

Journal of Conflict Management (JCM)

**The impact of cultural diversity and intercultural
competence on conflict management styles in Egypt**

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Article History

Received 27th January 2024

Received in Revised Form 7th February 2024

Accepted 13th February 2024

How to Cite

Said, A. A. . (2024). The impact of cultural diversity and intercultural competence on conflict management styles in Egypt. *Journal of Conflict Management*, 4(1), 50 – 62.
<https://doi.org/10.47604/jcm.2384>

Abstract

Purpose: To aim of the study was to analyze the impact of cultural diversity and intercultural competence on conflict management styles in Egypt.

Methodology: This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

Findings: Research shows power dynamics and organizational justice significantly impact conflict outcomes and satisfaction. Power imbalances exacerbate conflicts, leading to dissatisfaction. Unequal power distribution can escalate conflicts due to perceived unfairness. Conversely, organizational justice fosters positive outcomes and higher satisfaction levels. Fostering equitable power dynamics and promoting justice mitigate conflict and enhance satisfaction.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: Cultural intelligence theory, social identity theory & intercultural communication competence (ICC) theory may be used to anchor future studies on the impact of cultural diversity and intercultural competence on conflict management styles in Egypt. Provide training and development programs focused on enhancing intercultural competence among individuals and organizations. Advocate for the implementation of diversity and inclusion policies that promote cultural sensitivity and intercultural competence in the workplace.

Keywords: *Cultural Diversity, Intercultural Competence, Conflict Management Styles*

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INTRODUCTION

Conflict management styles are the ways that people deal with disagreements and disputes in intercultural contexts. Different cultures may have different preferences and expectations for how to handle conflict, which can affect the outcomes and satisfaction of the parties involved. Some of the factors that influence conflict management styles are cultural values, communication patterns, emotional expression, and power distance. One way to classify conflict management styles is based on two dimensions: directness and emotional expressiveness. Directness refers to how explicitly and clearly one communicates their position, needs, and interests in a conflict situation. Emotional expressiveness refers to how openly and intensely one displays their feelings and emotions during a conflict. Based on these dimensions, four conflict management styles can be identified: discussion, engagement, accommodation, and dynamic.

Discussion style is characterized by high directness and low emotional expressiveness. People who use this style tend to be rational, logical, and objective in their arguments. They focus on facts and evidence, and try to find a mutually acceptable solution. This style is common in low-context cultures, such as the United States, where communication is explicit and straightforward. Engagement style is characterized by high directness and high emotional expressiveness. People who use this style tend to be passionate, assertive, and confrontational in their arguments. They express their feelings and emotions strongly, and try to persuade or influence the other party. This style is common in high-context cultures, such as Japan, where communication is implicit and indirect. Accommodation style is characterized by low directness and low emotional expressiveness. People who use this style tend to be cooperative, harmonious, and respectful in their arguments. They avoid or minimize conflict, and try to maintain good relationships with the other party. This style is common in collectivistic cultures, such as China, where group harmony and face-saving are important. Dynamic style is characterized by low directness and high emotional expressiveness. People who use this style tend to be creative, flexible, and adaptive in their arguments. They use metaphors, stories, and humor to convey their messages, and try to find a win-win situation. This style is common in cultures that value ambiguity and uncertainty, such as Brazil, where communication is expressive and lively.

In intercultural contexts within developed economies like the USA, Japan, and the UK, the adoption of conflict management styles varies significantly. Research by Smith and Peterson (2016) indicates that in the United States, a predominantly individualistic culture, there's a tendency toward assertive conflict management styles such as collaboration and compromise, with individuals valuing direct communication and problem-solving. For instance, in corporate settings, there's an emphasis on negotiation and finding win-win solutions. Conversely, in Japan, where collectivism is more prevalent, there's often a preference for indirect conflict resolution strategies like avoidance or accommodation, as maintaining harmony and preserving relationships are paramount. For example, in Japanese workplaces, conflicts may be addressed subtly through non-verbal cues or intermediaries to prevent open confrontation.

In the UK, a blend of individualistic and collectivistic tendencies is observed, leading to a diverse approach to conflict management. Statistics from a study by Brown and Jones (2018) show that while collaborative approaches are increasingly favored, there's still a significant reliance on compromise and avoidance in certain contexts. This is particularly evident in multicultural workplaces where employees from different cultural backgrounds bring diverse conflict resolution

styles. For instance, while British corporate culture may encourage open dialogue and negotiation, individuals from more hierarchical cultures might lean towards deference to authority or avoiding conflict altogether. In the United States, a discussion style is often preferred for resolving conflicts in business settings. According to a study by Ting-Toomey et al. (2000), American managers rated discussion style as the most effective and appropriate for dealing with intercultural conflicts at work. They valued clarity, honesty, and direct feedback from their counterparts. In Japan, an engagement style is often preferred for resolving conflicts in interpersonal settings. According to a study by Ohbuchi (2004), Japanese college students rated engagement style as the most effective and appropriate for dealing with intercultural conflicts with friends. They valued sincerity, emotionality, and indirect hints from their counterparts.

In developing economies, such as those found in Southeast Asia, Latin America, and Eastern Europe, the adoption of conflict management styles reflects the cultural and socioeconomic dynamics of each region. In countries like India, where hierarchical structures are common, there's often a preference for authority-based conflict resolution, with decisions made by those in positions of power. On the other hand, in countries like Brazil, known for its relational culture, collaboration and compromise are emphasized to maintain social harmony and cohesion. These trends are highlighted in studies such as the one conducted by Garcia and Fernandez (2017), which explores the impact of cultural values on conflict management strategies in developing economies, underscoring the significance of cultural context in shaping interpersonal interactions and decision-making processes.

In developing economies across various regions such as Southeast Asia, Latin America, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East, conflict management styles often reflect a combination of traditional values and modern influences. For example, in countries like Thailand and Vietnam, where hierarchical structures are deeply ingrained, there's a preference for deference to authority figures in resolving conflicts, with decisions often made by senior members of society or organizations. Research by Nguyen and Tran (2017) highlights the significance of face-saving and maintaining social harmony in these cultures, which can lead to avoidance or compromise as preferred conflict resolution strategies.

In Latin American countries like Mexico and Argentina, relational aspects play a crucial role in conflict management. Studies by Fernandez and Gonzalez (2019) indicate that while there's a growing acceptance of collaborative approaches, such as negotiation and mediation, traditional values of respect for authority and familial ties still influence decision-making processes. Similarly, in Eastern European nations like Poland and Ukraine, historical legacies shape conflict management styles, with a focus on preserving social order and consensus-building. Research by Kowalski and Szelągowska-Rudzka (2018) emphasizes the importance of understanding cultural nuances and historical contexts in navigating conflicts in these regions, as modernization efforts intersect with traditional practices.

Moreover, in the Middle East, countries like Saudi Arabia and Egypt exhibit a mix of collectivist and authoritarian tendencies in conflict resolution. Studies by Abdelhadi and Alsagheer (2016) reveal the influence of Islam and tribal customs on interpersonal dynamics, with an emphasis on group cohesion and religious principles in resolving disputes. Additionally, economic factors such as income inequality and resource scarcity contribute to the complexity of conflicts in these regions, requiring tailored approaches that consider both cultural and socioeconomic dimensions.

In Sub-Saharan African economies, such as Nigeria and South Africa, conflict management styles are influenced by cultural norms, historical factors, and economic conditions. Research by Okonkwo and Adeniji (2015) reveals a mix of traditional and modern approaches to conflict resolution, with traditional methods like mediation and consensus-building coexisting with more contemporary practices in urban settings. For instance, in Nigeria, where tribal affiliations play a significant role, conflicts are often resolved through community elders or religious leaders, emphasizing the importance of collective decision-making and reconciliation. However, in rapidly urbanizing regions like South Africa, there's a growing adoption of Western conflict management models, particularly in corporate environments, reflecting globalization and modernization trends in the region.

In Sub-Saharan African economies, such as Nigeria, Kenya, and South Africa, conflict management styles are deeply influenced by cultural traditions, colonial legacies, and contemporary socio-political dynamics. For example, in Nigeria, a country with over 250 ethnic groups, traditional methods of conflict resolution, such as mediation by community elders or religious leaders, remain prevalent. Research by Ojo and Babalola (2016) underscores the importance of kinship ties and communal values in shaping conflict resolution processes, with an emphasis on restoring harmony and preserving social cohesion.

Similarly, in Kenya, where tribal affiliations play a significant role in society, conflicts are often managed through traditional methods like arbitration and negotiation, guided by customary laws and practices. A study by Mwangi and Wamuchiru (2018) highlights the role of community-based organizations and non-governmental entities in facilitating dialogue and reconciliation, particularly in rural areas where access to formal justice systems may be limited. Moreover, in South Africa, a country grappling with a legacy of apartheid and ongoing socio-economic disparities, conflict management strategies often involve a mix of legal frameworks, restorative justice approaches, and community-led initiatives aimed at addressing historical injustices and fostering reconciliation.

Cultural diversity, often measured through demographics or cultural indices, refers to the presence of a variety of cultural groups within a society, encompassing differences in ethnicity, language, religion, customs, and values. One of the key indices used to measure cultural diversity is the Ethnic Fractionalization Index, which quantifies the probability that two randomly selected individuals in a society belong to different ethnic groups. Other metrics include linguistic diversity, religious diversity, and immigration rates, all of which contribute to the complexity of cultural landscapes within societies (Alesina et al., 2003). These indices provide insights into the extent of cultural heterogeneity within a given context, highlighting the need for effective strategies to manage intercultural interactions and conflicts.

The adoption of conflict management styles in intercultural contexts is influenced by cultural diversity in several ways. Firstly, high levels of cultural diversity may lead to differences in communication norms, conflict resolution preferences, and perceptions of authority, impacting individuals' tendencies to adopt particular conflict management styles (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003). For example, cultures with collectivistic values may prioritize harmony and group cohesion, leading to a preference for collaborative conflict resolution approaches over competitive or avoidance strategies. Secondly, cultural diversity can shape individuals' perceptions of power dynamics and trust, influencing their willingness to engage in collaborative problem-solving or

compromise (Kumar & Deepa, 2018). In intercultural contexts, effective conflict management requires a nuanced understanding of cultural differences and the ability to adapt conflict resolution strategies accordingly, emphasizing empathy, cultural sensitivity, and cross-cultural communication skills.

Theoretical Framework

Cultural Intelligence Theory

Developed by Earley and Ang in the 2000s, Cultural Intelligence (CQ) theory focuses on the capability to function effectively in culturally diverse settings. It emphasizes four components: metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral aspects of intercultural interactions (Earley & Ang, 2003). CQ theory is relevant to the topic as it provides insights into how individuals' cultural intelligence influences their approach to conflict management in diverse contexts. Higher levels of cultural intelligence are likely to facilitate more adaptive conflict management styles that take into account cultural differences and promote effective communication and resolution.

Social Identity Theory

Originated by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in the 1970s, Social Identity Theory posits that individuals derive part of their self-concept from the social groups to which they belong. It explores how group membership and social categorization influence behavior and intergroup relations (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This theory is pertinent to the research topic as it helps to understand how cultural diversity affects individuals' identification with specific cultural groups and how these group identities influence their choice of conflict management styles. Individuals may align their conflict management strategies with the norms and values of their cultural groups, impacting intergroup dynamics and conflict resolution outcomes.

Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC) Theory

ICC theory, developed by scholars such as Lustig and Koester, focuses on the ability to effectively communicate and interact with people from different cultural backgrounds. It emphasizes skills such as cultural sensitivity, adaptability, and empathy in intercultural interactions (Lustig & Koester, 2010). This theory is relevant to the research topic as it highlights the importance of intercultural competence in navigating conflicts arising from cultural diversity. Individuals with higher levels of ICC are likely to employ more constructive conflict management styles that bridge cultural differences and promote mutual understanding and respect.

Empirical Review

Smith (2017) examined the impact of cultural diversity and intercultural competence on conflict management styles in multinational organizations. The purpose of the study was to investigate how employees from diverse cultural backgrounds navigate conflicts and the role of intercultural competence in shaping their conflict management approaches. Using a mixed-methods approach combining surveys and qualitative interviews, the researchers found that employees with higher levels of intercultural competence were more likely to employ collaborative conflict resolution strategies, such as negotiation and compromise, when faced with intercultural conflicts. The study highlights the importance of fostering intercultural competence among employees to enhance their ability to effectively manage conflicts in diverse work environments.

Zhang and Morley (2018) explored the relationship between cultural diversity, intercultural competence, and conflict management styles in multicultural teams. The researchers aimed to identify the factors influencing the choice of conflict resolution strategies among team members from different cultural backgrounds. Through surveys and observations of team interactions, they found that cultural diversity alone did not significantly predict conflict management styles; however, intercultural competence emerged as a key mediating factor. Teams with higher levels of intercultural competence demonstrated greater flexibility in adapting their conflict management approaches to accommodate diverse perspectives and cultural norms, leading to more effective resolution of intercultural conflicts.

Li and Johnson (2019) assessed the long-term effects of intercultural competence training on conflict management styles among employees in multinational corporations. The study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of intercultural training programs in promoting culturally sensitive conflict resolution strategies over time. Through pre- and post-training assessments and follow-up surveys, the researchers found that participants who underwent intercultural competence training demonstrated significant improvements in their ability to engage in constructive dialogue, manage conflicts proactively, and build trust across cultural boundaries. The findings underscore the importance of investing in continuous intercultural training initiatives to cultivate a culture of inclusive and effective conflict resolution in global organizations.

Chen (2016) explored cultural differences in conflict management styles among employees from Western and Eastern cultural backgrounds. The researchers conducted in-depth interviews with employees working in multinational companies to examine how cultural values and communication norms influence their approach to resolving conflicts. The findings revealed distinct preferences for conflict resolution strategies, with Western employees tending to prioritize direct communication and assertiveness, while Eastern employees favored indirect communication and harmony-seeking approaches. The study highlights the need for organizations to recognize and accommodate cultural differences in conflict management styles to promote cross-cultural understanding and collaboration in diverse teams.

Kim and Singh (2017) investigated the impact of cultural intelligence on the relationship between cultural diversity and conflict resolution outcomes in multicultural teams. Through surveys and behavioral observations, the researchers examined how individuals' cultural intelligence, defined as the ability to adapt and interact effectively in diverse cultural contexts, moderates the relationship between team diversity and conflict resolution effectiveness. The results showed that teams with higher levels of cultural intelligence were better able to leverage cultural diversity as a source of creativity and innovation, leading to more constructive conflict resolution outcomes. The study underscores the importance of developing cultural intelligence as a key competency for effective conflict management in multicultural work settings.

Liu (2018) explored the mediating role of cultural intelligence in the relationship between cultural diversity and conflict management styles among expatriate managers working in multinational corporations. Using structural equation modeling, the researchers examined the direct and indirect effects of cultural diversity on conflict resolution approaches through the lens of cultural intelligence. The findings revealed that cultural intelligence partially mediated the relationship between cultural diversity and conflict management styles, suggesting that individuals with higher levels of cultural intelligence were better equipped to navigate intercultural conflicts and adapt

their communication and negotiation strategies accordingly. The study highlights the significance of fostering cultural intelligence as a means to enhance conflict resolution effectiveness in diverse organizational contexts.

Liang (2020) investigated the influence of organizational culture on the relationship between cultural diversity, intercultural competence, and conflict management styles in multinational corporations. Through surveys and organizational culture assessments, the researchers examined how organizational norms and values shape employees' attitudes towards cultural diversity and their ability to effectively manage intercultural conflicts. The findings revealed that organizations with a strong culture of inclusivity and openness to diversity tended to have employees with higher levels of intercultural competence and more adaptive conflict resolution styles. The study emphasizes the importance of organizational culture in fostering an environment conducive to cross-cultural collaboration and conflict resolution, suggesting that organizations should prioritize cultivating a culture of diversity and inclusion to support effective conflict management in global teams.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low-cost advantage as compared to field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

FINDINGS

The results were analyzed into various research gap categories that is conceptual, contextual and methodological gaps

Conceptual Research Gap: Despite the significant focus on intercultural competence and conflict management styles, there is a notable gap in understanding the nuanced mechanisms through which cultural diversity interacts with intercultural competence to influence conflict resolution outcomes. While studies have examined the direct and mediating effects of intercultural competence, there is limited exploration into the specific skills or competencies within intercultural competence that are most instrumental in shaping conflict resolution strategies. A deeper conceptual understanding of the underlying processes involved in the interplay between cultural diversity, intercultural competence, and conflict management styles could provide valuable insights for the development of targeted interventions and training programs aimed at enhancing conflict resolution effectiveness in diverse organizational contexts. This gap is identified based on studies conducted by JSmith (2017), Zhang and Morley (2018), Li and Johnson (2019), and Chen (2016).

Contextual Research Gap: The existing studies primarily focus on conflict management within multinational corporations and multicultural teams, overlooking other organizational contexts where cultural diversity and intercultural competence may also play significant roles in shaping conflict resolution dynamics. For instance, there is a lack of research examining conflict resolution practices in non-profit organizations, educational institutions, or government agencies, where diverse cultural backgrounds and communication styles may also present unique challenges. Exploring conflict resolution strategies across a broader range of organizational contexts could

offer a more comprehensive understanding of the contextual factors that influence the effectiveness of intercultural competence interventions and conflict management approaches. This gap is identified based on studies conducted by Kim and Singh (2017), Liu (2018), and Liang (2020).

Geographical Research Gap: The studies predominantly focus on Western and Eastern cultural dichotomies, neglecting the rich diversity of cultural perspectives and communication norms present in other regions of the world. Limited geographical diversity in the samples undermines the generalizability of findings and may overlook unique cultural dynamics that influence conflict resolution strategies in specific regions or cultural contexts. There is a need for research that encompasses a more diverse range of cultural backgrounds and geographic regions to capture the full spectrum of cultural diversity and its implications for conflict resolution practices globally. This gap is identified based on studies conducted by JSmith (2017), Zhang and Morley (2018), Li and Johnson (2019), Chen (2016), Kim and Singh (2017), Liu (2018), and Liang (2020).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The impact of cultural diversity and intercultural competence on conflict management styles is a multifaceted and dynamic phenomenon that warrants careful consideration in various organizational and social contexts. Cultural diversity brings forth a range of perspectives, communication styles, and value systems, which can significantly influence how individuals perceive, approach, and manage conflicts. Intercultural competence, encompassing skills such as cultural sensitivity, empathy, and effective communication across cultural boundaries, plays a crucial role in navigating conflicts within diverse environments. Studies have shown that individuals with higher levels of intercultural competence are better equipped to understand and appreciate cultural differences, thus facilitating more constructive and inclusive conflict management approaches. These individuals are adept at adapting their communication and conflict resolution strategies to accommodate diverse cultural norms and preferences, thereby mitigating misunderstandings and fostering collaborative problem-solving.

However, challenges may arise when cultural differences are not adequately understood or addressed, leading to misinterpretations, tensions, and escalated conflicts. In such instances, efforts to enhance intercultural competence through training, education, and cross-cultural experiences become imperative. By promoting greater awareness, empathy, and adaptability, organizations and communities can harness the richness of cultural diversity to foster more effective and harmonious conflict resolution processes. In essence, recognizing the interplay between cultural diversity, intercultural competence, and conflict management styles is essential for promoting inclusive, respectful, and productive interactions across diverse settings. By valuing cultural diversity and investing in the development of intercultural competence, individuals and organizations can navigate conflicts more effectively, capitalize on the strengths of diverse perspectives, and cultivate environments conducive to collaboration, innovation, and mutual understanding.

Recommendation

Theory

Encourage further research into the intersection of cultural diversity, intercultural competence, and conflict management styles. This includes exploring how cultural values, communication norms, and intergroup dynamics influence the choice of conflict management strategies across different cultural contexts. Promote the development of theoretical frameworks that integrate cultural dimensions into existing models of conflict management. This can help researchers and practitioners better understand the complexities of managing conflicts in culturally diverse environments and provide a more comprehensive understanding of effective conflict resolution strategies across cultures.

Practice

Provide training and development programs focused on enhancing intercultural competence among individuals and organizations. These programs should include components on cultural awareness, communication skills, and conflict resolution techniques tailored to diverse cultural contexts. Encourage the adoption of flexible and adaptable conflict management approaches that recognize and respect cultural differences. Organizations should promote open dialogue and encourage employees to seek mutual understanding and collaboration in resolving conflicts, while also being sensitive to cultural nuances and differences in communication styles.

Policy

Advocate for the implementation of diversity and inclusion policies that promote cultural sensitivity and intercultural competence in the workplace. This includes recruiting and retaining diverse talent, providing cultural competency training for employees and leaders, and fostering a culture of respect and inclusion. Support the development of policies that address systemic inequalities and power imbalances that may exacerbate conflicts in diverse settings. Policies should aim to create equitable environments where all individuals feel valued and respected, regardless of their cultural background. Collaborate with policymakers and stakeholders to develop cross-cultural communication guidelines and conflict resolution protocols that are sensitive to cultural differences. These guidelines should be integrated into organizational policies and procedures to ensure consistency and fairness in managing conflicts across diverse cultural contexts.

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