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**Understanding the Conflict Management Styles of Thais and Myanmar
in a Private International Hospital in Thailand:
A Cross-Cultural Dimension of Organization Development**

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Abstract

Cross-cultural interactions have gained significant attention in recent years due to the tremendous business advancements and high collaboration among the diverse workforce. The medical tourism industry has become a global phenomenon (Chen & Wilson, 2013). Among the medical tourism destinations, Thailand is well-reputed for its competitive advantages; especially medical tourists from Myanmar and Cambodia in the ASEAN region highly contribute to the private international hospitals in Thailand and to the medical tourism industry there. Thai international hospitals employ Myanmar talents to provide required services to Myanmar medical tourists. According to Ting-Toomey and Oetzel (2001), more chances of work-related conflicts or difficulty are likely to occur among different cultural groups in the workplace. Therefore, there is a research gap in terms of investigating the conflict management style of Myanmar and Thai managerial staff working in Thai private international hospitals from a cross-cultural perspective. Semi-structured interviews were used in the present study to collect data from 30 Thai and Myanmar participants; a descriptive analysis was used to analyze the data; and the Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory-II (Rahim, 1983) was referred to identify the conflict styles of the participants. As was seen in the study, Thais favored four conflict styles from the highest to lowest: dominating, integrating, compromising, and obliging, while Myanmar people preferred avoiding, dominating, and obliging. The findings of this study can be used as a contribution of knowledge to HROD scholars, practitioners, and organizations in Thailand in terms of the employment of Myanmar talents.

Keywords: Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory-II, Thai and Myanmar conflict management styles, cross-cultural, qualitative research

Introduction

Background of the Study

International business expansions and diverse workforces enhance cross-cultural interaction and reshape organizations in the face of globalization (Burke & Ng, 2006). In the healthcare sector, the globalization of medical care is a phenomenon where medical tourists travel to healthcare destinations (Chen & Wilson, 2013) to seek quality healthcare at an affordable price (Chaulagain et al., 2021). Thailand is one of the most popular medical tourism countries. In 2020-2021, it ranked 5 out of 46 destinations, and 15 out of 46 for its quality facilities and services. According to the Eastern Economic Corridor (n.d.) and the Thailand Board of Investment (n.d.), Thai medical tourism was prioritized as part of the 10-year national strategic plan (2016-2025) to develop the “Hub of Wellness and Medical Services,” aiming to become the medical hub of Asia.

Thai private international hospitals are the key players in the Thai medical tourism industry that welcome foreign patients, especially from the neighboring ASEAN countries (Ploymee, 2021). Among them, Myanmar and Cambodia patients are the highest with increased revenue of 38% year-over-year (YoY) (Ninkitsaranont, 2020). In 2023, Myanmar medical tourists reached up to the top 5 international patients (BDMS, n.d.). Due to the high demand for healthcare services by Myanmar patients, international private hospitals in Thailand have recruited Myanmar talents to provide the required services to the customers, as well as to liaise with the Thai hospital staff. The mid-level management of the hospitals have reported frequently occurring issues and conflict management in relation to the Thai and Myanmar managerial staff.

From the cross-cultural perspective, different cultural members working in the same work setting are likely to face work-related conflicts or difficulty in understanding one another’s culture (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001). Cultural exchange and understanding employees of different cultural backgrounds have been an area of focus in achieving successful business and organizational performance. It is crucial to study the conflict management styles of the Thai and Myanmar managerial staff of the private international hospitals in Thailand, as the knowledge gained from this research can contribute to Human Resource and Organization Development (HROD) scholars, practitioners, or Thai organizations regarding the employment of Myanmar talents.

Research Purposes

The purpose of the research is two-fold:

- To investigate the preferred conflict management styles of Thai managerial staff
- To investigate the preferred conflict management styles of Myanmar managerial staff

Research Questions

Based on the research purposes, there are two key questions as follows:

- What are the preferred conflict management styles of Thai managerial staff?
- What are the preferred conflict management styles of Myanmar managerial staff?

Literature Review

Cross-Cultural Organization Development

Since 2004, the concept of cross-cultural management has developed as one of the distinct strands of International human resource development (IHRD) (Garavan, 2012). Cultural-related issues emerge when a diverse group of people from different cultures meet and work “under the same roof” (Kadam et al., 2021), and therein lies the problems of differences in national values, practices, and behaviors in a multicultural workplace. Thus, the development of cross-cultural organization development interventions has become important (Kyriakidou et al., 2013). Garavan (2012) highlighted the role and importance of cross-cultural human resource development as follows: “The cross-cultural perspective has generally focused attention on the cultural distinctiveness of practices, beliefs, and values shared by a country. It assumes that culture and values act as boundaries that allow interaction and socialization within them. Cross-cultural perspectives assume that societies or countries will vary in the types of institutions and approaches to HRD and those variations reflect different traditions, values, attitudes, and experiences”.

Conflict Management in Organization Development

Conflict is a common phenomenon depending on the individual’s needs and interests (Martínez-López et al., 2022). From the organization development aspect, conflict does not eliminate but ensures the nourishment of healthy conflict in organizations (McLean, 2005). As conflict involves communications and relationships (Rattanasimakool, 2009), communication is the key to understanding how individuals or groups in the organization manage conflicts (Thomas & Pondy, 1977). Scholars (e.g., Kilmann & Thomas, 1977; Rahim, 1983) have developed conflict management style inventories to study the conflict styles of individuals and their influence on the group (Gelfand et al., 2007).

The conflict management styles of individuals vary from one to another, and the conflict management style of a person can be changed depending on the situation (Cupach & Canary, 1997). However, different conflict styles have different impacts and outcomes on the organizations. Conflict management influences the improvement of organizations through organizational learning, knowledge acquisition and sharing (Rahim, 2002), ethical decision-making and leadership (Rahim et al., 1992), team coordination and performance (Tabassi et al., 2019), innovation and creativity (Tjosvold, 2008), financial growth of the organization (Cheung & Chuah, 1999), and interpersonal relationships, employee satisfaction, and organizational performance (Schermerhorn et al., 2005).

The Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory-II (1983)

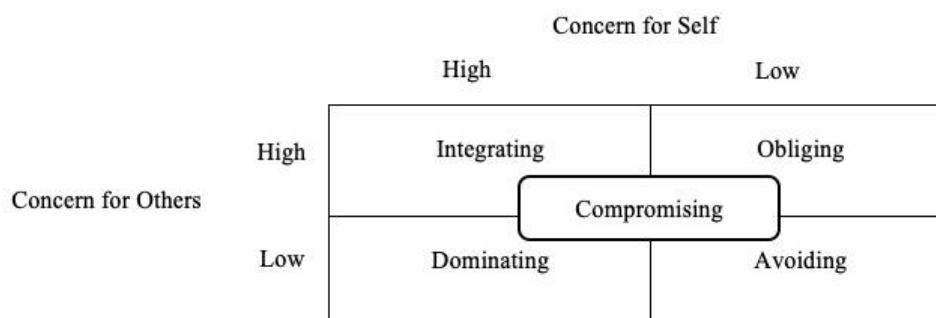
Conflict resolution and management are different (Robbins, 1978). Wall and Callister's (1995) approach to conflict resolution is to reduce, eliminate, or terminate the conflict. From the HROD perspective, conflict management is the preferable term that implies ensuring healthy conflict in order to eliminate abusive and unhealthy conflict in the organizations.

Understanding the nature of conflict management, and learning how organizational members handle their interpersonal conflicts with their superiors, subordinates, and peers, are essential for reducing the dysfunctions of conflict and for improving the constructive

functions of conflict in contemporary organizations (Rahim, 2002). Each of the interpersonal conflict management styles has been summarized according to the situations where they are used appropriately or inappropriately in the organizational setting through the diagnosis and management of organizational conflict based on the Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory-II (Rahim, 1983), as shown in Figure 1. As this study emphasized the Thai and Myanmar managerial staff of a private international hospital, this model was considered appropriate for investigating and identifying the preferred styles of different cultural groups.

Figure 1

The Styles of Handling Interpersonal Conflict. Adapted from Rahim and Bonoma (1979)



Based on Figure 1, the general characteristics of the five conflict management styles—integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding, and compromising—is discussed in the following.

Integrating (high concern for self and others). The integrating style can be regarded as the most constructive and effective conflict management style that enables one to see the right problem and to solve complicated issues. The willingness to share information with others and the openness to think of alternative ways are the strengths of an integrating style. However, it is time-consuming to identify the issues or to negotiate with others.

Obliging Style (low concern for self and high concern for others). The obliging style can be regarded as a useful way to manage a conflict, where one party is willing to agree with others for their own interests while the other find it unimportant. This style is commonly found among relationship-oriented people or those with less power. However, the obliging person may expect to receive something from the other party for his or her loss.

Dominating Style (high concern for self and low concern for others). Authoritarianism, forcing, or competing are the inter-exchangeable terms of the dominating style, as this style can be associated with aggressiveness, forcefulness, and competitive nature. Dominating parties are goal-oriented and are likely to neglect others' desires. This style can be used as an immediate problem-solving method with subordinates or with a less experienced or powerless person. Thus, this style will not be useful with a highly competent individual, or with handling a complex issue.

Avoiding Style (low concern for self and others). This is also known as flight or withdrawal. Avoidance can be used to “take a break” for a certain period when facing a complex issue, or when thought must be carried out a careful manner instead of making a hasty decision. Thus, it is not recommended to use this style in a situation where urgent action or decisions is required.

Compromising Style (intermediate in concern for self and others). Give and take, and mutual-agreement, are the common characteristics associated with this style. This style can be regarded as an instant problem-solving method, especially in handling a complex situation, a dead end, or when both parties have equal power. Compromising is recommended for the management level, or this style can also be used as the last conflict style while as other styles have failed.

Thai Conflict Management Styles

Previous studies of Thai conflict management styles were reviewed in the present study to learn how Thai people respond to their cross-cultural counterparts in different organizational or industrial settings. Through the cross-cultural and intercultural communication studies from the 1900s to the 2000s, the conflict management styles of Thais were investigated. For example, the comparative study conducted by Chau (Komin, 1995) reported that the Thai participants showed more obliging than avoidance or compromising styles, yet the Thais practiced these conflict styles more than the Australians. In contrast, Komin (1995) discovered that integrating, compromising, avoiding, and dominating were the preferred conflict styles, except for obliging.

In Boonsathorn's (2007) comparative study, the Thai participants preferred avoidance and obliging in managing conflicts with their American counterparts in the multi-national companies (MNCs) in Bangkok and its vicinity. Further, Rattanasimakool (2009) conducted a study of conflict style by reviewing master's degree theses, independent studies, and term papers from 1984 to 2008. The results of the study showed that compromising and collaborating were highly employed, whereas avoiding and accommodating were rarely used conflict styles in Thai organizations, with no indication of competing styles. In the same year, Mujtaba et al., (2009) reported that Thai law students had a strong collaborating conflict style while the competitive style was less favorable.

In a study of Chienwattanasook (2010), it was found that among operational-level employees working in the three largest telecommunication companies in Bangkok, integrating and compromising were the most adapted conflict management styles; and those that preferred the avoidance and obliging styles were likely to experience a higher level of stress compared to others. In a comparative study of Katejulasriroj (2011), it was seen that Thai and Japanese employees in multinational corporations in Thailand have different conflict style preferences. The Thai participants were more likely to use the following conflict styles: integrating, compromising, obliging, and avoiding rather than dominating. In the same year, Onishi and Mondejar (2011) conducted a study between the Japanese managers and Thai staff at Japanese manufacturers in Thailand and the results showed that the Thais were more collaborative and compromising than the Japanese.

In later studies, the conflict styles of the Thai participants were seen to be the same as their German colleagues: they preferred collaborating and compromising but not competing (Promsri, 2013). However, in a qualitative study of Peratanasumran (2017) it was discovered that the Thai participants were competitive, like their German colleagues. In the same year, Otakum and James (2017) studied the conflict styles of Thai employees working in Thailand and their results indicated that integrating and compromising were the most employed styles among the Thais. Further, Sahban and Abbas (2018) compared Thai and Malaysian employees at a rubber company in Malaysia and the findings revealed that Thai employees were more

collaborating and compromising, and less competing, than the Malaysian employees. In conclusion, the results of previous conflict management studies differed according to geographical location, nationality, context, and the settings of the research.

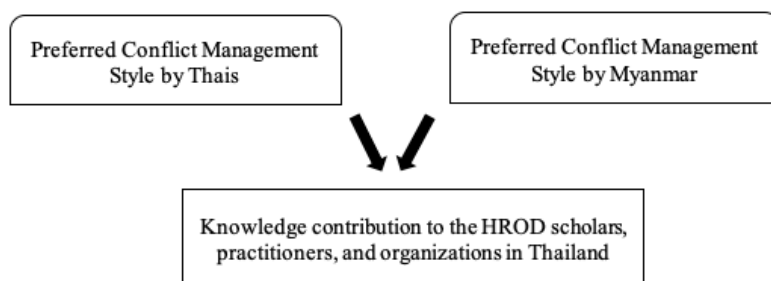
Myanmar Conflict Management Styles

In the literature, Myanmar conflict management studies were comparatively less than the Thai conflict styles studies. Amongst the scarce resources, two published conflict management style studies of Myanmar were conducted by Khin (2018); Min and Takai (2019). These two articles were used to proceed with the literature review and investigate the Myanmar conflict styles in different settings. The first study by Khin (2018) focused on the conflict and leadership styles of the women administrators working in Universities in Myanmar. They preferred compromising, collaborating, and competing to avoiding and accommodating in handling interpersonal conflict management. In the second study, Min and Takai (2019) examined the influence of emotional competence on conflict management styles and relational factors by comparing Myanmar and Japanese cultures. The study suggested that integrating and obliging styles were highly preferred with less compromising by the Myanmar participants who were university students in lower and upper Myanmar.

Research Methodology

Figure 2

Conceptual Framework



In this qualitative study, in-depth interviews were the research method used to understand the conflict styles of the Thai and Myanmar managerial staff working in a private international hospital in Thailand.

Research Participants

According to the area of interest and nature of the research, participants were divided into two groups: 1) Thai participants (TP), and 2) Myanmar participants (MP). There were 15 participants in each group, totaling 30 participants. They were non-medical support service staff working at the managerial level at a private international hospital in Bangkok, Thailand. The participants needed to have at least one year of experience with the hospital, and daily work with Thai and Myanmar cohorts. Snowballing method (Merriam, 2009) was used to recruit the participants. At the end of the interviews, participants were also requested to

introduce the researcher to their team. Using this method, the researcher individually contacted the participants, and those who agreed to take part in the research were given a chance to choose between online or face-to-face interviews. Thai participants' demographics were displayed in Table 1, and Myanmar participants' demographics were presented in Table 2.

Table 1*Demographic Information of the Thai Participants*

Participant Code	Gender	Age	Department	Years of Work
Tf1	Female	59	International Medical Service	36
Tf2	Female	52	International Medical Service	8
Tf3	Female	33	International Medical Service	8
Tf4	Female	41	International Medical Service	15
Tf5	Female	36	International Medical Service	12
Tf6	Female	27	International Medical Service	2
Tf7	Female	42	International Medical Service	11
Tf8	Female	29	International Medical Service	3
Tf9	Female	47	Interpreter Service	16
Tf10	Female	44	Marketing	18
Tf11	Female	36	Marketing	6
Tf12	Female	44	Marketing	7
Tf13	Female	24	Recruitment	3
Tf14	Female	41	Referral Coordination	18
Tf15	Female	45	Referral Coordination	15

Table 2*Demographic Information of the Myanmar Participants*

Participant Code	Gender	Age	Department	Years of Work
Mm1	Male	37	Interpreter Service	7
Mf2	Female	46	Interpreter Service	8
Mf3	Female	35	Interpreter Service	7
Mf4	Female	33	Interpreter Service	6
Mm5	Male	33	Interpreter Service	8
Mf6	Female	34	Interpreter Service	8
Mm7	Male	36	Interpreter Service	10
Mf8	Female	43	Interpreter Service	8
Mf9	Female	42	Interpreter Service	8
Mf10	Female	42	Interpreter Service	4
Mf11	Female	31	Interpreter Service	5

Participant Code	Gender	Age	Department	Years of Work
Mf12	Female	50	Interpreter Service	13
Mf13	Female	36	International Medical Service	8
Mf14	Female	27	International Medical Service	3
Mf15	Female	31	International Medical Service	5

Data Collection

In qualitative research, interviewing is a verbal communication technique that stimulates the participants' responses in a conversation (Schwartz & Jacobs, 1979). Semi-structured questions are a popular qualitative data collection tool with versatility and flexibility, which the interviewers should not be strictly followed in gaining in-depth information (Kallio et al., 2016). Therefore, self-developed semi-structured interview questions as shown in Table 3 were prepared to obtain information on how Thai and Myanmar participants manage a conflict situation. All participants were asked to recall their conflict experience with their cross-cultural cohorts by starting with question 1 to cover the main topic of the study. In accordance with Rubin and Rubin (2011), the rest of the interview sessions were followed by improvised questions depending on the participants' responses.

Before the interview started, the informants were given a participant information sheet, and an informed consent form approved by the NIDA Ethics Committee to ensure the confidentiality, and privacy of the participants' personal information, and interview data. Face-to-face interviews were conducted at the hospital, mostly at the duty stations of the participants. The English and Thai languages were the medium of communication with the Thai group, and the Burmese language was used with the Myanmar group during the interviews.

Semi-structured Interview Questions

1. Have you ever experienced any conflicts with a Thai/Myanmar colleague in your work? If you have, could you please recall a recent conflict situation with a Thai/Myanmar colleague in your work? Please describe the situation.
2. How was your response or reaction to your colleague in that situation? If possible, could you please tell me in details?
3. Do you ever think that it was your usual response or reaction in every situation or only in this case? If yes, why? If no, why? Could you elaborate more? How was the other person's response or reaction in that situation? If possible, could you please tell me in details?
5. Why do you think your colleague respond that way? Do you know/understand their cultural values involved in such responses?
6. Do you think your colleague displayed an appropriate response to you? Why or why not?
7. Do you notice any significance or specific response or reaction of your colleague in that situation? If possible, could you give me some examples?

Data Analysis

Creswell and Creswell (2018) qualitative data analysis, as shown in Figure 3 was used to analyze the collected data. The audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed, and each participant was given a pseudonym by nationality, gender, and number (e.g., Tf1, Mm7). Then, the transcripts were read word-by-word, line-by-line to identify and interpret the Thai and Myanmar participants’ preferred conflict management style with reference to the keywords presented in the summary of interpersonal conflict management style by Rahim (2002) as in Table 4, with Thai and Myanmar participants’ quotations. Participants’ codes and relevant quotations were organized under each conflict management style, and the occurrence of each style by the participants was counted by frequency.

Figure 3

Data Analysis in Qualitative Research. Adapted from Creswell and Creswell (2018)

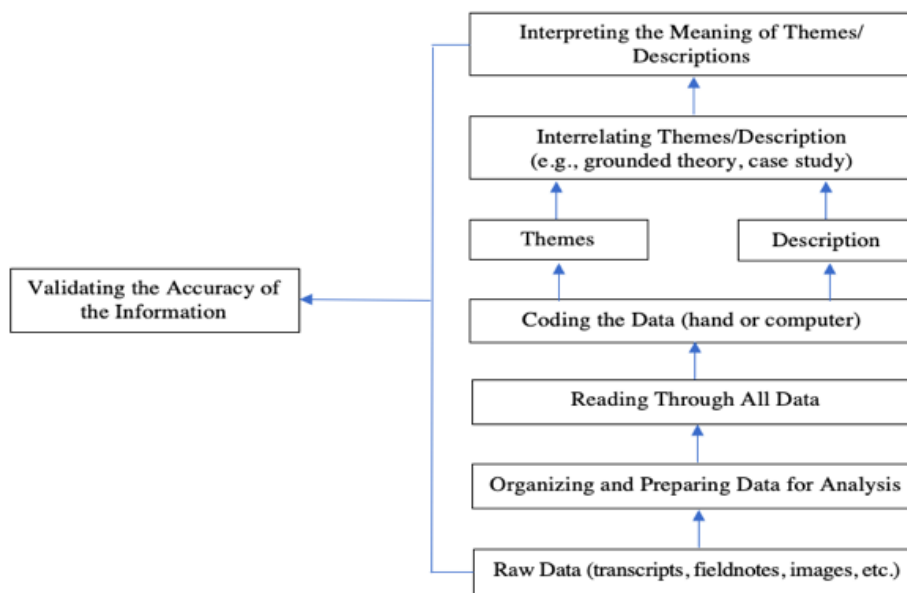


Table 3

Summary of interpersonal conflict management style. Adapted from Rahim (2002).

Conflict Style	Associated with	Example Quote
1. Integrating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - problem-solving - Diagnose the right problems Openness to differences and information exchange - Expect an alternative and acceptable solution for both parties 	Tf7 "We can have an open conversation, and ask what we need to know, and how to handle the case through collaborative ideas to get the best possible solution to the problem."
2. Obliging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Try to play down the differences - Neglect own concern to satisfy others 	Mm23 "We need to please someone to get their help or support for us work accomplishment. Agreeing with someone is my priority when I expect to get something."
3. Dominating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Have win-lose orientation - Have a forcing behavior to win over others 	Tf12 "When my Myanmar colleagues are inconvenient, they will not make a step. I must start the conversation and make them

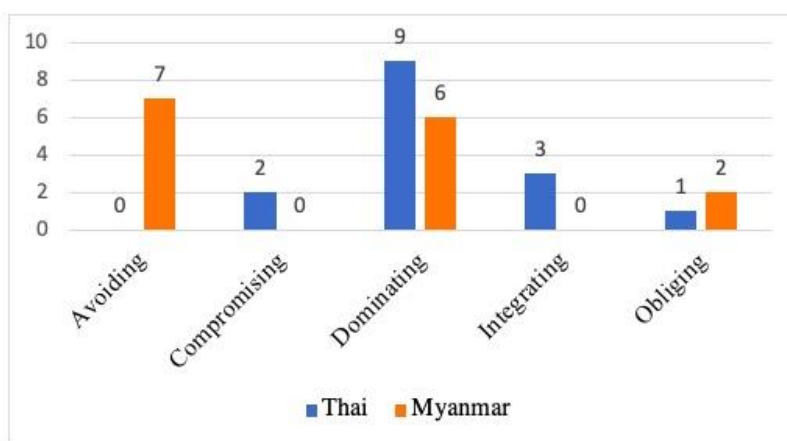
Conflict Style	Associated with	Example Quote
	- Goal-oriented - Ignore the needs and expectations of others	follow my lead."
4. Avoiding	- Withdrawal and sidestepping behavior - Put blame on others - Fail to satisfy self and others' concern	Mf2 "I never like making a quick judgment without knowing the underlying issue. So, I stepped back for a while and waited until the conflict person calmed down."
5. Compromising	- Give and take to make a mutual and acceptable decision	Tf6" Having a Myanmar friend is very helpful at work. He teaches me English and helps me do the translation. I can also help him read, and translate Thai. We can help each other out with us language proficiency."

Research Findings of the Thai and Myanmar Conflict Management Styles

The research findings were based on the analysis of the interview data. In response to the research questions relating to the conflict styles, Figure 4 indicated the frequency of the preferred conflict styles of the Thai and Myanmar managerial staff. Five conflict styles lie on the x-axis, and frequency on the y-axis as in the numerical value form (0-10). The figure showed that Thai participants preferred 4 conflict styles, and Myanmar participants favored 3 conflict styles. The dominating style was the most significant conflict management style by Thais, followed by integrating, compromising, and obliging. There was no preference towards avoiding. On the other hand, avoiding, and dominating styles were the most significant conflict management styles by the Myanmar participants, followed by obliging. There was no preference for compromising and integrating.

Figure 4

Preferred Conflict Management Styles of Thais and Myanmar



Thereafter, findings of the five conflict management styles and discussions of the Thai and Myanmar participants' emphasis on the characteristics of each conflict style were supported by the appropriate excerpts (responses from the interview questions in Table 3).

Avoiding

Avoiding was the most preferred conflict style of the Myanmar participants whereas the least desirable style by the Thai participants. More than half of the Myanmar group, 7 out of 15 participants favored this style when dealing with their Thai colleagues. Myanmar participants reported 3 ways of avoidance: 1) representing forbearance and forgiveness, 2) self-control (to avoid hasty responses and decisions), and 3) calming down to think.

Avoidance was common among Myanmar participants as they want to avoid the heated conversation. It was important to control themselves, and their anger for being shouted at, yelled at, or scolded by others. They tried to avoid their Thai counterpart when they were being neglected their voice, and presence (e.g., not listening to their explanation, lack of support). Avoiding includes getting mad, dismissing a conversation, or leaving the scene to avoid their counterpart or to observe the situation. Mm7 was asked question no. 1, and the following excerpt was his response to his supervisor in a heated situation.

“The problem was her words and her aggressive tone of voice. At last, she lost her mind and yelled at me in front of others. So, I left without a word when she stopped because I feel like she is insulting me. I did not expect this way” (Mm7)

Compromising

Compromising was the second last conflict style applied by 2 Thai participants Tf1 and Tf13, whereas the least desirable style of the Myanmar participants. They have shared perspectives towards the compromising conflict style. Compromising was more like a friendship, working together and helping each other with mutual understanding. Moreover, it was rather a day-to-day communication style among the colleagues than a conflict style. Thai participants also believed that mutual-understanding and social relationships are interconnected. A win-win situation is the best-expected outcome, that can be achieved by exchanging knowledge, expertise, and experience with their Myanmar colleagues. Following is the excerpt indicating the integrating style of the Thai participant, regarding his colleague's reaction when he was asked question no. 4.

“We rarely misunderstand each other because we have a higher understanding towards each other... I can help them with what they need, and they can also help me back with what I need. It is because they can adapt Thai culture, and they know how to handle or deal with Thai people.” (Tf1)

Dominating

The dominating style was the most preferable conflict style of the Thai participants and the second most preferable style of the Myanmar participants. Nine Thai participants and 6 Myanmar participants preferred this conflict style.

Figure 5

Characteristics of Thai and Myanmar Dominating Conflict Style

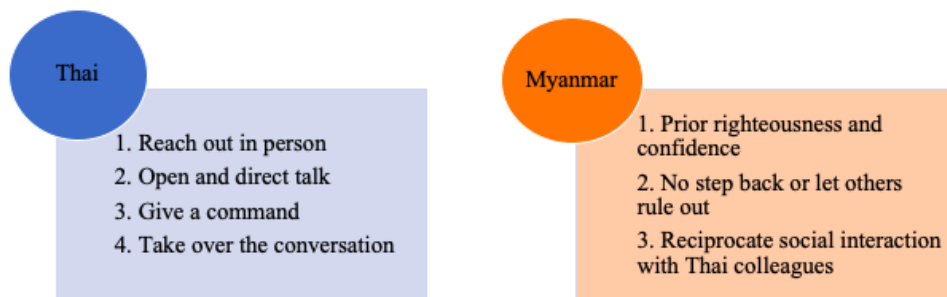


Figure 5 showed the characteristics of Thai and Myanmar dominating conflict styles. These findings showed different styles of dominance in managing a conflict between Thai and Myanmar managerial staff. Details of the discussion were presented in the following.

Dominating Style by Thai Participants

A dominating style occurred when the Thai participants had difficulty moving the conversation forward, or dealing with the indecisiveness of the other party. Also, having a friendly relationship helped remove the hesitation before asking for a favor or starting a confronting conversation. It was also found that most of the dominating situations occurred in a face-to-face meeting, and with those who have equal power. Thai participants revealed that they were more convenient and comfortable speaking their mother language even though most of them have comprehensive English. Moreover, they recognized their Myanmar colleagues' Thai language fluency. It encouraged the Thai participants to have an open conversation without hesitation or worries with their Myanmar colleagues. On the other way, speaking their mother language sometimes transformed it into the dominating style over their counterparts.

Moreover, Thai participants practiced dominating as in authoritarian decision-making in a situation where they want the answer to something. That was when they pressured the other party by forcing them to choose from the given options. In summary, Thai participants were unintentionally unaware of the different nationalities of their counterparts as most of the Myanmar staff in the hospital speak fluent Thai and have a good understanding of Thai culture. Also, they assumed of having a good understanding of Myanmar colleagues.

Two different scenarios discussed by Tf5 and Tf10 are presented. Tf5 was asked question no. 3. She shared her thoughts regarding her Myanmar colleague's response in handling a problem.

“They mostly understand me and the situation I am facing. I prefer open communication with my Myanmar colleagues so that we can talk to each other like close friends. Confrontation is also a good way to clarify any misunderstandings among our team members, and it gives us a chance to solve the problem on the spot.” (Tf5)

Dominating Style by Myanmar Participants

Dominating behaviors can be seen when the Myanmar participants were being accused or blamed by their cohorts without proper investigation, and when they were being treated disrespectfully or uncourteously. In another scenario, participants reported their dominating behaviors over their Thai counterparts when they were intolerable with the disrespectful behaviors to the Myanmar patients, or themselves. Asking direct questions, losing temper and patience, protecting one's rights, and reciprocating their Thai counterpart's conflict styles were the common characteristics of domination by the Myanmar participants. When Mm 1 was asked question no. 2, he discussed his Thai colleague's response to him while helping the patient at the clinic.

“When I approached to follow up on behalf of the patient, the Thai nurse responded to me with impatience and anger in public. I got heated up when I heard what she had just said; the use of language was offensive to me, and it was hard for me to talk nicely when I was upset. I preferred to reciprocate her communication style. That was when the situation went bad, and I was reported by that occurrence.” (Mm1)

Integrating

The integrating style was the second conflict style applied by 3 Thai participants, whereas it was the least desirable style of the Myanmar participants. Thai participants reported 3 ways of integration: 1) asking a favor from a competent person, 2) exploring alternatives for the best solution, and 3) clarifying the issue and working with flexibility. The integrating style occurred when Thai participants have mutual understanding or trust in the responsible nature of Myanmar colleagues. Integration style occurs where the social relationship, the capability or personality (e.g., hospitality, helpfulness) of someone was highly valued. In this situation, they expect to receive an opinion from their Myanmar colleague to help find a solution to the problem in collaboration.

In a different situation, they tend to show their integrative behavior when they have a concern, and willingness to help the patients. They further explained that the less the language barrier and cultural misunderstanding, the more they get closer to their colleagues, and the more they understand each other. Thai participants feel free to ask for help or suggestion without any barriers from their Myanmar colleagues in both Thai and English. Tf14 was asked question no. 4, and the following excerpt was her significant experience while working with her Myanmar colleagues.

“In the end, we were able to come up with a few workable options, and choose the most suitable one with the input of both parties...Both parties can give feedback, and justifications if needed. We must find a way out to solve the problem together.” (Tf14).

Obliging

The obliging style was the least applied conflict style by 1 Thai and 2 Myanmar participants. They regard this conflict style as the most effective way of communication between Thai and Myanmar teams.

Obliging Style by Thai Participants

In the eyes of the Thai participant, obliging was agreeableness towards others without a complaint when the knowledge, skill, and competency of the counterpart were higher than oneself. For instance, Tf12 felt unimportant by comparing herself with her Myanmar colleague. However, recognizing someone's knowledge, skills, and competency was a way of showing respect and agreeableness. Hence, it was not difficult to agree with and oblige a qualified person in a conflict. Tf12 was asked question no. 3, and the following excerpt was her thought on her Myanmar colleague's way of handling a conflict.

"I found that Myanmar people are knowledgeable, well-planned, and fluent in English. I feel noi jai sometimes, due to their energy level. My partner always leads the decision-making. I always agree with his rationale. I have no objections to his decision because I believe in his knowledge, skills, and competency." (Tf12).

Obliging Style by Myanmar Participants

Myanmar participants reported 3 ways of obliging: 1) agreeing with others to get something, 2) dealing with uncertainty, and 3) unwilling to interrupt others. They were likely to oblige when they expect to get something from someone. They believe that agreeing or following others may help them achieve their expectation.

One of the participants shared her experience as a newcomer to the team. Obliging was assumed to be the only way to keep the situation simple, yet finish the problem with fewer consequences. In the first few months in a new work group, the Myanmar participant obliged her team without complaining or questioning but following their lead without thinking, after being scolded by her Thai colleague. Obliging can be used as one of the ways of facing an uncertain situation.

Other Myanmar participants tend to oblige by waiting for their Thai colleagues without asking until they get noticed because they were hesitant to interrupt others' work. Sometimes, they may greet their colleagues with a 'wai', speak in Thai, agree with someone, or apologize to convince their Thai colleagues are a few obliging behaviors of the Myanmar participants. Mf13 was asked the question no. 2. She talked about her colleague's behavior and the way she responded to that specific situation.

"I clearly remembered the day my colleague came to tell me off in a loud voice about work. It made me puzzled, sad, and angry at the same time... I had lots of questions that I never guessed right. So, I just listened to my colleague and agreed with her although I was unhappy." (Mf13)

Results and Discussion

In this part, Thai and Myanmar conflict management styles were discussed according to the literature review of the previous studies, emphasizing Thai and some other nationalities' commonly found conflict management styles from different organizational or industrial settings.

Avoiding was the least adapted conflict management style of the Thai people in the previous studies. In the study of Rattanasimakool (2009), avoidance in the Thai organization was regarded as the worst decision among the other conflict styles as it fails to get a solution to the problem. In this study, none of the Thai participants discussed this conflict style. Nonetheless, avoidance was the most preferable conflict style among the Myanmar participants in this research in contrast to the Thai group. Khin (2018) reported that avoiding was the least preferred conflict style in Myanmar. Therefore, previous, and present findings were not aligned for the Myanmar group.

Compromising was found to be the most common and preferable conflict style among the Thai people in the previous studies. As they do not want to have a conflict, they tend to compromise their colleagues to maintain their social relationship, and face (Rattanasimakool, 2009). Therefore, Thai people tend to use compromising style in a conflict as a medium of face-saving, and social harmony in a relationship (Nimanandh & Andrews, 2009). In the study of Khin (2018), compromising was highly employed by Myanmar university administrators. However, the result of this study was aligned with the findings of Min and Takai (2019) where compromising was less employed by Myanmar university students.

Dominating was the least preferable conflict style of the Thais (Katejulasriroj, 2011; Sahban & Abbas, 2018), and Myanmar in the previous studies (Khin, 2018). Confrontations, self-expressions, and emotional displays were inappropriate, and unaligned to the Thai culture and it can be associated with face value, and social harmony (Knutson & Posirisuk, 2006; Leung & Tjosvold, 1998). Therefore, the dominating style resulted in a rarely used conflict style among Thais. In contrast to the literature, both Thai and Myanmar people in this study had more preference towards dominating. Among the Thai conflict management style research, Peratanasumran's (2017) qualitative research resulted in the same outcome regarding the dominating style of the Thai people in a conflict. Rattanasimakool (2009) investigated that Thai people may tend to use "position power, assertiveness, verbal dominance, and perseverance." (p. 5).

Integrating was the most preferred conflict style of the Thais (Chienwattanasook, 2010; Komin, 1990; Rattanasimakool, 2009; Sahban & Abbas, 2018) and Myanmar in the previous studies (Khin, 2018; Min, 2019). In this study, Thai participants indicated their preference towards integrating style, however, none of the Myanmar participants mentioned this style. Thai people prefer an integrating style when they have mutual-face concerns (Katejulasriroj, 2011), expecting a win-win situation through collaboration (Rattanasimakool, 2009).

Obliging was the most preferred conflict style of the Thai people in the previous studies (Boonsathorn, 2007; Katejulasriroj, 2011), as well as in the present study. Their results indicated that Thai people tend to use an obliging style when they have a face concern for themselves, and others, and it helps maintain social harmony among the parties. However, it was the least preferred conflict style in the study of Khin (2018), however, the most favorable style in the study of Min and Takai (2019). In this study, the obliging style was occasionally utilized by the Myanmar people after avoiding and dominating. Obliging with agreeableness was the way to achieve something from someone according to the Myanmar participants.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The purpose of this research was to investigate the preferred conflict management style of Myanmar and Thai managerial staff working in a private international hospital in Thailand from a cross-cultural perspective with the purpose of knowledge contribution to the HROD scholars, practitioners, and organizations. Understanding of conflict management styles gained from this study can be integrated into HRD interventions, and it can be implemented as part of the organization development learning activity as conflicts cannot be eliminated. Well-designed and customized interventions can be the powerful tools to transform the abusive conflict to constructive conflict among the cross-cultural workgroups.

Further studies can be also conducted through the quantitative lens or explore the conflict styles of Thai and Myanmar in different contexts or setting to gain more insights and knowledge to contribute to the academia and practice. In addition, cultural differences among diverse groups have an impact on conflict management style preference (Cushman & King, 1985). It is important for the researchers to explore the function of culture in identifying different conflict management styles to reduce the misunderstanding between cross-cultural encounters. Thus, more studies can be conducted to identify Thai and Myanmar conflict management styles from the cultural value dimensions and national culture perspectives to reduce the misunderstanding between the cross-cultural encounters to some extent.

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