1997), and hinders the success of project teams or groups (O'Neill et al., 2013). Furthermore, process conflict is the disagreement that occurs while work is being done, such as the distribution of duties, responsibilities, tasks, and resources (Jehn & Bendersky, 2003).

Organizations need to understand the nature of intercultural conflict in order to resolve it effectively. Conflicts can have positive (or functional) or negative (or dysfunctional) outcomes. Task and process conflicts concern the accomplishment of tasks, whereas relationship conflict involves an emotional reaction due to a dispute over interpersonal incompatibility (not related to the task). Nevertheless, it could result in an obstacle to task performance (Jehn & Bendersky, 2003). Therefore, the researchers chose to examine task conflict in particular, leaving out process conflict, with regard to task performance. Relationship conflict was chosen because it involves an emotional response. Therefore, this research focused on task and relationship conflict because, as will be explained in the next section of this paper, the serious game approach used for this research resulted in some time constraints for participants to complete all game scenarios.
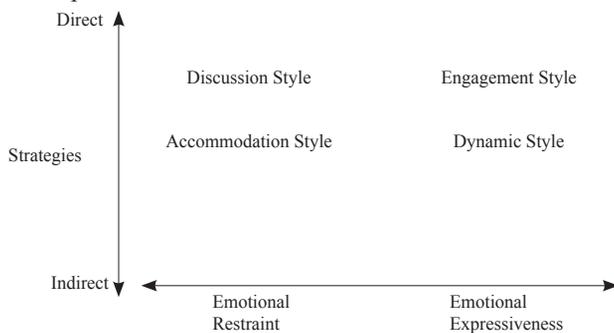
Intercultural Conflict Management Styles

Managing conflict in an intercultural context has unique and remarkable implications. Organizations can benefit greatly from the cultural diversity of their workforce if managed constructively and appropriately, for example, by facilitating group decision making that leads to effective decisions (Oetzel et al., 2000). However, it requires more energy and cultural sensitivity to gain a better understanding of how to manage it appropriately, as the potential for frustration and dissatisfaction among diverse group members can be increased (Boonsathorn, 2007). Therefore, different conflict management styles are used among team members from different cultures to have a pleasant diverse work environment.

Intercultural conflict resolution styles, as defined by Hammer (2005), are concerned with how disagreements and emotions are addressed. People use different communication approaches (direct/indirect) and emotional strategies (expressive/ restrained) when dealing with intercultural conflict. Individuals from different cultural backgrounds have different beliefs, values, stereotypes, and rules (IGI Global, 1988-2023). In terms of the emotional strategy used, emotions are

either controlled or expressed, typically combined with reasons. In direct cultures, there is a mutual responsibility to directly verbalize one's thoughts, concerns, opinions, and perspectives in the dispute. Persuasion is valued in these direct cultures; individuals logically support their arguments with valid and objective facts and then conclude with relevant recommendations or solutions. When dealing with conflict, direct cultures take a "solution-oriented" approach to problem solving (Leigh et al., 2018). In contrast, from the perspective of indirect cultures, direct strategies and face-to-face meetings escalate tensions and increase the discomfort of the parties. The indirect approach uses the concept of "relationship repair," or mending the broken relationship, when dealing with disagreements or conflict.

With the development of these two core dimensions (how people deal with disagreements and emotions) in the Intercultural Conflict Styles Inventory, a four-quadrant model of intercultural conflict resolution styles has been proposed (see Figure 1), based on high/low levels of directness and high/low levels of emotional expressiveness. They are referred to as (1) the discussion style (direct and emotionally restrained), which emphasizes the use of linguistic precision-the maxim "Say what you mean and mean what you say" explains it well; (2) the engagement style (direct and emotionally expressive), which is considered a sincere and positive conflict resolution style because people feel that if their emotions are on the table, then the resolution is progressing satisfactorily; (3) the accommodation style (indirect and emotionally restrained), which uses ambiguity to ensure that the conflict is under control. It is essential for this style to maintain an emotional calm to allow for interpersonal harmony; and (4) the dynamic style (indirect and emotionally expressive), which can be seen as unreasonable, overly sensitive, volatile, and rarely to the point.

Figure 1 A model of intercultural conflict management styles (Hammer, 2005)

Cultural Background

Hofstede's (1980) model of cultural orientations is the most widely cited (Has, 2012). According to Hofstede (1980), a four-dimensional conceptual framework of national culture has been developed that includes power distance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity, and uncertainty avoidance. These four cultural dimensions relate to how subordinates relate to superiors (power distance), how individuals and groups relate to each other (individualism/collectivism), how men and women relate to each other (masculinity/ femininity), and how people deal with uncertainty, aggression, and social conflict (uncertainty avoidance/ tolerance). Later, the fifth dimension, "Long-term versus Short-term Orientation," was added. Finally, the sixth dimension, "indulgence versus restraint", became an entirely new dimension related to the satisfaction versus control of basic human desires related to how people enjoy life (Hofstede, 2011).

Cultural background refers to the national culture that is rooted in the values that individuals acquire in their childhood and that are passed down from generation to generation (Hall & Hall, 1990). National cultures are highly complex. Multicultural virtual teams are composed of individuals from different cultures who perform simultaneous, collaborative work processes through electronic media without regard to geographic location (Chinowsky & Rojas, 2003). Cultural dimensions play an important role in global teams (Rodrigues & Sbragia, 2013).

In particular, De Wit et al. (2012) proposed that the relationship between task and relationship conflict depends on the cultural context. Moreover, the way employees respond to conflict is influenced by different cultural dimensions such as power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism versus collectivism, long-term versus short-term orientation, and masculinity versus femininity (Hofstede, 2001).

Nardon and Steers (2009) stated that the dimensions of power distance and individualism-collectivism have been widely used to study organizational and management research across cultures (Chow et al., 2000). In addition, organizations should consider cultural dimensions when managing global teams (Rodrigues & Sbragia, 2013) because the individualism-collectivism dimension helps explain attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors (Ting-Toomey, 2010). Furthermore, collectivism has gained the most popularity among researchers mainly in

knowledge management, followed by power distance (Pesch & Bouncken, 2017). Moreover, De Church et al. (2013) suggested that individualism-collectivism can be used to understand the behavior of individuals in groups or teams, and power distance or unequal use of power can prevent conflict from escalating (De Wit et al., 2012). Therefore, in this study, two cultural dimensions (individualism/collectivism and high/low power distance) were used to categorize participants from different backgrounds.

Gunkel et al.'s (2016) analysis of a multinational dataset of over a thousand individuals from ten different cultural clusters showed a direct influence of cultural value dimensions on a leader's preferences for conflict management styles. In contrast, the individualistic members of groups or teams have a greater tendency toward individual or dyadic (sub-team) trust, concern, and goal attainment (Goncalo & Staw, 2006). In fact, empirical studies have found that collectivist values promote more cooperative, positive conflict than individualistic values (Tjosvold et al., 2010). Thus, it can be concluded that the way collectivists deal with conflict tends to be indirect and emotionally restrained, whereas individualists prefer to use direct and emotionally restrained strategies.

Intercultural competence and conflict management have a long history and have been studied by many scholars. However, recently there have been many calls for future research on intercultural competence (Bartel-Radic, 2006), types of conflict (O'Neill et al., 2013), and intercultural conflict resolution (Ma et al., 2012) in the context of multicultural virtual project teams (Leigh et al., 2018). Importantly, none of the previous studies have examined the relationship between cultural differences, intercultural competence, conflict types, and intercultural conflict resolution among multicultural virtual team members. Therefore, this study filled these research gaps by investigating the relationship between the aforementioned variables and context, in addition to using a serious game in this experimental research as a novel methodology for increasing realistic data collection.

From the above literature review, the following hypotheses were developed:

H1: Team leaders' cultural background influences their choice of intercultural conflict management style among multicultural virtual team members.

H1.1: Team leaders' cultural background influences their choice of intercultural conflict

management style among multicultural virtual team members in the case of task conflict.

H1.2: Team leaders' cultural background influences the choice of their intercultural conflict management style among multicultural virtual team members, in the case of relationship conflict.

Intercultural Competence

Intercultural competence (IC) is defined as "the ability to think and act in interculturally appropriate ways" (Hammer et al., 2003). It also stands out as a paramount and fundamental concept within the field of intercultural communication (Liang et al., 2022).

Similarly, Deardorff (2006) described IC as "the ability to interact effectively and appropriately in intercultural encounters - supported by specific attitudes and affective characteristics, intercultural knowledge, skills, and reflection". In addition, the main skills among heterogeneous groups that lead to intercultural competence are cultural knowledge and self-control, relationship building, transcultural communication, cross-cultural adaptation, and intercultural sensitivity (Popescu, 2014).

Moreover, Bartel-Radic (2006) defined IC as "the ability to understand the meaning of intercultural interaction and the ability to adapt one's behavior to these meanings in order to produce efficient behavior". Thus, individuals should use compromise strategies in the intercultural learning process between their own culture and others due to effective intercultural interaction.

Heterogeneous groups bring several benefits, but the most important one is an increase in performance. Popescu (2014) summarizes these advantages, disadvantages and some suggestions as follows. First, the advantages are presented: diversity of skills, creativity, innovation, modernity, openness stimulation, ability to manage and utilize diversity, result in motivation, personal and service satisfaction, supportive environment and more comprehensive solutions. However, there are some drawbacks that need to be carefully considered, such as lack of intercultural competence, where managers cannot take advantage of cultural differences, leading to language difficulties, misunderstandings and conflicts. In fact, organizations need to make efforts in strategic management, fostering group harmony and psychological empowerment in teams. They should also act to anticipate future risks, avoid disagreements, and support training on cultural differences, intercultural competence, language skills,

effective communication, and team psychological safety.

The following hypotheses were developed from the literature review above:

H2.1: Team leaders with higher intercultural competence are more likely to adapt their choice of intercultural conflict management style (communication approach) to a team member from a different cultural background.

H2.1.1: Team leaders with higher intercultural competence are more likely to adapt the communication approach aspect of their intercultural conflict management style during a task conflict with a team member from a different cultural background.

H2.1.2: Team leaders with higher intercultural competence are more likely to adapt the communication approach aspect of their intercultural conflict management style during a relationship conflict with a team member from a different cultural background.

H2.2: Team leaders with higher intercultural competence are more likely to adapt their choice of intercultural conflict management style (emotional strategy) to a team member from a different cultural background.

H2.2.1: Team leaders with higher intercultural competence are more likely to adapt the emotional strategy aspect of their intercultural conflict management style during a task conflict with a team member from a different cultural background.

H2.2.2: Team leaders with higher intercultural competence are more likely to adapt the emotional strategy aspect of their intercultural conflict management style during a relationship conflict with a team member from a different cultural background.
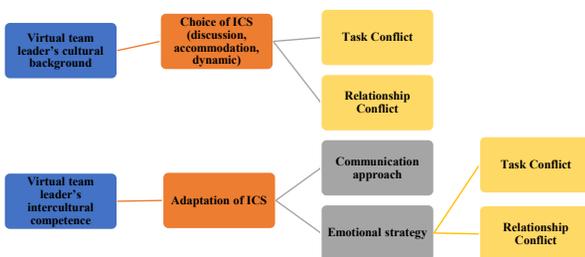
Conceptual Framework

Figure 2 Conceptual Framework

Research Methodology

In 2016, the Journal of International Business Studies (JIBS) welcomed and encouraged greater use of experimental research, as international business (IB) research could benefit from these methods to assess the internal validity of IB theories (Bartel-Radic et al., 2019). Therefore, based on the matching nature of our inquiry, we decided to use a quasi-experimental approach for this study. In addition, as discussed in the literature review, power distance (related to how subordinates deal with superiors) and individualism/collectivism (the bonds between individuals and groups) are the two most widely used in cross-cultural organizational and management research. Therefore, we included these two cultural dimensions in this study.

1. Population

As explained earlier, we focused our research on countries with distinctive Power Distance Index and Individualism Index scores. Hofstede et al. (2010) conducted a study to measure the Power Distance Index (PDI) and Individualism Index (IDV) scores, ranging from 0 to 100, in 78 countries. The median score was between 45-55 and was considered to be excluded for this study as it does not allow for sufficient differentiation of the selected countries. Thus, countries scoring between 0-44 were considered "Low Power Distance" or LPD and "Collectivism" or COL, and countries scoring between 56-100 were considered "High Power Distance" or HPD and "Individualism" or IDV. The results showed that high PDI includes Eastern European, Latin American, Asian, and African countries, while low PDI includes Germanic and English-speaking Western countries. Furthermore, individualism tends to be found in developed and Western countries, while collectivism tends to be found in less developed and Eastern countries.

Our study combined two cultural dimensions from the Power Distance and Individualism Index cultural dimensions to create four cultural background types: Type I, Type II, Type III, and Type IV. In terms of sample accessibility, cultural background type IV (Costa Rica only) was excluded due to limited data accessibility. Therefore, Thailand, France, and the United States were selected to represent cultural background types I, II, and III, respectively.

2. Sampling Design

The selection of each respondent was based on a purposive or judgmental sampling design, depending on who would be the most representative

population to be included in this study (Babbie, 2004). The researcher sent an invitation email that included an introduction to the game with an explicit statement of the expected time spent during the game, which was approximately 60 minutes, the link to the game for participants whose cultural background was Type I (Thailand), II (France), and III (USA), and incentive information (a lottery to win 10 Euro vouchers). Respondents had to be working professionals in public or private organizations or international business students from either Thailand, France, or the USA. Therefore, respondents who were not from these three countries were rejected.

     3. Research Instrument (The Serious Game)

     A serious game is a game-based approach that provides a controllable environment for researchers to study. It is designed not only for entertainment but also for learning. The pedagogy of serious games is based on the principles and benefits of experiential learning (Kolb & Kolb, 2005 as cited in Bartel-Radic et al., 2020).

     CRIT, the serious game, is the third game developed in the InterCCom project, which was initiated in 2018 by Anne Bartel-Radic, a full professor of international management at Sciences Po Grenoble and University Grenoble Alps in France (Bartel-Radic et al., 2020). CRIT, which stands for Conflict Resolution in Intercultural Teams, was developed for this research to assess the preferred intercultural conflict management styles of virtual team leaders through gameplay. The three main characters in the CRIT serious game were Thai, French, and American to represent the three cultural background types included in this study. Compared to conflict interaction in real virtual work life, CRIT presented problems and allowed the player to act in solving the problems or overcoming the incident.

     To assess the level of intercultural competence, a part of "LINK" the serious game was used. "LINK" the serious game was the first game developed within the InterCCom project. It was used in this study to overcome the problem of using a self-report. LINK stands for "Learning Intercultural Competence". It is based on the pedagogical objectives around the theme of intercultural competence in work teams. The scenes in LINK are organized around cultural differences. These scenes are likely to be interpreted differently depending on the culture, as they are based on the cultural dimensions developed by Hofstede (1980, 2001), Hall and Hall (1990) and Hampden-Turner &Trompenaars (2003).

"LINK" is an online serious game with interactive and effective educational tools that uses an experimental research approach that allows prominent participants to take action in realistic scenarios. Researchers could better understand specific behaviors in certain situations designed in the serious game by collecting data on players' choices. Therefore, the researchers included the selected scenes from the serious game LINK (Bartel-Radic et al., 2020) to measure the level of intercultural competence as an individual's adaptation to diversity in high vs. low power distance, individualism vs. collectivism, masculinity vs. femininity, monochronic vs. polychronic, explicit vs. implicit communication, and universalism vs. particularism.

     In addition, as suggested by Creswell & Creswell (2018), the researchers conducted two pilot studies to ensure the validity of the scenarios and the content validity of the serious game scores. In response to comments and feedback from pilot participants, the "engagement style" of the selected four intercultural conflict management style model (Hammer, 2005) was removed as it was identified as an inappropriate intercultural conflict management style. CRIT included clear rules, goals, and objectives that pushed the player to compete and win (to "get the job done"). Compared to conflict interaction in real virtual work life, CRIT presented problems and allowed the player to act to solve the problems or overcome the incident. The decisions to be made were based on the three intercultural conflict management styles, including discussion, accommodation, and dynamic styles. In addition, the scenarios included in both the LINK and CRIT serious games were created using the "critical incident" technique (Flanagan, 1954), which are short stories related to real intercultural and conflict situations. Thus, both serious games were used together as innovative data collection instruments to gather data from culturally diverse respondents (or players). The questions used in both serious games and the scoring methods can be found here (https://shorturl.at/afhP3).

     4. Data Analysis

     Since the data collected from the serious game are quantitative in nature, the data were analyzed using IBM's SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science) version 25 software. Analysis of variance (ANOVA), t-test, and chi-square were used to test our hypotheses.

Results

1. Descriptive Data

This study included 339 male and female respondents from 3 nationalities; Thai (106, 31.3%, high power distance & collectivism), French (114, 33.6%, high power distance & individualism), and American (119, 35.1%, low power distance & individualism). Their ages ranged from 18 to 65 years. The majority of respondents had Master's degree or equivalent, and their English proficiency was advanced. They were employed as professionals in the private sector, especially in research and education. Their international experience was gained through living abroad and interacting globally in their virtual workplace.

In terms of IC level based on six cultural dimensions, including high vs. low power distance, individualism vs. collectivism, masculinity vs. femininity, monochronic vs. polychronic, explicit vs. implicit communication, and universalism vs. particularism, it was measured through LINK, the serious game. The result of our sample showed that the mean value of IC (on a Likert scale from 1 to 5) was highest for French respondents ($\overline{x} = 3.41$), followed by Thai ($\overline{x} = 3.06$) and

American (USA, $\overline{x} = 2.82$) respondents. The results of the one-way ANOVA revealed that the IC scores showed statistically significant differences among the respondents from Thailand, France, and the USA.

In terms of intercultural conflict management styles, the Americans most frequently used the accommodation and dynamic styles ($\overline{x} = 5.88$, $\overline{x} = 7.73$), followed by the French ($\overline{x} = 5.28$, $\overline{x} = 5.62$) and the Thais ($\overline{x} = 5.11$, $\overline{x} = 5.68$). However, the Thais used the discussion style the most ($\overline{x} = 7.21$), followed by the French ($\overline{x} = 7.10$) and the Americans ($\overline{x} = 4.39$). In short, Thais and French are similar in their use of all intercultural conflict management styles. Americans, on the other hand, preferred to use the accommodation and dynamic styles, but rarely used the discussion style. Surprisingly, the results of the respondents' communication and emotional approach to intercultural conflict management style showed that the Thais used the direct approach the most ($\overline{x} = 7.21$), followed by the French ($\overline{x} = 7.10$), and the Americans ranked the lowest ($\overline{x} = 4.39$).

2. Inferential Statistics

To test our first hypothesis, we used the analysis of variance, or ANOVA test, to analyze the

Table 2 The summary of ANOVA results of Intercultural Conflict Management Style used when interacting with different interlocutors

Nationality	The way people deal with disagreements and emotions			Overall Conflict		Task Conflict		Relationship Conflict	
			df	F	Sig.	F	Sig.	F	Sig.
Thai	Use of Direct Style	Between Groups Within Groups	2 315	1.219	0.297	0.183	0.833	2.614	0.075
	Use of Indirect Style	Between Groups Within Groups	2 315	1.219	0.297	0.183	0.833	2.614	0.075
	Use of Expressive Style	Between Groups Within Groups	2 315	2.199	0.113	7.264	**0.001** **H1.1**	17.512	**0.000** **H1.2**
	Use of Restrained Style	Between Groups Within Groups	2 315	2.199	0.113	7.264	**0.001** **H1.1**	17.512	**0.000** **H1.2**
French	Use of Direct Style	Between Groups Within Groups	2 339	0.692	0.501	1.454	0.235	2.629	0.074
	Use of Indirect Style	Between Groups Within Groups	2 339	0.692	0.501	1.454	0.235	2.629	0.074
	Use of Expressive Style	Between Groups Within Groups	2 339	4.259	**0.015** **H1**	7.617	**0.001** **H1.1**	12.726	**0.000** **H1.2**
	Use of Restrained Style	Between Groups Within Groups	2 339	4.259	**0.015** **H1**	7.617	**0.001** **H1.1**	12.726	**0.000** **H1.2**
American	Use of Direct Style	Between Groups Within Groups	2 354	1.715	0.182	1.122	0.327	4.120	**0.017** **H1.2**
	Use of Indirect Style	Between Groups Within Groups	2 354	1.715	0.182	1.122	0.327	4.120	**0.017** **H1.2**
	Use of Expressive Style	Between Groups Within Groups	2 354	33.627	**0.000** **H1**	8.952	**0.000** **H1.1**	56.115	**0.000** **H1.2**
	Use of Restrained Style	Between Groups Within Groups	2 354	33.627	**0.000** **H1**	8.952	**0.000** **H1.1**	56.115	**0.000** **H1.2**

differences among respondents from Thailand, France, and the United States in the use of intercultural conflict management styles in two types of conflicts, namely task conflicts and relationship conflicts. In addition, planned contrasts were used to compare means between groups. The following Table 2 shows the summarized ANOVA results of the intercultural conflict management style used among respondents from different cultural backgrounds.

Hypothesis 1 is supported partially. The results indicate that:

- There was a statistically significant difference in the use of the emotional strategy (expressive/restrained) in a conflict between French and team members from other cultural backgrounds, $F_{(2,339)} = 4.259$, $p = .015$.

- There was a statistically significant difference in the use of emotional strategy (expressive/restrained) in a conflict between Americans and team members from other cultural backgrounds, $F_{(2,354)} = 33.627$, $p = .000$.

However, there was no statistically significant difference in the use of communication approach (direct/indirect) in a conflict between team members from different cultural backgrounds.

Hypothesis 1.1 is partially supported. The results indicate that:

- There was a statistically significant difference in the use of the emotional strategy, expressive/restrained, in a task conflict between Thais and others with cultural differences, $F_{(2,315)} = 7.264$, $p = .001$.

- There was a statistically significant difference in the use of the emotional strategy, expressive/restrained, in a task conflict between French and others with cultural differences, $F_{(2,339)} = 7.617$, $p = .001$.

- There was a statistically significant difference in the use of the emotional strategy, expressive/restrained, in a task conflict between Americans and others with cultural differences, $F_{(2,354)} = 8.952$, $p = .000$.

However, there was no statistically significant difference in the use of communication approach (direct/indirect) in a task conflict between team members from different cultural backgrounds.

Hypothesis 1.2 is partially supported. The results indicate that:

- There was a statistically significant difference in the use of the emotional strategy, expressive/restrained, in a relationship conflict between Thais and others with cultural differences, $F_{(2,315)} = 17.512$, $p = .000$.

- There was a statistically significant difference in the use of the emotional strategy, expressive/restrained, in a relationship conflict between French and others with cultural differences, $F_{(2,339)} = 12.726$, $p = .000$.

- There was a statistically significant difference in the use of the emotional strategy, expressive/restrained, in a relationship conflict between Americans and others with cultural differences, $F_{(2, 354)} = 56.115$, $p = .000$.

- There was a statistically significant difference in the use of the communication approach, direct/indirect, in a relationship conflict between Americans and others with cultural differences, $F_{(2,354)} = 4.120$, $p = .017$.

To test our second hypothesis, Chi-Square was used to test the relationship comparing the frequencies between IC and intercultural conflict resolution behaviors in a conflict (task conflict and relationship conflict).

Then, the communication approach and emotional strategy used in intercultural conflict resolution behaviors between respondents with cultural differences were recoded into a categorical variable. The frequencies of how respondents changed their communication approach and emotional strategy during the conflict were counted. If the frequencies were between 40 and 60 percent, the respondents were identified as frequently changing their communication approach and emotional strategy. The opposite was true for frequencies below 40 percent (rarely changed) (see Figure 3). In general, a p-value of less than 0.05 (typically ≤ 0.05) is considered an indicator of statistical significance, providing strong evidence against the null hypothesis. Finally, the Phi value and its interpretation were reported on the strength of association between the two categorical variables. The summarized chi-square results are presented in Table 3.
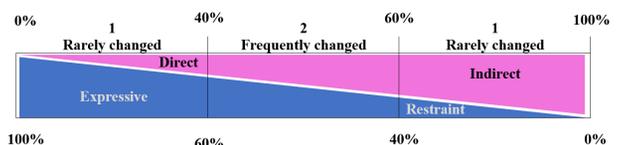

Figure 3 Converting the frequencies of communication approach and emotional strategy into categorical variables

Table 3 The summary of Chi-Square results for H2

Hypothesis	Type of Conflict	IC Level	Change Direct/Indirect Style		Pearson Chi-Square		Symmetric Measures	
			Rarely	Often	Value	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Phi Value	Interpretation
Communication approach (Direct/Indirect) (N=339)								
H2.1	Combined Conflicts	Medium	131	28	10.859ᵃ	**0.001**	**0.179**	**Strong**
		High	120	**60**				
H2.1.1	Task Conflict	Medium	112	47	1.140ᵃ	0.286	0.058	-
		High	117	63				
H2.1.2	Relationship Conflict	Medium	121	38	1.140ᵃ	0.907	0.006	-
		High	136	44				
Emotional Strategy (Expressive/Restraint) (N=339)								
H2.2	Combined Conflicts	Medium	108	51	3.241ᵃ	0.072	-0.098	
		High	138	42				
H2.2.1	Task Conflict	Medium	102	57	0.073ᵃ	0.787	-0.015	
		High	118	62				
H2.2.2	Relationship Conflict	**Medium**	110	**49**	5.259ᵃ	**0.022**	**-0.125**	**Moderate**
		High	114	36				

Hypothesis 2.1 is supported. The result indicates that IC level (high) was significantly and strongly associated with the way respondents adapted their communication approach when dealing with a conflict with a member from another culture in a multicultural virtual team, X2 (1, N = 339) = 10.859, p = .001, f = 0.179 (strong).

Hypothesis 2.1.1 is not supported. The result indicates that IC level was not significantly associated with the way respondents adapted their communication approach when dealing with a task conflict with a member from another culture in a multicultural virtual team, X2 (1, N = 339) = 1.140, p = .286, f = 0.058 (strong).

Hypothesis 2.1.2 is not supported. The result indicates that IC level was not significantly associated with the way respondents adapted their communication approach when dealing with a relationship conflict with a member from another culture in a multicultural virtual team, X2 (1, N = 339) = 0.014, p = .907, f = 0.006.

Hypothesis 2.2 is not supported. The result indicates that IC level was not significantly associated with the way respondents adapted their emotional strategy when dealing with a conflict with a member from another culture in a multicultural virtual team, X2 (1, N = 339) = 3.241, p = .072, f = 0.098.

Hypothesis 2.2.1 is not supported. The result indicates that IC level was not significantly associated with the way respondents adapted their emotional

strategy when dealing with a task conflict with a member from another culture in a multicultural virtual team, X2 (1, N = 339) = 0.073 p = .787, f = 0.015.

Hypothesis 2.2.2 is not supported because team leaders with medium EQ adapted their emotional strategy aspect more than those with higher EQ. The result indicates that IC level (medium) was significantly and moderately associated with the way respondents adapted their emotional strategy when dealing with a relationship conflict with a member from another culture in a multicultural virtual team, X2 (1, N = 339) = 5.259, p = .022, f = -0.125 (moderate).

Discussion

For RQ1.1 and RQ1.2, our results indicated that cultural background influences the choice of intercultural conflict management style. It was reported that for our sample, cultural background doesn't significantly influence the use of communication approaches (direct and indirect). In contrast, cultural background dramatically influences the use of emotional strategies (expressive and restrained) in general conflict and task conflict. However, in relationship conflict, cultural background significantly influences the use of both communication approach and emotional strategy.

For RQ2.1 and RQ2.2, our findings revealed that for our sample, the level of intercultural competence influences the adaptation of intercultural conflict

management style. The results concluded that respondents with high IC often change their communication approach in general conflict, but don't often change their emotional strategy in relationship conflict.

Regarding the age of the participants, we found an increase in IC scores with increasing age. This finding reflects the existing IC literature that IC increases with age when measured by a situational judgment test rather than a self-report measure (Schwarzenthal et al., 2017). In addition, respondents who had lived abroad received the highest IC scores. This finding is consistent with the research of Shaftel et al. (2007), who concluded that the experience of living abroad leads to higher IC.

In terms of intercultural conflict management choices, our study showed that Thais prefer to use the emotional restraint strategy as well as the indirect communication approach. Both behaviors are commonly cited in the literature as attributes of Thai cultural behaviors. However, our French sample reflected that their behaviors (indirect and emotional restraint) partially contradict the previous literature on French cultural behaviors. Nevertheless, the reported results that the French scored highest on the IC level may be a reason for adapting their behavior in a conflict situation. Regarding the behaviors used by the American sample, the result showed that they preferred to use an indirect and emotionally restrained communication approach, which also contradicts the existing literature. There are two possible reasons for this finding: Americans are goal-oriented; therefore, they may adapt their cultural behaviors to help accomplish the task in the game. And because USA is made up of many different, multicultural ethnic groups, their cultural behaviors may differ.

In summary, according to the findings of this study, cultural background and IC influenced ICS and the adaptation of ICS to cultural diversity to some extent. Specifically, for the cultural differences in conflict management style, it was partially demonstrated that it varied from culture to culture. Finally, the role of IC was demonstrated in a substantial relationship with the adaptation of conflict management style.

We see three possible reasons why these results contradict the existing literature. First, the goal of the serious game was task-oriented, as it was clearly stated that players had to complete the task. Second, players took on the role of coordinator of a multicultural virtual team and focused on their goals to complete the task. They typically collaborated in the work process via electronic media. People from low power distance cultures typically encourage participation and prefer participatory and collaborative decision making. Third, the role of the coordinator is to keep the group members organized and focused on the goal of the task. Thus, they focused mainly on getting the job done, using various strategies to work collaboratively and minimize conflict.

Since most of the respondents had previous international experience, this may be another reason why our sample responded to conflict differently than expected. In other words, the samples had a high level of IC awareness of cultural differences, which may influence their intercultural conflict management style. Furthermore, Tjosvold et al. (2014) added that people use open-minded discussions and direct approaches to reduce conflict because individuals can freely express their views and build a mutually beneficial relationship.

Conclusion

Intercultural competence was measured in the serious game by the degree of adaptation to cultural diversity in terms of six cultural dimensions. The results showed that in our sample, the French had the highest level of IC, followed by the Thais and the Americans. Furthermore, when looking at each dimension closely, the French scored highest on every IC dimension, followed by the Thais on four IC dimensions (high/low power distance, universalism/particularism, competition/ consensus, and individualism/collectivism), and the Americans on two IC dimensions (monochronism/ polychronism and explicit/implicit communication). Again, the IC level results based on this study should not be generalized to the entire country population that all French have higher IC than the other two country samples, as the subsamples are not strictly equivalent on demographic variables.

In terms of intercultural conflict management style, our samples reflected that Americans preferred to use dynamic style and accommodation style, while Thai and French were similar in terms of using discussion style as their preferred style.

It can be concluded that the use of accommodation style is always higher when interacting with people from the same cultural background and lower when interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds. On the contrary, the dynamic style was used more when interacting with people from different cultures and less when interacting with people from the same cultural background. Finally, the discussion style was used more

by Thais when interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds, but the French used it more when interacting with people from the same cultural background. And Americans used this style more with Thai interlocutors but less with French interlocutors.

Our main findings revealed that cultural background has some influence on the choice of intercultural conflict management style. In a conflict and task conflict, cultural background influences the use of emotional strategy (expressive and restrained), but not communication approaches (direct and indirect). However, in a relationship conflict, cultural background significantly affects the use of both communication approach and emotional strategy. The results concluded that Thai and French significantly used the argumentative style more than the dynamic and accommodation style. Meanwhile, Americans significantly used the dynamic style, followed by the accommodation style and the argumentative style.

Suggestions

The authors make the following suggestions for future research. First, we suggest that the combination of qualitative methods will help to enrich the results of our initial quantitative findings. In addition, due to the relatively small sample size for each cultural type, increasing the sample size of each country/culture will lead to generalizability. Also, to maximize generalizability, future research should use the probability sampling design. Then, adding more conflict contexts in the scenario by including how the conflict escalated in different conflict stages and the process conflict could help to find deeper potentially interesting future results.

Regarding the criticism of Hofstede's work, the cultural elements used in the GLOBE study (Shaiq et al., 2011) are recommended for a more effective analysis since it consists of more than 160 scholars from 62 cultures, providing for a deeper and accurate state to develop an understanding of cultures by separating values from practices, and proposing an in-depth detailed cultural dimensions. Finally, since one of the critical success factors in ensuring effective collaboration is trust (Breuer et al., 2020), future research could add an interpersonal trust variable to the study. As a final word from the authors, we strongly believe that future research could reuse our serious game with different samples from other cultures/countries, as many exciting aspects can also be explored. We welcome any research collaboration.

Second, using a real game platform or metaverse will offer higher benefits in terms of allowing an increase in enjoyability, faster interactivity, and score feedback features. Players could potentially have more fun while playing the serious game and receive instant feedback and recommendations after completing the game. In addition, the adjustment to shorten the scenarios should be reconsidered, as many players mentioned that the game was too long. However, the player could enjoy the game more and forget the time spent during the game if many game features are developed.

The research contribution is the development of an innovative data collection method, CRIT the serious game, which allowed the data collection method to be immersive, engaging, and entertaining. The serious game projected an actual virtual work environment through simulation. It is also recognized as an educational tool, as feedback on how to improve their IC and conflict management style was provided upon completion of the game. The use of CRIT's serious game approach is an important contribution as other studies in this area mainly use self-report instruments and interviews. The second research contribution is that this research filled the gap in international business research by examining the influence of intercultural competence and cultural background on the choice of intercultural conflict management style in a multicultural virtual team context. Thus, this research filled the gaps by investigating the influences between the mentioned variables in a multicultural virtual team context and used an innovative research methodology in this quasi-experimental research for data collection.

The result showed that when managing intercultural conflict among virtual team members, one should be wary of stereotypical expected behaviors. Many factors may influence the choice of their intercultural conflict style, including age, educational background, international experience, and work and virtual team experience.

In terms of research context and methodology, this research is based on purely quantitative data, and the number of respondents per country/culture was relatively small. In addition, our three cultural background types are represented by only a single country, so it will lead to more generalizable results if the study includes more countries to represent each cultural background type. Last but not least, this study only used two of Hofstede's cultural dimensions when looking at cultural differences, it may be interesting to

look further into the GLOBE study , which is the more recent study and includes more cultural dimensions.

For the limitations related to the serious game, it would be beneficial to use a real game platform that allows interactive and scored feedback features or use immersive metaverse development, the 3D digital virtual reality focused on social platforms to make it even more realistic. In addition, the time to complete the whole game was a bit too long, so shortening the scenarios may need to be considered.

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