COMPETENCE IS IN THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER: CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STYLES AND PERCEIVED COMPETENCE OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STYLES BY THAIS AND AMERICANS IN MULTINATIONAL CORPORATIONS IN THAILAND

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Wasita Boonsathorn

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The thesis of Wasita Boonsathorn has been reviewed and approved* by the following:

Dennis S. Gouran  
Professor of Communication Arts and Sciences and Labor Studies and Industrial Relations  
Thesis Advisor  
Chair of Committee

Ronald L. Jackson II  
Associate Professor of Communication Arts and Sciences

Edgar P. Yoder  
Professor of Agricultural and Extension Education

Judith A. Kolb  
Associate Professor of Education

Jon F. Nussbaum  
Professor of Communication Arts and Sciences  
Head of the Department of Communication Arts and Sciences

*Signatures are on file in the Graduate School.
ABSTRACT

Over the past decades, researchers have paid substantial attention to conflict interaction in various settings. This has not been the case in multinational corporations. The multinational corporation is one of the contexts in which conflict plays a crucial role, however. Understanding conflict interactions, as well as the way in which people from different cultures perceive conflict behavior, can enhance the working environment, not to mention benefit organizations in various ways.

The purpose of this study was to explore Thais’ and Americans’ preferences for styles of conflict management and the way they perceive these styles in terms of competence. The individualistic-collectivistic orientation of Thai and American participants in the study was determined to see how they fit into the general assumptions concerning the two types. This study also explored how such variables as gender, culture of the conflict counterpart (in-group/out-group), and exposure to other cultures relates to these preferences and the perceptions. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were employed to obtain a more precise and complete picture of conflict phenomena in multicultural organizations. The quantitative part of the study involved 319 Thai and American participants from 73 American-owned/co-owned multinational corporations in Thailand, and the qualitative part involved 27 interviewees from 13 such companies.

More often than not, the statistical and interview data were consistent. In regard to the preference for styles of conflict management, both statistical and interview analyses indicated that Thais preferred nonconfrontational indirect conflict styles (e.g., avoiding and obliging) more than Americans did. However, Thais also reported enacting direct confrontational styles (e.g., integrating, and compromising) to an extent similar to that of American participants. Dominating styles were reportedly displayed by Americans more than by Thais in the qualitative examination, but ANOVA results showed no significant differences in preferences. In addition to the five styles, interview data showed that Americans resorted to third-party help and emotional expression more than did Thais. Thais exclusively used neglect and a combination of styles.
The survey and interview data showed slightly different results for perceived competence. Both methods indicated that American and Thai participants evaluated integrating and compromising, or the direct, open, and honest expressions of ideas, more favorably than they did other styles, with Americans mentioning this topic more frequently than did Thais in qualitative examination. However, whereas ANOVA showed that Thais did not rate avoiding and obliging as highly as expected in competence, the qualitative part of the study revealed that Thais, nevertheless, focused on harmonious relationships and mutual face concerns to a much greater extent than did Americans. Dominating was viewed as relatively low in competence by both Thai and American participants in the quantitative analysis; on the other hand, in the interviews, Americans saw aggressiveness or emotional displays as more acceptable than Thais did.

National and organizational culture tended to have a considerable effect on the ways Americans and Thais dealt with conflict. For the most part, the participants reported values that were consistent with their expected individualistic-collectivistic orientations. Some deviation occurred in the manner that Thais reported relying on many individualistic values, such as directness and task accomplishment, more than Americans reported adopting collectivistic values. From the discussion regarding values and practices in their organizations, it appeared that most organizations in the study relied on the Cultural Dominance Model, which emphasized reliance on management’s standards as basis for policy formation and behavioral guidance.

For the effects of the culture of the counterpart on conflict behavior and perceptions of it, the qualitative results indicated that Americans and Thais tended to assess the behavior of the conflict targets on the basis of similar criteria, regardless of the culture backgrounds of the other person. Different reactions toward Thai and American target cultures were prevalent. However, when different behavior or judgment criteria were reported, they were expressed in a way that showed understanding, adaptability, and cultural sensitivity. Neither Thais nor Americans appeared to be biased in favor of their in-groups. The quantitative analysis showed similar results for Thai participants’ perceptions. The small number of American participants did not allow for the test of American perceptions toward different conflict targets.
Gender stereotypes relating to preferences for and evaluations of conflict styles did not appear to be operative in this study, as no differences in the preference for conflict styles between males and females surfaced. In respect to perceptions of competence, males and females tended to show small differences in their evaluation of styles. When different evaluations occurred, in large part, they ran counter to gender stereotypes (e.g., males evaluated obliging as higher in effectiveness than other styles).

Statistical analysis revealed only a few significant results for the correlations of exposure to other cultures to preferences for given styles or perceptions of corresponding levels of competence. In contrast, the qualitative examination showed that exposure to other cultures seemingly affected Americans and Thais’ behavior and perceptions in conflict situations substantially. The evidence produced from these two methods led to the conclusion that exposure to other cultures may influence Americans and Thais in conflict situations in many ways; however, the impact showed in a variety of aspects of conflict phenomena, not merely conflict styles nor perceptions regarding each style.

In addition, and contrary to expectations, ANOVA results revealed that Thai participants scored higher on the individualism scale (INDCOL) than American participants did. However, the data were not sufficient to reject the assumption that the Thai participants tended more toward collectivism than did the American participants.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

In the world of globalization and high technology, geographical boundaries often become obscured. People from different cultural backgrounds have increasingly more chances to come into contact and work collaboratively. When there is interaction, it is not surprising that conflict occasionally occurs. Being involved in an interpersonal conflict with similar others can prove to be uncomfortable and require a great deal of energy to resolve; conflict between people with distinct perceptions and styles may arise even more easily and be more difficult to manage. This is especially true when differences are intercultural in nature.

Because of the global market and the multiple benefits of working in culturally diverse groups, multinational organizations are proliferating. Other than speaking different languages (in some cases) and having different beliefs and values, people from different cultures also often have different approaches to and perceptions of conflict, which can affect their ability to achieve resolution. Intercultural conflict is a unique and interesting phenomenon that can facilitate group decision-making, lead to effective decisions, and greatly benefit an organization if managed constructively (Putnam & Poole, 1992). On the other hand, conflict can be a destructive force if the organizational members fail to deal with it properly.

Ting-Toomey, Gau, Trubisky, Yang, Kim, Lin, and Nishida (1991) assert that, often, it is not the conflict issue itself, but the differences in conflict management styles that create the greatest tension in conflict situations. Considerable research has focused on topics relating to conflict because knowing how to communicate competently in a conflict situation is the key to productive outcomes. Managing conflict in a culturally sensitive manner can help the organization to make the best use of the diversity (Oetzel, Ting-Toomey, Yokochi, Masumoto, & Takai, 2000).
Rationale

Conflict is an important topic that needs to be explored. In fact, conflict is one of the most frequently researched and discussed topics in the area of organizational behavior (Putnam & Poole, 1992). Although conflict in organizational contexts has been of interest to researchers in the field for the several past decades, the intercultural aspects of it have not attracted much attention until recently. In the discussion that follows, I attempt to establish why continued exploration is desirable and why the study reported herein, in particular, was useful to pursue.

Schneider and Barsoux (1997) emphasize the view that multicultural teams encourage diverse perspectives, creativity, and innovation, all of which presumably contribute to better decisions and organizational performance. Nonetheless, working in a multicultural team has a possibly greater potential for frustration, dissatisfaction, and conflict (Cox, 1993; Schneider & Barsoux, 1997). Extra effort and sensitivity are necessary in working with people from different cultures. The performance of an intercultural group depends on how well those involved manage differences in their approaches to conflict if they are to reap the full benefit of being in groups of diverse membership.

Multinational corporations (MNCs) represent one of the arenas in which people from different cultures come into contact on a daily basis and work together to accomplish common goals. Different approaches and assumptions regarding conflict that emerge from cultural differences can influence such organizations in many different ways, including their task and social behavior. Scheerhorn and Geist (1997) categorize these as social and task realities. Task reality refers to substantive issues with which members of organizations have to deal. Social reality pertains to the communication, relationships, and other connections among the members.

Social and task realities are interrelated. The main goal of a group or an organization is to perform and accomplish certain tasks. However, the relationships among the members allow the group or an organization to function. According to Scheerhorn and Geist, “[W]ithout good relationships, carrying out a task is difficult, if
not impossible; good relationships, on the other hand, facilitate the process” (p. 83). It is important to balance the tensions resulting from the two to enhance group productivity and organizational performance.

Conflict among organizational members can have either negative or positive effects on task and social aspects of groups and organizations. In the task domain, the skillful management of conflict encourages vigilant decision making and reduces groupthink (Janis, 1982). If managed poorly, conflict can result in dysfunctional behavior, low productivity, and even the collapse of an organization (Khun & Poole, 2000; Nicotera, 1997). In the social domain, the successful management of conflict can contribute to group cohesiveness and a supportive group climate. At the other extreme, poor management can turn group members into enemies, lower morale, and create a hostile climate (Nicotera, 1997).

Because of the often unique nature of conflict among people from different cultures, the importance of the role of conflict in organizations, and the growth of multinational corporations, this topic needs to be explored more closely. Note that, although the study reported did not focus on group communication, much of the literature dealing with the topic provides useful information for interpersonal communication in organizational contexts because organizations consist of groups of people working together, and conflict or other types of communication that occur within group settings can greatly affect interpersonal relationships throughout organizations as a whole.

The way in which people in an organization handle conflict appears to have a considerable impact on the organization’s climate and productivity. Conflict is not an easy matter with which to contend, especially in an organization, a place in which a lot of different personal stakes may be involved. The management of conflict tends to be even more complicated when people involved have different assumptions, rules, and styles that reflect their unique cultural values. The knowledge of these differences is crucial and can lead to a better understanding of how to deal with conflict in the intercultural context.

Even though many studies have explored differences in preferences for conflict management styles of people from individualistic and collectivistic cultures, the results are inconclusive. For instance, some research shows that individualists tend to prefer
confrontational and competing conflict management styles, whereas collectivists appear to prefer harmony-enhancing conflict management styles (e.g., Barnlund, 1989; Leung, 1987); this supports Ting-Toomey’s (1988; Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998) Face Negotiation Theory. Face Negotiation Theory posits that because of a high concern for one’s own image, individualists tend to employ dominating conflict strategies in general situations and cooperating in task-related situations, whereas collectivists tend to adapt more avoiding and obliging strategies in general situations and cooperating strategies in relational-related interactions because of the high concern for others.

Other studies have revealed deviations from the theory’s predictions (e.g., Gabrielidis, Stephan, Ybarra, Pearson, & Viallareal, 1997), and still others have yielded results opposite from those expected (Gire & Carment, 1993). Deviations in the findings appear to be attributable to different factors, such as social context of the study (e.g., interpersonal vs. organizational) (Gabrielidis et al., 1997), the relationship of the disputants (e.g., in-group vs. out-group) (Leung, 1988), and the roles of the participants (e.g., accused vs. accuser) (Gire & Carment, 1993).

A great majority of past studies have relied mainly on student participants and have failed to establish that these students adequately represent the populations to which scholars want to generalize. While generalizing the findings to business or work-related settings, many researchers still employ predominately student samples (e.g., Siddo, 1996). Although some try to establish that these students have work experience, a reliance on students nevertheless limits the generalizability of the findings necessarily to the particular groups of people who share the characteristics of these participants, such as educated individuals in the age range of 20-25. Since a main interest of the present study was people in multicultural workplaces, a different type of participant was necessary.

The majority of the relevant research on styles of conflict management compares those of people at an intracultural level. In other words, the conflict episodes of interest have been ones participants experienced with people from the same culture. Researchers then have contrasted the conflict management styles of the members of one culture with those of another culture of interest. For the present study, the conflict episodes investigated involved people from different national cultures, as well as conflict with
others from the same culture (this applied for Thai participants only since there were insufficient American participants in the study). This departure had as an underlying intention providing the field with an enlarged perspective and helping to determine whether the preference for styles of conflict management of people from individualistic/collectivistic cultures are the same when they interact with people from the same and different cultures.

Conflict behavior itself does not directly affect relationships, but the parties’ evaluation of a conflict interaction is the important factor that determines the relational outcomes (Canary, Cupach, & Messman, 1995; Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998). Conflict styles have been investigated in terms of competence (especially, the dimensions of effectiveness and appropriateness); however, studies in this area are still lacking in their intercultural applicability. The present study had as one purpose extending previous research in examining the perceived competence of conflict management styles from the perspective of the people from individualistic and collectivistic cultures who interact with one another. The study also had as a focus whether participants would vary in their perceptions according to the in-group and out-group status of their conflict counterparts.

Because one characteristic of collectivists is the protection and concern of in-groups, while for individualistic cultures, the in-groups and out-groups are not as clearly distinguishable (e.g., see Ting-Toomey, 1999), it seemed to be important to observe how this plays out in assessment of conflict styles. Of the specific interest was the question, do people judge/perceive the same style of conflict management enacted by people from the same and different cultures similarly or differently? From a practical perspective, this aspect of interaction is of importance because one major reason for doing intercultural studies is to help people from different cultures interact more competently and enhance their understanding of each other. Knowing how people interact with members of their own cultural groups might not provide as complete a picture of the conflict interaction as desirable, since they might act and evaluate others in a certain way when they are from their own culture, but dissimilarly when they are from different cultural groups.

In addition, to determine whether factors other than national culture affect preferences for and perception styles of conflict management, gender was a variable in
the investigation. Research in this area of gender and styles of conflict management to date has been inconclusive. Some studies show that females use more obliging, avoiding, and collaborating conflict styles (e.g., Tannen, 1990); others show no differences in preferences (e.g., Ting-Toomey, Oetzel, & Yee-Jung, 2001), or preferences for conflict styles opposite of what one would expect on the basis of gender stereotypes (Ohbuchi & Yamamoto, 1990). A possibility accounting for such inconsistency is that gender interacts with culture. Therefore, further information concerning gender in relation to preferences for, as well as perceptions of, particular styles of conflict management is useful to acquire.

This study also considered the process of cultural adaptation as one of the potential factors that might be related to the use and the perception of different styles of conflict management. The study included Americans working in Thailand and Thais who had been exposed to Americans, whether in the MNCs or in the United States. For this reason, cultural adaptation could not be ignored. Regardless of the reasons for relocation, people living in other cultures for a certain period of time need to adapt their behavior to be able to carry on activities and survive in the new culture (Kim, 2001). During the process of cultural adaptation, acculturation or the acquisition of new ways of thinking, feeling, and acting often occur. Deculturation can occur as well. In light of these considerations, for this study, the length of time participants spent in other cultures was a variable of interest.

The concepts of cultural adaptation or acculturation enter into explanations and understanding of a broad range of issues, such as alcohol consumption (Hines, 1998; Markides, 1988), national and organizational cultures adaptation (Alkhazraji, Gardner, Martin, & Paolillo, 1997), language proficiency (e.g., Lin, 1996; Yeh, 1998), and various communication practices (Klopf, 1991). However, to date, there is still a lack of research focusing on the relationship between preferences for and attitude toward styles of conflict management and degree of acculturation. An exception is the work of Boonsathorn (1999), which examined the relationship between Asian students’ degree of acculturation with preference for particular styles of conflict. Nonetheless, to the best of my
knowledge, there has not been any research focusing on cultural adaptation in relation to attitudes toward different styles of conflict management.

There also has been insufficient attention given to Americans acculturated to styles of conflict interaction of other cultures. The time one spent living in other cultures served as indirect indication of the degree of acculturation in light of studies suggesting that the acceptance of the national culture significantly correlates with the length of time one spends in the host culture (e.g., Alkhazraji, et al., 1997). The qualitative interviews of the present study offered more insight into this issue.

Finally, previous studies in the area of styles of conflict management and perceptions of the communicative competence relating to their use relied mainly on quantitative data. Although the quantitative approach has provided a great deal of information regarding the issue, using qualitative methods, in addition to the quantitative methods, presumably would provide more in-depth information. In addition to providing a fuller picture, both types of methods can also help establish the validity of findings in research involving this relationship.

The understanding and knowledge of how people from different cultures in MNCs usually deal with conflict (conflict management styles) and how they evaluate styles of conflict management enacted by the members in-groups and out-groups should enhance researchers’ and practitioners’ ability to anticipate and learn how to deal with interculturally based conflict in such organizations more successfully. In fact, among the criteria for dimensions of intercultural facework competence (knowledge, mindfulness, and interaction skills), knowledge (the understanding of the phenomenon through conscious learning or direct experience) is the most important one (Ting-Toomey 1997). The results of the present study provide additional in-depth knowledge in this realm of conflict management.
Theoretical Perspective

Face Negotiation Theory (Ting-Toomey, 1988; Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998) is a landmark work in the area of cultural conflict management and served as a framework for this study. Face Negotiation Theory posits that cultural values and norms play major roles in framing how members of each culture perceive face. People from individualistic and collectivistic cultures have different types of face needs, which leads to preferences for different styles of conflict management.

The concept of face originated from the Chinese culture and consists of two types: lien and mien-tzu (Hu, 1944). Lien is identified by an individual’s moral worth, whereas mien-tzu refers to reputation or status obtained from success in life. The concept of face is prevalent in all cultures, but the meaning and uses differ from one culture to another. Face, in Face Negotiation Theory, refers to “the claimed sense of favorable social self-worth and/or projected other-worth in a public situation” (Oetzel et al., 2000, p. 400). Hence, face is a social phenomenon, rather than a psychological construct, because it can only emerge with the presence of others (Holtgraves, 2001; Tracy, 1990). Face is a “vulnerable identity-based resource” (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998, p. 187) because it can be threatened, enhanced, given, lost, or saved in critical situations. Conflict is one such situation in which face is highly at stake. Facework involves the “communicative strategies (both verbal and nonverbal) a person uses to enact self-face and to uphold, support, or challenge another person’s face” (Oetzel, Ting-Toomey, Masumoto, & Yokochi, 2001, pp. 235-236). In a conflict situation, facework occurs in different forms. As such, it serves to resolve, to intensify, to avoid the conflict, etc. Facework can protect one’s image, threaten others’ images, or uphold others’ images.

Conflict style and facework are closely related, but not identical. Styles of conflict management are a reflection of the self-face (concern for one’s image), other-face (concern for other’s image), and mutual-face (concern for both parties’ image). A dominating style reflects self-face concern, avoiding and obliging styles reflect other-face concerns, and compromising and integrating styles reflect mutual-face concerns. Each style of conflict management may combine many types of facework behavior. For
example, an integrating style might consist of listening to the other party, expressing one’s own ideas, and showing respect for others’ viewpoints. *Facework* does not only occur during conflict interaction, but also before and after (Oetzel et al., 2000). Moreover, unlike previous literature that views *face* as involving secondary goals that one forms to support primary or substantive goals, Oetzel et al. (2001) suggest that *facework* focuses on substantive, identity, and relational goals. *Face* is a primary goal since conflict intertwines the substantive, identity, and relational concerns. Especially in cross-cultural context, *face* may even “supercede [sic] ‘primary’ goals” (p. 239). On the other hand, conflict style refers to the behavioral pattern by which one addresses or resolves the conflict that emerges during an interaction.

Because of differences in cultural values and assumptions concerning conflict, miscommunication can easily occur, and conflict can escalate or intensify in intercultural contexts. Face Negotiation Theory aims at acknowledging these cultural issues and serves as a tool for better conflict management.

According to Face Negotiation Theory, the cultural dimensions of individualism-collectivism and power distance exert substantial influence on conceptions of selfhood. The basic assumptions that Face Negotiation Theory (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998) offers are:

1. people in all cultures try to maintain and negotiate face in all communication situations; (2) the concept of “face” is especially problematic in vulnerable interpersonal situations (such as request, embarrassment, or conflict situations) when the situated identities of the communicators are called into questions; the cultural variability dimensions of individualism-collectivism (Triandis, 1995) influences members’ selection of self-oriented facework behaviors and or other-oriented facework behaviors; the cultural variability dimension of power distance (Hofstede, 1991) influences members’ assertion of power resources (e.g., person-based vs. positional-based power) in different cultures; individualism-collectivism influences members’ selection of autonomy-based facework (i.e. a boundary issue—self- vs. other-directed) and approval-based facework (i.e. a social esteem issue—self- vs. other-directed); small and large power distance influences members’ preferences for horizontal vs. vertical facework interaction; and individualism-collectivism and power distance, in conjunction with other individual (e.g. ingroup & outgroup) [sic] and conflict salience (e.g. conflict importance or intensity) [sic] factors, influence the use of various facework behaviors in intergroup and interpersonal encounters. (p. 190)
For the present study, only the individualism-collectivism dimension in relation to face and conflict styles was of interest. Individualism-collectivism is the major dimension along which scholars distinguish cultures, as well as the main concept in explanations of how self and face vary across culture. Power distance and relationship closeness tend to have relatively smaller effect on facework, according to Oetzel el al. (2001).

Ting-Toomey (1988; Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998) notes that in individualistic cultures, people show more concern with individual rights and goals than with group rights and goals, as well as more concern with self-images than public images. Therefore, an “individual’s public self presentation of face should correspond to an invariant ‘core self’ within an individual to a certain degree” (Ting-Toomey, 1988, p. 229). In contrast, in collectivistic cultures, people generally show greater concern with group rights and goals. For collectivists, the importance of self is associated with situational and relational issues. Therefore, they are more concerned than are individualists about “other-face” and “mutual-face” in conflict situations and act in accordance more with other-face and mutual-face concerns than with personal or core self-concerns. Because of their emphasis on individual image and task accomplishment, members of individualistic/low-context cultures presumably exhibit a greater use of direct and face-threatening styles (in general), as well as solution-oriented conflict styles (in task-related issues) than do members of collectivistic, high-context cultures. On the other hand, members of collectivistic/high-context cultures ostensibly exhibit avoidance-oriented and harmony-enhancing conflict styles (in general) and corroboration styles (in relational-related issues) more than do members of individualistic/low-context cultures because relationships within the group are important to them.

Culture potentially has a highly significant influence on the way its members perceive, evaluate, and interact in conflict situations. However, cultural factors are not the sole influence on conflict interaction. Ting-Toomey’s Face Negotiation Theory also suggests that other factors, such as personal, relational, and situational characteristics, should be taken into account in anticipating conflict, as well as other conflict behavior a
person might prefer. For this study, the work-related situation was the specific situational context of interest.

**Purpose of the Study**

In studying organizational conflict, researchers mainly rely on two approaches: (1) measuring the amount and exploring the sources of conflict and (2) investigating the relationship between styles of conflict management and their effectiveness in problem-solving or attaining social system objectives (Rahim, 1985). This study had elements of both.

The specific purpose of this study was to examine the conflict management styles of Thai and American employees in multinational corporations in Thailand, as well as explore the perceived competence (effectiveness and appropriateness) of different styles of conflict management from the perspectives of Thai and American participants. The study was designed mainly to test the implications of Face Negotiation Theory (Ting-Toomey, 1988; Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998), which posits that people from individualistic cultures (e.g., Americans) tend to prefer dominating, controlling, and competitive conflict management styles, whereas people from collectivistic cultures (e.g., Thais) tend to prefer obliging and avoiding conflict management styles. The study extended previous research involving cultural differences in the preferences for conflict styles by determining whether people from individualistic and collectivistic cultures have different perceptions of the competence of individuals employing different conflict management styles. The study also explored whether gender of the participants, the cultures of the conflict counterparts, and the length of exposure to other cultures related to the participants’ judgment of competence of each conflict management style. In addition, the study involved people who were actually working in MNCs instead of students and considered conflict from both intercultural and intracultural perspectives. Finally, the study utilized both quantitative and qualitative methods in arriving at conclusions concerning these matters.
Conflict and Communication

Communication is a crucial aspect of processes involving conflict. Putnam and Poole (1992) emphasize the importance of communication in conflict research in contending that communication is the basic ingredient of conflict. Specifically, “[C]ommunication underlines the sources, goals, strategies, tactics, relationships, and contact system that shape the nature of conflict and conflict management” (p. 550). The activities in conflicts entail communication from the beginning to the end. For example, communication underlies the formation of conflict issues and goal setting, the strategies one follows in defending one’s opinions and attacking others, the way in which parties reach agreements, and the likelihood of future conflict. Communication also plays a major role in understanding conflict management (Thomas & Pondy, 1977), which ultimately was the main concern of the present study.

In communication, many perspectives underlie the study of conflict (Putnam & Poole, 1992). These include: a mechanistic view, which emphasizes communication transmission “and its attendant breakdowns and barriers” (p. 553); a psychological view, which considers conflict as semantic misunderstanding or differences in perceptions of the parties; an interpretive-symbolic view, which focuses on the role of shared meanings of conflict; a systems-interaction view, which centers on reciprocity of conflict behavior and phases of conflict development; and, finally, a critical theory view, which concerns structures of meaning that leads to the discovery of the structure of domination.

The psychological perspective has dominated studies of interpersonal conflict in organizations. From this view, “[C]ommunication and conflict styles are examined through conceptual filters of organization members. In studies on conflict styles[,] communication is equated with perceptions of verbal and nonverbal messages that enact a particular style” (p. 556). Conflict management styles, therefore, are measured in terms of perceptions of the verbal and nonverbal behavior that constitutes such styles. For instance, perceived verbal dominance, such as using loud voice and using power to win one’s position, fit under the heading of forcing style. For this study, the psychological
perspective is the one applicable to the examination of the interpersonal conflict in the intercultural/organizational context.

Ting-Toomey (1999) identifies five characteristics of intercultural conflict: intercultural perceptions, interaction, interdependence, self- and mutual-interest goals, and the protection of intergroup images. Intercultural perception refers to how ethnocentrism, stereotypes, and cultural values filter people’s perceptions and attribution tendencies. Interaction includes both culturally-bound verbal and nonverbal behavior used in sustaining and managing conflict. Interdependence is determined by whether one or both persons’ behavior has consequences for the other. The self-interest and mutual-interest aspects of conflict refer to the fact that both parties need something from the other in order to reach their individual or personal goals. Finally, the protection of intergroup image is unique to intercultural and intergroup conflict since, other than worrying about one’s image, the person also has to worry about the group-based image (e.g., Thai, Christian, or Democrat) (Ting-Toomey, 1999). *Facework* serves to uphold, support, or challenge oneself and others’ face and refers to the communicative strategies people adopt in conflict situations. Therefore, a focus on communication, which differs from culture to culture, is essential to understanding the characteristics of intercultural conflict behavior. Communication is pervasive in all stages of conflict interaction and is the key to understanding intercultural conflict management.

**Research Questions**

In light of the preceding discussion, the present study addressed the following research questions:

RQ1: What styles of the conflict management do Thais and Americans working in multinational organizations prefer?
RQ2: What types of communicative behavior do Thais and Americans working in multinational organizations perceive as effective/ineffective and appropriate/inappropriate in conflict situations?
RQ3: How do Thais and Americans working in multinational organizations describe the respects in which their cultural background influences their behavior and perceptions of effectiveness/ineffectiveness and appropriateness/inappropriateness in conflict interaction?
RQ4: How do Thais and Americans working in multinational organizations describe the respects in which the cultural background of the conflict counterpart influences their perceptions of effectiveness/ineffectiveness and appropriateness/inappropriateness in conflict interaction?
RQ5: How do the gender of the person and exposure to other cultures affect preferences for and perceptions of the styles of conflict management that Thais and Americans working in multinational organizations report?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses grew from these questions and the background material reviewed:
H1: In multinational organizations, Thais prefer using avoiding and obliging conflict management styles more than do Americans.
H2: In multinational organizations, Americans prefer using integrating, dominating, and compromising conflict management styles more than do Thais.
H3: In multinational organizations, Thais perceive those using avoiding and obliging styles of conflict management to be more communicatively competent than do Americans.
H4: In multinational organizations, Americans perceive those using integrating, dominating, and compromising styles of conflict management to be more communicatively competent than do Thais.
H5: In multinational organizations, Thais perceive Thais to be more communicatively competent than they perceive Americans using the same conflict management styles.

H6: In multinational organizations, differences in perceptions by Americans of communicative competence of conflict management styles based on the culture of the conflict counterpart are less pronounced than in the case of Thais.

H7: In multinational organizations, gender relates differently to preferences for particular styles of conflict management among Thais and Americans.

H8: In multinational organizations, gender relates differently to perceptions of the communicative competence of the conflict counterpart among Thais and Americans as a function of style.

H9: The time Thais and Americans spend in other cultures relates to their preferences for and perceptions of conflict management styles. Specifically, for Americans, preference for and perception of competence in respect to avoiding and obliging styles of conflict management are positively related to the length of exposure to other cultures. For Thais, preference for and perception of competence in respect to integrating, dominating, and compromising styles of conflict management are positively related to the length of exposure to other cultures.
Chapter 2

Review of Previous Scholarly Literature

The study of the way people from different cultures manage conflict and their assessment of different styles of conflict management is crucial in today’s globalized world, especially in multicultural workforces. In such a context, miscommunication and misattribution can easily occur, since people from different cultures often have different goals, values, beliefs, and assumptions toward various issues, including many aspects of conflict interaction. These differences can create or intensify conflict situations (Ting-Toomey, 1999). The understanding of how face undermines preferences for and the perception of styles of conflict management of people from different cultures can be a major step toward creating more healthy and productive working environments.

Conflict

Conflict is a natural and pervasive phenomenon in human experience. Scholars in various disciplines have generated a wide variety of definitions for the term, and, depending on the purpose of given studies, they range from very broad to narrow. For communication studies, in which the emphasis is on interaction, scholars often use Putman and Poole’s (1992) definition. Putman and Poole refer to conflict as “the interaction of interdependent people who perceive the opposition of goals, aims, and values, and who see the other party as potentially interfering with the realization of these goals (aims, or values)” (p. 552).

People often regard conflict as a negative force. Many researchers have emphasized the negative outcomes of conflict, ranging from discomfort, misunderstanding, and disruption of relationship to the collapse of organizations (Komin, 1995; Ting-Toomey, 1997; Tjosvold, Moy, & Shigeru, 1999). However, Nicotera (1997)
suggests that conflict in itself is neutral. The way people manage conflict, instead, is indicative of the probable outcome. Recent research indicates that conflict can be healthy, if not necessary, and should be promoted in task groups. Conflict in such groups can help members to reduce groupthink, generate creative alternatives, and maintain a balance of power. Janis (1982) feels that conflict helps groups to be more attentive and critical in evaluating problems and solutions.

For the present study, intercultural conflict within the organizational context was the focus. When people from different cultural backgrounds come into contact, cultural misunderstanding or misattribution of the causes of observable behavior can influence the interaction process, and intercultural conflict can easily arise as a result. Since the intercultural nature of conflict was key, I adopted Ting-Toomey’s (1999) definition of intercultural conflict as “the perceived or actual incompatibility of values, norms, process, or goals between a minimum of two [interdependent] cultural parties over content, identity, relational, and procedural issues” (p. 194).

Conflict is a natural part of people’s lives in organizations for many reasons, such as competition for resources, coordination of systems, distribution of work, and involvement in decision making (Putnam & Poole, 1992). Putnam and Poole categorize organizational conflict into four types: interpersonal (e.g., between co-workers or superior and subordinates), bargaining and negotiation (e.g., between labor and management), intergroup (e.g., between departments), and interorganizational (e.g., between companies). In this study, interpersonal conflict or “disputes between two organizational members” (Putnam & Poole, 1992, p. 556) was mainly of interest.

**Styles of Conflict Management**

Even though conflict appears to be a common phenomenon in human experience, each person deals with conflict situations differently. In a variety of studies regarding conflict, the way in which people manage it has received a great deal of attention. *Styles of conflict management* are characterized by the general tendency for an individual to display a certain type of conflict behavior repeatedly and across situations (Cupach &
Canary, 1997). Because of major reliance on certain styles more than others, “[C]onflict-handling styles are viewed as relatively stable personal dispositions or individual differences” (Ruble & Schneer, 1994, p. 157). Note that even though some, if not many, researchers believe that people have preferences for certain styles, that does not mean that they also feel that people use only those styles in every conflict situation they encounter. Individuals may adopt and enact other styles of conflict management as well, according to Ruble and Schneer. The present study did not assume that individuals from different cultures use certain styles exclusively. The presumption rather was that people from different cultures are able to and do enact different styles of conflict management. However, they tend to prefer certain styles over others and might see the use of other styles as more or less competent in different circumstances.

Scholars have used many instruments to capture styles of conflict management in interpersonal and organizational contexts. These instruments reflect similar constructs, but many different models, involving specific terms for them, are evident in the work of different researchers (e.g., Blake & Mouton, 1964; Rahim, 1983; Thomas & Kilmann, 1974). However, the Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory-II (ROCI-II) (Rahim, 1983), one of the most widely used measures of conflict measurement styles among interpersonal and intercultural scholars, has especially attracted attention. According to Rahim (1985), interpersonal styles of conflict management fall into five categories according to the degree to which a person is concerned about satisfying his or her own goals and the extent to which the person is willing to support the other person’s goals.

**Integrating** reflects a high concern for both one’s goals and others’ goals. This style reveals efforts to explore an issue at hand and examine each conflict party’s interests to find a solution that is acceptable and beneficial to both parties. Problem-solving communication, openness, and exchanges of relevant information presumably lead to creative solutions.

**Obliging** reflects a low concern for one’s goals and a high concern for others’ goals. This style involves an attempt to minimize differences and conflict by surrendering to the other party’s wishes.
**Dominating** reflects a high concern for one’s goals and a low concern for others’ goals. This style is evident in attempts to use one’s power to secure her/his position or achieve an objective by ignoring the other party’s needs. It typically entails a win-lose orientation.

**Avoiding** reflects a low concern for both one’s goals and others’ goals. It is a passive strategy characterized by attempts to withdraw from a conflict situation, withhold complaints, and refrain from an open discussion of conflict issues.

**Compromising** reflects a moderate concern for one’s goals and others’ goals. Using this style, each party is willing to give up some resources and seek a middle-ground solution. In short, both parties give in order to gain.

This instrument was suitable for testing different aspects of Face Negotiation Theory. The conflict styles it taps reflect concerns for self and others, which is similar to the self-face and other-face concern, as presented in the theory.

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**Culture and Cultural Dimensions**

In social science, culture is an important concept. Particularly in the study of human behavior, culture is often the focus since it constitutes the framework in which behavior emerges. A recent view of culture that is appropriate for today’s cyber world is Chen and Starosta’s (1998) computer analogy. To them, culture is the “software of the human mind that provides an operating environment for human behaviors [sic]” (p. 25). These authors propose that people who share a culture resemble computers that have the same operating environment. People from the same culture exhibit certain substantial characteristics of the culture. However, the metaphor also necessitates caution, in that unlike operations of a computer, human behavior is not entirely a product of culture. Humans are more complex and given to idiosyncratic, irrational, and unexpected behavior for which scientific explanations cannot adequately account.
Hofstede (2001) defined culture as “collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another” (p. 9). Culture is manifest in a deeper level of human’s mind, such as in values, as well as superficial levels, such as symbols, heroes, and rituals. Culture, in his sense, mainly refers to a national culture.

In relation to communication, culture is “a negotiated set of shared symbolic systems that guide individuals’ behaviors [sic] and incline them to function as a group” (Chen & Starosta, 1997, p. 26). Komin (1995) notes that culture includes abstract ideas of a society, such as values, ideas, beliefs, and customs, as well as concrete behavior and objects that distinguish one society from others.

Ting-Toomey (1997), a communication scholar specializing in conflict interaction, refers to culture as:

a group level construct that embodies a distinctive system of traditions, beliefs, values, norms, rituals, symbols, and meanings that is shared by a majority of interacting individuals in a community. Simply put, culture refers to a patterned way of living by a group of interacting individuals who shares similar set of beliefs, values, and behaviors. (p. 122)

Porter and Samovar (1997) identify six characteristics of culture that shed some light on the role it plays in the emergence and development of human interaction. According to them, culture is learned, transmissible, dynamic, selective, interrelated in respect to its various facets, and ethnocentric.

People learn patterns of behavior and ways of thinking, consciously or unconsciously, from interaction, observation, and imitation. These patterns become internalized over time. Culture is transmitted from generation to generation through artifacts and/or verbal and nonverbal behavior. Culture is dynamic because it is on-going and fluctuates. Culture does change, but the change often occurs at surface levels (e.g., food, dress, type of housing, etc.), whereas at deeper levels, such as values, ethics, morals, and religion, it is much more stable. The selective aspect of culture stems from the fact that each culture selects a pattern of behavior from a wide range of the totality human behavior. The selection reflects the important values each culture holds, and the differences in the choices separate each group from others. The interrelation
characteristic suggests a systems perspective. A change in one aspect of a culture affects other aspects. Finally, the *ethnocentric* element of culture refers to “being centered on one’s own group” (p. 15). This is evident when members of one culture use their own as a standard by which to judge or interpret other cultures’ ways of life. Often, ethnocentrism leads to a feeling of superiority of one’s culture or the belief that one’s culture determines the *right* way to behave.

In socialization processes, culture exerts considerable influence on an individual’s behavior. Most research involving conflict styles and culture has suggested that the different styles of conflict management are, in fact, a product of cultural influences. Ting-Toomey (1999) proposes four value-based cultural dimensions that help explain why members of different cultures have diverse approaches to and perceptions of conflict behavior, as well as styles of its management. These dimensions, three of which Hofstede (1980, 2001) originally identified, are: individualism-collectivism, power distance, self-construal, and low/high-context communication. For the present study, individualism-collectivism was the cultural dimension of interest since it is appears to be the most important one for distinguishing among cultures in social sciences and psychological research. Moreover, individualism-collectivism also appears to be the most influential factor in determining how people from different culture manage conflict.

**Individualism-Collectivism**

The primary method for dealing with cultural differences is to locate them along the dimension of individualism-collectivism, as set forth by Hofstede (1980, 2001) in a study of work-related values in more than 40 countries (and later in 50 countries). There are countless theoretical discussions and empirical studies supporting the view that this dimension is pervasive in a wide range of cultures (Ting-Toomey, 2003).

Individualism-collectivism reflects the relationship between individuals and their membership groups. It is a broad value tendency that suggests the degree to which a person is expected to take care of oneself (*autonomous self*) or to integrate him or herself with various groups, especially one’s family (*connected self*). There are major
characteristics that distinguish individualists and collectivists. People from individualistic cultures (e.g., the United States, Australia, Great Britain, Canada, and France) are more concerned with the individual’s goals, rights, needs, and successes than with those of their groups. Individuals view themselves as independent from the group and use their personal attitudes as guidance of their behavior rather than depending on an in-group’s norms. The I-identity is the characteristic of individualistic cultures. Even their languages require the use of I and you, and they clearly distinguish between the use of me and we. The control of one’s autonomy, freedom, territory, and boundaries is crucial to individualists’ self-respect and ego (Hofstede, 2001; Ting-Toomey, 2003; Triandis, 2003).

People from collectivistic cultures (e.g., Thailand, Greece, Brazil, Japan, and Peru) value group goals, rights, needs, and successes more than individual’s. They view themselves as interdependent with their groups and use group norms and rules as guidance for how to behave. Whereas an I-identity is prevalent in individualist cultures, a we-identity is characteristic of collectivistic cultures. Their languages usually do not require the use of I and you, and sometimes there is ambiguity in using the word me, whereas they are very positive when using we. For collectivists, self-respect derives from being accepted and approved by in-group members, such as peers, family, and superiors (Hofstede, 2001; Ting-Toomey, 2003; Triandis, 2003).

Individualists also value task accomplishment over relational outcomes and tend to separate content and relational issues. Collectivists tend not to separate relational issues from content issues. Face, or one’s projected self-image, is intertwined with relational issues, especially in conflict situations (Ting-Toomey, 1988, 2003).

Factors related to individualism-collectivism include affluence, social homogeneity, population density, job dependency, geographic mobility, mass media exposure, education, and family background. The countries or societies that usually fall under the headings of collectivistic are not affluent, are relatively homogeneous, have high population density, and have high job dependency. Collectivism is also characteristic of the lower social class in any society, people who have not traveled or been exposed to modern mass media, and come from large families (Triandis, 2003).
Even though individualism-collectivism is a culturally specific orientation (all members in the same nation are usually considered having the same value tendency), individual differences exist within each culture. Such cultural variability needs to be investigated further, especially if one is interested in the role of cultural values in perceptions of communication (Coleman, 1992).

**Power Distance**

Power distance, according to Hofstede (1991), is “the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally” (p. 28). This cultural dimension also refers to how people in certain cultures treat and respect others on the basis of their social status and positions (Ting-Toomey, 1999). High power-distance cultures (e.g., the Philippines, Korea, Japan, Mexico, and many Arab countries) have clear-cut role differences between subordinates and supervisors. People of high status receive priority treatment and are objects of greater displays of respect. On the other hand, people from low power-distance cultures (e.g., Denmark, Norway, Australia, and the United States) tend to expect similar treatment, regardless of their positions, and to be judged on the basis of personal attributes rather than titles.

**Self-Construal**

Self-construal is similar to individualism-collectivism, except that it serves to explain individual variation within, as well as between cultures. It refers to how an individual in a culture perceives himself or herself as independent or interdependent (Ting-Toomey, 1999; 2003). An individual with an *independent sense of self* tends to be autonomous and self-reliant. *Independent self-construal* individuals feel that each individual is unique, is in control over her/his actions and environments, and feels the need to express one’s opinions to others. Standing out from the crowd is desirable for
them because that elicits ego-focused emotions and enhances self-esteem. Individuals with an interdependent sense of self, in contrast, tend to be group-oriented and seekers of harmony. The main characteristics of interdependent self-construal are being attentive, responsive, and accommodating in respect to others’ needs. Group’s goals, interests, and norms are sources of guidance for their behavior. With interdependent self-construal, individuals find behavior that involves an other-focus as satisfying. They often enhance their self-esteem by the approval from and reciprocity of the same actions by others around them. Independent self-construal is characteristic of individualistic cultures, whereas interdependent self-construal is more in evidence in collectivistic cultures. Nonetheless, both types of self-construal exist within each culture.

**High/Low Context**

Another crucial dimension in understanding the communication of individuals from different cultures is context. Hall (2000) relies on verbal expressiveness and dependency on context to locate individuals on a high/low-context continuum. Members of cultures at the high end tend to rely on physical context, the surrounding environment, and nonverbal cues in communicating meaning. Trust and relationships are major concerns for those in high-context cultures. In contrast, those from cultures at the low end rely mainly on direct explicit verbal messages. Members of low-context cultures value task accomplishment more than relationships. In general, members of individualistic cultures prefer low-context modes of communication, whereas members of collectivistic cultures appear to prefer high-context styles.

The dimensions discussed above are not absolute; they merely reflect general tendencies of people in each cultural group. Within each culture, there are subcultures that may exhibit different orientations. As a result, in the United States, different ethnic communities have distinct value-orientations. For example, first-generation Asian immigrants in the United States may rely on the collectivistic group-oriented values, whereas the later generations and other ethnic groups may become more individualistic in nature. In addition to differences among subcultures, individual differences may exist
within the same culture or subculture. Finally, depending on the situation or social context (e.g., interpersonal vs. organizational), the same individual might behave differently from how his or her cultural type would suggest (e.g., Ting-Toomey, 1988; Triandis, 2003).

Despite these concerns, the basic cultural dimensions help explain how people within a culture think and interact. Although not absolute, these general tendencies provide a useful framework on which to rely when one is interacting with individuals from different cultures, especially when other information is not available. The behavior reflecting these cultural dimensions surfaces in numerous forms and practices in everyday life, including those involved in conflict management.

**Culture and Styles of Conflict Management**

The ways people manage conflict have attracted the interest of researchers in many disciplines for well over two decades, but intercultural styles of conflict management have received attention only recently. Similar to other aspects of life, culture plays an enormous role in the emergence and development of conflict interaction. It, therefore, has understandably begun to be an object of growing scholarly attention.

**Different Lenses**

Ting-Toomey (1999, 2003) believes that the four cultural dimensions above help explain why members of different cultures have diverse approaches to and perceptions of conflict behavior and styles. Culture provides what she calls “conflict lenses” for viewing interpersonal relationships. Specifically, these cultural lenses differ in respect to assumptions, conflict rhythms, conflict norms, conflict styles, and ethnocentric lenses (Ting-Toomey, 1997, 1999).

Differences in **conflict assumptions** affect our attitudes, expectations, and behavior in any given conflict situation. Among the four cultural dimensions mentioned
above, individualism-collectivism has received the most attention among scholars. It is also presumably the most relevant dimension for explaining conflict interaction across cultures (Ting-Toomey, 1997).

The differences regarding conflict may emerge from attitudes toward conflict. For members of individualistic, low-context cultures, conflict progresses according to a problem-solving model. Conflict serves as a way through which one can express differences. It can be dysfunctional or functional. Conflict is dysfunctional when suppressed or not addressed directly; it is functional when it creates an opportunity for solving problematic issues. Individualists feel that one should deal with substantive and relational issues independently. Open and honest discussion about conflict ostensibly is of value, and effective management of conflict should result in a win-win situation. In contrast, collectivistic, high-context cultures have a different basic attitude toward conflict. Conflict in such cultures is purportedly dysfunctional. It is an embarrassing, distressing, and destructive force that can damage face and harmony of the members of the society and should be avoided. Conflict reflects a lack of self-discipline and emotional immaturity; therefore, people should deal with it discreetly and subtly. Effective management of conflict results in win-win outcomes in terms of face maintenance. Collectivists are mainly concerned with relational outcomes, specifically those relating to face of both parties (Ting-Toomey, 2003).

Because of the emphasis on one’s own goals and interests, individualists are more outcome-oriented than are collectivists. Their major concern in conflict situations is to move rapidly to reach a tangible goal. Individualists prefer to discuss conflict openly, whereas collectivists prefer a subtle negotiation to preserve pride and the relationship of the parties involved. Ting-Toomey (1999) summarizes the different conflict assumptions that members from individualistic and collectivistic cultures hold in Table 2.1.
Table 2.1: Individualistic and Collectivistic Conflict Lenses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individualistic Conflict Lens</th>
<th>Collectivistic Conflict Lens</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Outcome focused</td>
<td>Process focused</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasis on factual details</td>
<td>Emphasis on holistic pictures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content goal oriented</td>
<td>Relational goal oriented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasis on tangible resources</td>
<td>Emphasis on intangible resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work at monochronic pace</td>
<td>Work at polychronic pace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of personal equity norms</td>
<td>Use of communal or status-based norms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliance on linear inductive or deductive reasoning</td>
<td>Reliance on spiral and metaphorical reasoning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facts and evidence are most important data</td>
<td>Intuitive and experience are most important data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competitive/controlling behaviors</td>
<td>Avoiding/accommodating behaviors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct conflict styles</td>
<td>Indirect conflict styles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-face concern</td>
<td>Other-face concern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasis on conflict effectiveness</td>
<td>Emphasis on conflict appropriateness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conflict rhythms, or paces, reflect individualism-collectivism perspectives on time. Individualists rely on *monochronic* rhythms and consider time as tangible and linear. Schedules are very important and must be followed. In contrast, collectivists rely on the *polychronic* rhythms. Collectivists view time as flexible. They place the importance of people and relationships above the strict compartmentalization of time and schedule. With their emphasis on objective goals and criteria, people from *monochronic* cultures tend to adopt a linear-sequential approach to conflict situations, where point-by-point discussion is the norm. In contrast, members of *polychronic* cultures take a spiral-holistic approach, whereby discussions regarding conflict often flow according to context.

Norms, or shared standards for behavior, shape people’s expectations of what is appropriate conduct and what is not. Examples of norms that affect conflict interactions are ones involving the distribution of reward and emotional expression. For individualists, generally, rewards from conflict interaction are to be distributed according to the equity norm, that is, unevenly and based on performance, whereas, for collectivists, rewards are to be distributed on the basis of communal values, that is, equally to everyone in the group, regardless of the performance, as a means of enhancing group harmony. The norm regarding emotional expression is also important in conflict interactions. Individualists feel that open expression of aggressive or negative emotions during conflict is acceptable and reflects honesty. On the other hand, collectivists mask or avoid the expression of such feelings to prevent the disruption of a harmonious relationship within the group.

Ting-Toomey’s (1988; Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998; Ting-Toomey, Oetzel, & Yee-Jung, 2001) Face Negotiation Theory provides a conceptual linkage between cultural values and styles of conflict management. Relying on Hofstede’s cultural dimensions (especially, individualism-collectivism) and Hall’s (2000) notion of high/low-context cultures, Face Negotiation Theory posits that cultural norms and values shape how members of each culture perceive *face* and that the differences in *face needs*, acting in concert with individual, relational, and situational variables, contribute to differences in preferences for conflict styles displayed in intergroup and interpersonal situations. Ting-
Toomey uses the term *face* to signify the projected self-image. *Facework* entails the communicative strategies one uses to satisfy the face needs (the aspect of *face* that is important to the person, including self-, other-, or mutual-face).

Because people from individualistic cultures tend to be concerned with individual images, task accomplishment, and individual goals relative to the group’s interests, they also tend to exhibit more self-face-saving conflict styles, such as dominating. On the other hand, people from collectivistic cultures tend to see themselves as part of the group, place the group’s goals over the individual’s goals, and focus on maintaining harmony. As a result, they are apt to display more of the other-oriented types of face-saving styles, such as avoiding and obliging (Rahim, 1983).

To manage intercultural conflict successfully, it is important for one to realize that people assess conflict interactions and situations through ethnocentric lenses. People often see their ways of behaving as the right ways and deviation as improper. As mentioned earlier, ethnocentricity leads one to evaluate other cultural behavior negatively when it does not conform to the expectations derived from one’s own cultural values and norms.

Among these cultural frameworks, the relationship between the individualism-collectivism dimension and styles of conflict management has been an object of extensive study. The hypotheses for which most researchers have found support are that members of collectivistic/high-context cultures tend to endorse harmony-enhancing approaches, whereas members of individualist/low-context cultures tend to prefer confrontational approaches (Gabrielidis et al., 1997; Leung, 1987).

Using Rahim’s (1985) five styles of conflict management, Ting-Toomey (1988) proposed that people from individualistic/low-context cultures exhibit direct explicit verbal interaction, which, in turn, leads to preferences for dominating, integrating, and compromising styles of conflict management. On the other hand, people from collectivistic/high context cultures, who are concerned about face and relationships, exhibit indirect modes of interaction and prefer the conflict management styles of obliging and avoiding.
Consistent with Ting-Toomey’s prediction, Barnlund (1989) characterized Japanese (high in collectivism) styles of conflict management as passive, permitting withdrawal, and allowing greater concealment than others. Barnlund contends that Japanese usually rely on avoidance or accommodation in conflict situations and eschews collaboration because such a style encourages the expression of different opinions, which can be disruptive to harmonious relationships. On the other hand, Americans (high in individualism) tend to display more aggressive and active behavior. Americans also often develop rationales in supporting their positions. They may, in addition, use humor and sarcasm in certain conflict situations.

Attempts to save face and enhance harmony between conflict counterparts of Chinese participants (high in collectivism) surfaced in Leung’s (1987) study of Chinese and American conflict in a legal context. Focusing particularly on the relationship between collectivism and procedural preferences, Leung determined that Chinese participants favored non-binding procedures (bargaining and mediation) more than American participants did. In contrast, Americans showed a preference for adjudicatory procedures (in which responsibility for the development of the issue is given to the disputants or the judge) more than did Chinese.

Employing both student and non-student participants, Leung (1988) specifically explored the preference for avoidance conflict styles among Hong Kong Chinese (high in collectivism) and Americans (high in individualism). The results supported Ting-Toomey’s proposition that, in general, those from collectivistic/high-context cultures prefer avoiding more than do their counterparts from individualistic/low-context cultures. However, the results further revealed that the decision to bring a dispute to court also depended on the severity of the conflict, the relationship between the interactants, and perception of in-group/out-group status. Chinese participants were more likely than American participants to sue strangers than friends and tended to be more hostile to the out-groups than to the in-groups. Moreover, students were less likely to avoid conflict than non-students.

A slight deviation from expectations surfaced in Gabielidis et al.’s (1997) study comparing American student participants’ styles of conflict management to Mexican
student participants’ (high in collectivism). In line with Ting-Toomey’s (1988) Face Negotiation Theory, Gabrielidis et al. discovered that Mexican participants preferred accommodation (obliging) and collaboration (integrating), the styles that reflect concern for others, more than American participants did. The results revealed the collectivist propensity to resolve conflict with as little hostility as possible and concern for face-saving. However, slightly different from expectations, both Mexican and American participants showed greater preference for collaboration and accommodation than they did for avoidance and competition.

The authors reasoned that since the study was conducted in an interpersonal context, American might not have been as competitive as they would have in other social contexts (e.g., the organizational context) because damage to interpersonal relationships is more evident when one is using competitive style, in which the person’s only concerns center on reaching his or her own goals. In other contexts, there are many personal/organizational interests involved, and the relationships between the conflict parties (e.g., co-workers) might not be as important as other matters.

The results of Trubisky, Ting-Toomey, and Lin’s (1991) study only partly support Ting-Toomey’s (1988) Face Negotiation Theory. Their findings showed that Taiwanese students (high in collectivism) preferred avoiding and obliging styles more than American students did. However, for integrating and compromising, results counter to expectations surfaced. Taiwanese students also preferred integrating and compromising styles more than American students did. The authors conjectured that the leader role that participants assumed in the study and Confucian ethic of task completion might have contributed to the deviation for the Taiwanese students. In addition, individualists did not use dominating styles more than collectivists did. The researchers noted that the small group communication courses that the American participants had completed might have influenced them to be more empathetic and supportive and to see dominating as an inappropriate approach to managing interpersonal conflicts.

Finally, research by Gire and Carment (1993) contradicted Ting-Toomey’s hypotheses. Using Canadian (high in individualism) and Nigerian (high in collectivism) student participants, these researchers discovered that Canadians preferred harmony-
enhancing styles, whereas Nigerians preferred harmony-enhancing and competitive styles to a similar extent. The explanation for the inconsistent findings involved the complexity of individualism-collectivism. The researchers suggested that collectivism in Asia (most studies relied on Asian countries as representatives of collectivists) might have a different quality from collectivism in Africa (Nigerian). Moreover, each participant in the study was to assume the role of the accused instead of the accuser in a dispute context. As the accused, participants might have felt more animosity from the accuser and behaved in a more aggressive way. In light of this, the authors cautioned that individualism-collectivism alone might not be a major determinant of styles of conflict management.

Thai Styles of Conflict Management

There have been few studies of styles of conflict management of Thais. Even though Thailand qualifies as a collectivistic, high-context culture and is high on the dimension of power distance, there are many unique characteristics about Thai culture to be explored if one is to have a good understanding of how Thais manage intracultural and intercultural conflict. Located on opposite sides of the world, Thais and Americans differ greatly in their beliefs and values.

Lying in the heart of Southeast Asia, Thailand is an agricultural country with a population of 60.2 million. The population consists of Thai (80%), Chinese (10%), Malay (3%), and some minorities (e.g., Mons and Khmers), with a high level of culturally and socially unity. The political system is a democratic constitutional monarchy. Thai is the official language, but English is understood in major cities (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2003).

To appreciate Thai culture, it is important that one know the basic tenets of Buddhism, Thailand’s national religion. Despite several crises over the centuries, Buddhism has never suffered from any loss of faith and has been deeply rooted in Thailand since the earliest times. Even with the absolute freedom of religion and full support of all different faiths from the government, 95% of the Thai population is Buddhist. Buddhism has a profound impact on Thai arts, culture, tradition, and learning.
Buddhism has long been an integral part of every aspect of Thai people’s everyday lives. Buddhism is a religion based on science, or the empirical way of life. Central to Buddhist teaching are the concepts of *karma* (the accumulation of sin and good deeds) and *reincarnation*, or the great Wheel of Existence (born and reborn in another body). Based on the law of cause and effect, Buddhist doctrine holds the merits or sins committed in our previous existence or in our past will affect what we do and how we are in the present (The National Identity Board Office of the Prime Minister Kingdom of Thailand, 2000).

The high power-distance nature of Thai culture stems partly from Buddhist belief. In view of *karma*, the authority, status, and positions people attain are the purportedly result of the accumulation of good deeds and merits of the past. Thai people accept these hierarchical differences and tend to treat people according to their status. The tendency to respect authority prevents Thai people from challenging or questioning authority figures in all contexts, including business settings (Fieg, 1989).

To achieve *nirvana*, the ultimate goal in Buddhism, people must first become detached from feelings and desires. Extreme expressions or behavior are to be avoided. The expression of emotion, especially anger, to any extreme is viewed as inappropriate (Fieg, 1989).

Komin (1995) conducted a nation-wide survey and found nine prevalent values orientations held by Thai people: ego orientation (concept of face-saving), grateful relationship orientation, smooth interpersonal relationship orientation, flexibility and adjustment orientation, religio-physical orientation (spiritual beliefs), education and competence orientation, interdependence orientation, fun-pleasure orientation, and task-achievement orientation.

In accordance with Ting-Toomey and her colleagues (e.g., Oetzel et al., 2000; Ting-Toomey, 1999, 2003), Fieg (1989) points out that Thai people struggle to save face, both for themselves and for others. Thai people value smooth interpersonal relationships, so they see conflict as a negative phenomenon to be avoided. Displays of anger, overt disagreement, and embarrassing others are some examples of behavior subject to sanction because it causes one, as well as others, to lose face. Whereas American children are
encouraged to think independently and critically, Thai children are discouraged from bringing up contrasting views or challenging others, especially teachers, others who are older, and those in higher-level positions.

In response to the statement, “[M]ost organizations would be better off if conflict could be eliminated forever,” among people from 10 countries surveyed, Thai leaders showed the highest percentage of agreement (85% managers and 96.4% government officials), with the United States as the ninth, a percentage of 6 (Laurent, 1983). The notion of preference for conflict avoidance is also reflected in the finding that Thai employees often withhold criticism or refrain from making negative comments about others in the workplace. The results of the study above, together with the Thai value orientations (e.g., self and others’ face concerns and smooth relationship), are consistent with Ting-Toomey’s (1988) proposition concerning collectivistic cultures’ preference for avoiding conflict style.

A comparative study of Thai (high in collectivism) and Australian (high in individualism) business practices by Chau (as cited in Komin, 1995) revealed that Thai participants were the highest (prominent styles ranking) on obliging and lowest on compromising. This was similar to Australian participants. However, Thai participants revealed a much greater tendency toward avoiding and compromising than did Australians. Chua’s findings are congruent with the Thai value orientations and partially with Ting-Toomey’s (1988) collectivistic assumptions (preference for avoiding). Individualistic assumptions about Australian participants received only limited support.

Olson and Singsuwan (1997) investigated perceptions of Thai and American executives concerning the importance of partnership attributes, communication techniques, and conflict resolution behavior. The results revealed differences in perceptions of conflict styles. American participants were more amenable to argumentative styles, whereas Thais preferred persuasion in resolving conflict. Neither Thai nor American executives valued intimidation; however, Thai executives tended to admit using intimidation more. American participants were more likely to report using intimidation and persuasion, but they were less conscious of their use than Thai participants were. In addition, American executives were more accepting of third-party
intervention. Thai executives tended to prefer trusting and communicative relationships between the partners. In general, Americans expected immediate solutions to problems, whereas Thai executives were more tolerant of conditions that were less than perfect in the organization and viewed the strategic alliance relationship as a long-term commitment. This value is consistent with the Thai preferences for smooth interpersonal relationships, flexibility, and adjustment orientations.

In trying to explore communicative competence of Thai people in organizational context, Sriussadaporn-Charoenngam and Jablin (1999) collected data from 14 organizations, including governmental, state-owned (at least 50% is owned by government), and private organizations. They found that Thais perceived to be communicatively competent are those who know how to avoid conflict, know how to address people appropriately, know how to control their emotions, know how to show respect, are modest/polite, and are tactful. This study provides insight into organizational communication competence, but more in a general scope than in conflict situation in particular. Since conflict is one of the crucial issues in the organization, specific details about the way to manage it are necessary for an adequate understanding.

Komin’s (1995) study of Thai employees and government officials revealed inconsistent results in respect to what was expected. Thai participants preferred integrating, compromising, avoiding, and dominating. None of the participants indicated using obliging as her/his preferred style. The deviation from the expectation derived from Face Negotiation Theory was attributable to the small sample size (69), which can affect statistical power and lead to Type II errors (retention of a false null hypothesis when the research hypothesis should be accepted); representativeness of the samples (there were more participants from private sector, who might have different characteristics from participants from the public sector); and the context of the study (e.g., people in organizational context might be more direct than people in interpersonal context).

In almost every tour guidebook, the authors note that anger and conflict are major things to avoid when visiting Thailand. Although this idea tends to apply in many contexts, the question of whether it does in respect to the styles of conflict management
of Thai people in organizations and whether it applies when people deal with members of
other culture remain unsettled. The studies above mainly focus only on Thais
communicating with Thais (intracultural communication); different preferences,
perspectives on competence, and expectations might be the case when communicating
with people from different cultures.

Conflict and Styles of Conflict Management in Organizational Contexts

Studies of cross-cultural conflict focus on the phenomenon in a variety of
cultures. Rahim (1985) suggests that all styles of conflict management are appropriate,
but in different situations. From the perspective of role theory, when a person assumes a
particular role, her/his behavior reflects the interaction of the person’s personality and the
situation (Chusmir & Mills, 1989). From a review of relevant scholarly literature and
role theory, Chusmir and Mills note of that men and women at the same managerial level
reported using similar styles in handling conflict in organizational contexts. However,
when assuming the role of husband and wife, both men and women managers reportedly
displayed different styles of conflict management. Both men and women, according to
the authors, were more competitive at work than at home. They allegedly adopted more
accommodating styles at home. Moreover, women of low-level rank collaborated more
and avoided conflict less at home than at work. Men in all groups infrequently adopted
compromising styles at home compared to work.

Ruble and Schneer (1994) observed that even though their results showed a
statistically significant lower preference among women for competing and greater
preference for compromising across samples and instruments, these differences applied
only to the work setting. This raises even more questions concerning the stability of
conflict styles.

Studies showing differences in preferences for styles of conflict management
based on role theory have mainly involved American samples. For studies of Thai
participants, although many indicate that avoiding and obliging styles are preferred in
Thai organizational settings, as well as in other contexts, there are still some
inconsistencies in the findings (e.g., Komin, 1995). The effects of situational variables, especially organizational context, on conflict styles needs further investigation. For this reason, an organization that consists of people from diverse cultural backgrounds, such as an MNC, warrants special attention. This type of organization presumably possesses unique characteristics that require members to manage conflict in a distinct manner.

Understanding conflict is crucial in interpersonal and organizational contexts, where it ranked fifth among 65 important organizational issues (Putnam & Poole, 1992). The purpose of studying conflict in organizations is not to find ways to eliminate it altogether. With little or no conflict, an organization can stagnate. At the other extreme, however, unmanageable conflict can damage organizational effectiveness. Rahim (1985) posits an inverted-U relationship between conflict and organizational effectiveness. Organizational effectiveness is at its peak when conflict is at a moderate level. What we need to determine more fully are the factors that optimize the positive impact of conflict.

In the present work environment, it is not necessary for a person to move to other countries to encounter cultural differences. As Kennedy and Everest (1991) mention, the workforce today consists of employees from various cultural backgrounds. This is not only true in the United States, but almost everywhere else in the world. In the world of global competition, strategic alliance, if managed appropriately, provides the greatest opportunities for growth and the most substantial advantages among other types of inter-firm cooperation entry mode (e.g., licensing and franchising) (Olson & Singsuwan, 1997).

Developing countries are major targets for MNCs. Thailand is one of the countries that have attracted many MNCs from all around the world (e.g., IBM, Exxon, Hyatt Hotels, and Pricewaterhouse Cooper), especially since Thai government is supporting and trying to make Thailand an industrialized country. An MNC is one of the important places in which representatives of different cultures come into contact. Culture in MNC management, therefore, is a crucial issue. The success of MNCs relies heavily on how successfully conflicts resulting from cultural differences abate. The worldwide trend regarding the creation of MNCs increased in the 1990s, but many ended in failure. One study showed that 50% of 110 joint ventures between American and Asian
companies experienced failure as a result of the lack of “cross-cultural quality of the executives” (Komin, 1995, p. 3). In a similar vein, Kuhn and Poole (2000) provide evidence that MNCs often fail because of culturally based misunderstandings.

Schneider and Barsoux (1997) see many advantages to working in multicultural teams, such as greater ranges of perspective, creativity, and innovation, as well as better decision making. However, working in a multicultural environment requires extra energy and sensitivity because dealing with people from different cultures has heightened potential for frustration and dissatisfaction, and conflict can easily occur. Managing conflict constructively helps maintain good relationships, as well as provides for productive outcomes.

Because of the inconsistent findings and limitations in previous research involving individualistic-collectivistic styles of conflict management, we would profit from more study of this topic. MNCs are an arena in which intercultural conflict is pervasive. Since the outcomes of conflict management in such settings can have impact on the survival of the organization, research on conflict in the MNC context is warranted.

Previous research has often employed students, and the applicability of the results to organizations, especially in MNCs, is, therefore, questionable. Moreover, although Thailand is one of the collectivistic countries that have attracted many MNCs, the study of Thais’ styles of conflict management is limited. Thailand is a collectivistic culture (Hofstede, 1980), but there are many unique characteristics that distinguish it from other Asian countries and collectivistic cultures. The study of Thai style of conflict management would provide additional evidence to determine whether Face Negotiation Theory (Ting-Toomey, 1988; Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998) holds across individualistic and collectivistic cultures in the organizational context. Given what we do know at this point, it would seem to follow that:

H1: In multinational organizations, Thais prefer using avoiding and obliging styles of conflict management more than do Americans.
H2: In multinational organizations, Americans prefer using integrating, dominating, and compromising styles of conflict management more than do Thais.
Researchers have suggested some criteria for determining the relative superiority of different styles of conflict management. Some opine that certain conflict styles are inherently better than others, whereas others emphasize context/style interaction. Some researchers solely focus on the fulfillment of the goals of the actor (effectiveness), some focus on the relational satisfaction (appropriateness), and some consider both (communication competence). Although different terminology has been employed, similar versions of these concepts are evident in evaluations of the quality of the styles of conflict management.

Chusmir and Mills (1989) suggest evaluating styles of conflict management by determining whether the effects of conflict are exacerbated or reduced and whether the outcomes of the tasks are positive or negative. Competing and avoiding seem to have negative impact, whereas collaborating presumably has a very favorable impact. To date research concerning compromising and accommodating conflict styles has shown mixed results.

In an attempt to explain Japanese children’s use of conflict management strategies, Ohbuchi and Yamamoto (1990) identified a hierarchy of effective conflict strategies by relying on the evaluation of the conflict counterpart. Bilateral-direct strategies tended to elicit the most favorable responses from the conflict counterpart; bilateral-indirect, unilateral-direct, and unilateral-indirect strategies elicited less favorable responses. Instead of evaluating whether the conflict goals were achieved or relying on other objective criteria, Ohbuchi and Yamamoto (1990) emphasized only the reaction and feeling of the conflict counterparts (appropriateness).

Some researchers (e.g., Chusmir & Mills, 1989) suggest that integrative or cooperative styles of conflict management lead to the most effective outcomes, whereas dominating or competitive styles of conflict management limit possibilities for achieving desired outcomes. They reason that an integrative style of conflict management is more beneficial, in that it encourages honest communication, incorporates opinions and ideas of others, does not seek concession, and leads to trusting and friendly attitudes. An
integrative style of conflict management reflects high concern for both the individual’s goals and others’ goals (a win-win situation). These researchers oppose the use of competitive styles of conflict management because the focus on the concession or attempt to win at the expense of the conflict counterpart (win-lose situation) can create hostile feelings. Competitive or dominating styles of conflict management highlight an individual’s goals while diminishing the importance of others’ goals.

Unlike the first group of scholars, a second group of researchers believes that conflict is a complex matter. There is no one style that is appropriately applicable to all types of conflict situations; flexibility is the key. Although the very definition of styles of conflict management suggests that people are inclined to use the same conflict styles in different circumstances, Nicotera (1997) feels that predictions of individuals’ actual behavior in given situations on the basis of styles of conflict management alone might not be accurate. Styles of conflict management can help others understand how individuals approach certain conflicts, but depending on various factors and situations, they act differently. In fact, Nicotera encourages people to adapt their styles of conflict management strategically to suit variations in circumstances.

In the group context, key to constructive conflict management is for members to place the group’s goals above individual goals (consistent with the psychology of collectivism). Nicotera describes a step-by-step method of analyzing conflict situations and provides specific guidelines for determining the style of conflict that is appropriate in each situation. She, I should note, tends to focus more on substantive or task-related goals than on relational ones and, hence, on the effectiveness dimension of communication competence rather than the appropriateness dimension.

Rahim (1985) suggests that the effective use of a conflict style depends on the situation. For example, integrating (problem-solving) and compromising usually are best for dealing with strategic (global) problems, whereas the other styles are better for tactical (specific) issues. Tannen (1990) also refuses to comment concerning which style is best. Instead, she highlights the advantages of each conflict style and accentuates the role of situation and context. Different conflict styles, according to her, should be used for addressing different conflict situations. Moreover, a combination of different styles
can be beneficial in many situations. Finally, when certain conflict styles seem not to work well and may even aggravate tension, the flexibility of using other types of behavior can be beneficial.

The studies reviewed in the previous section have incorporated different definitions and different measures in evaluating styles of conflict management. Some of these studies deal with both substantive and relational outcomes, some accent one dimension, and for some, no clear-cut categorization of effectiveness and appropriateness is apparent. In most of the studies, however, it is evident that the authors believe that successful conflict management involves communication that enables one to achieve his or her goals while satisfying the relational and situational expectations of the partner. The ability of one person to achieve her/his goals (effectiveness), then, is not sufficient. Particularly in an organizational context, in which people encounter one another on a daily basis, and productiveness relies on how people work together, the relational outcomes of the conflict interaction cannot be ignored.

Because of these concerns, the communication competence perspective has been widely adopted in assessing the quality of conflict interaction (e.g., see Canary & Spitzberg, 1987, 1989; Gross & Guerrero, 2000). Canary and Spitzberg (1987, 1989) define competence as “a general impression of communication quality, referred to in particular by perception of appropriateness and effectiveness” (p. 633). Competent communicators, according to Spitzberg and Cupach (1984), are those who are motivated, have necessary social and cultural knowledge and skills, and are able to employ them appropriately to reach personal goals effectively. The competence model of conflict (Papa & Canary, 1995) characterizes competent communication in respect to three dimensions: effectiveness, relational (or specific) appropriateness, and situational (or general) appropriateness. Effectiveness refers to the extent to which the person achieves her/his own goals. Situational appropriateness is characterized by global evaluation of the extent to which the person avoids a violation of generally applicable norms, the ability to carry on a smooth conversation, and the like. Relational appropriateness has to do with particular remarks or types of behavior that occur in a given relationship that are acceptable or not.
In a conflict situation, people can be effective without being appropriate, as well as appropriate without accomplishing any goal. Canary and Spitzberg (1987) suggest that because of differences in criteria for judging one’s self and others, effectiveness is best evaluated from the actor’s perspective, since actors know best whether or not they have achieved their goals. On the other hand, appropriateness is best evaluated from the partner’s perspective. The communication competence perspective, as defined above, has been widely in evidence in assessments of conflict management behavior in the past.

Assessing the styles of conflict management in terms of effectiveness and appropriateness appears to make good sense because the measure is not only sensitive to cultural differences, but it reflects a group’s social and task realities as well (Scheerhorn & Geist, 1997). Although individualists value personal goals and are more task-oriented, they cannot ignore the social reality of the group. Relationships among group members are important in promoting task accomplishment. A supportive group climate can lead to better decisions because within such a climate, group members experience less stress and feel more comfortable stating their ideas honestly. However, in accenting the social dimension too much, a group might not accomplish its task. Effective management of conflict, therefore, requires maintaining a balance between task and social realities.

From the communication competence perspective, researchers often rank styles of conflict management differently. Canary and Spitzberg (1987) report that integrative strategies seem to be viewed as the most competent and distributive strategies the least competent, with avoidance strategies close in rank to distributive strategies. Canary and Spitzberg’s (1989) later rankings are in line with the previous ones. Participants perceived integrative strategies as the most competent. Avoidant and distributive strategies were negatively correlated with competence. In applying the competence model to Rahim’s organizational styles of conflict management, Gross and Guerrero (2000) reported that participants generally perceived integrating as the most competent style. They perceived dominating as effective when used in conjunction with integrating (self-judgment), but otherwise they viewed it as inappropriate. They rated obliging and compromising as neutral, but avoiding as incompetent.
Instead of examining styles of conflict management in isolation, Munduate, Ganaza, Peiro, and Euwema (1999) combined them. A mixture of styles (specifically, integrating, dominating, and compromising) yielded the optimum outcomes. From this, Munduate et al. reached the conclusion that styles do not operate separately and that global patterns evident in differing combinations of styles better predict perceptions of competence.

Despite the inconclusive findings, the assumptions underlying Ting-Toomey’s (1988, 1999) Face Negotiation Theory remain reasonable. Not only do different sets of norms, values, and standards of the cultures lead to different preference for styles of conflict management, they may also lead people to different perceptions of the competence of the communication related to each.

Collier (1989) defines intercultural communication competence in terms of communication in which both parties mutually feel that their cultural identities are confirmed. When advancing both their cultural identities, they are engaging in the behavior perceived to be appropriate and effective. For one to be able to reach this ultimate goal of intercultural communication competence, an understanding of what other cultures perceive as appropriate and effective is necessary.

Conflict is composed of both substantive and relational issues. Many researchers believe that substantive conflict stimulates critical thinking, as well as vigilant evaluation, and should be strongly encouraged. The body of research regarding the positive aspects of substantive conflict on decision-making effectiveness entails data gathered primarily in the United States. Their applicability to other cultures is questionable. For instance, whereas individualists (such as those in the United States) view content and relational issues as independent factors, collectivists view content and relational issues as an inseparable domain, especially when it comes to conflict situations. Face or relational issues are always a matter of concern when group members are in conflict. It is common, for example, for a collectivist to be upset when people disagree with his or her ideas because s/he might feel that the people are attacking her/him personally, not just the ideas (Oetzel, 1995). Since substantive conflict is encouraged, it is likely that avoiding or obliging styles of conflict management would not be perceived as effective or appropriate.
in the United States. Both are passive and do not contribute to critical thinking. These styles, however, might well be seen as both effective and appropriate in other cultural contexts. What appears to be an effective and appropriate approach in one culture might not be in another culture or in an intercultural context.

Ting-Toomey (2003) offers further elaboration on this issue and suggestions for how to deal with conflict to be considered competent in individualistic and collectivistic views. She indicates that individualists tend to prioritize objective and substantive issues relative to the relational dimension, whereas collectivists attend to relational, affective issues when responding to both task and procedural conflict. For individualists, functional resolution of conflict occurs when conflict parties can distinguish the content from relational issues and focus on resolving each type independently. They are more problem-oriented. Well-defined problems, as well as clear alternatives, are of great importance. On the contrary, for collectivists, when the conflict parties and their nonverbal behavior are synchronous, harmonious outcomes can emerge. The ability to maintain the other’s face and the relationship is more important than resolving substantive issues.

Arguing that appropriateness and effectiveness dimensions are not of equal importance across cultures, Coleman (1992) studied American and Japanese dyads employees in Japanese MNC to test this view. He discerned that appropriateness related significantly more strongly to the overall rating of communication competence than to effectiveness among collectivists. However, contrary to expectations, effectiveness ratings among individualists did not relate significantly to rating for overall competence. This might be partly attributable to the larger collectivist sample size.

Because many studies have revealed that people from different cultures prefer different styles of conflict management, it would be interesting to determine whether or not they perceive the competence of styles of conflict management of the counterpart according to their own cultural lenses, as Ting-Toomey (1999, 2003) proposes. A large amount of the scholarly literature concerns differences in perceptions of competence as associated with style of conflict management. Several studies have focused on differences in preferences for styles of conflict management as a function of culture. Not
many have explored differences in perceptions of the relative competence of styles of conflict management from cultural vantage point, however.

An exception to the general trend is the work of Rahim, Antonio, Krumov, and Iileva (2000). In exploring leader power bases (i.e., coercive, reward, legitimate, expert, and referent) and subordinates’ styles of conflict management of American and Bulgarian participants in relation to perceptions of effectiveness, Rahim et al. reported that among American participants the leaders’ use of referent power and subordinates’ use of an integrative style were positively correlated with effectiveness. For Bulgarian participants, the leader’s legitimate power positively correlated with effectiveness, but the subordinates’ conflict styles were not associated with effectiveness. The investigators operationalized effectiveness as a combination of the performance (quality and quantity of work), conformance (getting along with coworkers), dependability (having few disciplinary problems), and personal adjustment (emotional health) subscales. Effectiveness in this case applied to both substantive and relational outcomes, which is reminiscent of the dimensions of communication competence discussed above.

Oetzel (1995) suggests that the use of an integrative style of conflict management is applicable to both individualistic and collectivistic cultures. He contends that cooperation among members in all types of situations enhances a group’s ability to make effective decisions. Although Rahim et al. (2000) detected some differences in perceptions of the effectiveness of leader power bases, as well as the differences in perceptions of styles of conflict management (though not a contrastive one since they investigated each culture separately and no statistical comparison of the two cultures was performed), they did not explore their results in terms of individualism-collectivism or other cultural frameworks. Oetzel (1995), in contrast, did include the individualism-collectivism cultural dimension, but uncovered no differences in perceptions of competence.

Olson and Singsuwan (1997) explored perceptions of styles of conflict management of Thais and Americans. Thais viewed persuasion more favorably, whereas Americans rated argumentative styles more favorably than did Thais. Neither Thais nor
Americans viewed intimidation favorably. Unfortunately, the study included no assessment of style of conflict management systematically in terms of competence.

Since most theories and studies of the topic of communicative competence in organizational communication reflect a Western conceptualization, the extent to which they apply to other cultures remains questionable. Believing that the perception of communication competence is culturally bound, Sruissaporn-Charoenngam and Jablin (1999) conducted a study to test the generalizability of the competence concept in Thai culture. The findings revealed that compared to members of North American organizations, those in Thai organizations value the appropriateness dimension (cultural knowledge) of competence more than they do effectiveness (ability to achieve goals or skills). Although this study dealt with communication competence, it did not specifically center on styles of conflict management. Moreover, it had no comparison of individualistic and collectivistic cultures.

Some conflict scholars rely on objective criteria for assessing styles of conflict management and ignore the perceptions and the evaluations of the parties involved. The present study involved perceptions of both appropriateness and effectiveness. This is not to suggest that actual effectiveness, or the extent to which a person reaches a goal, and appropriateness, the extent to which one behaves as expected, are unimportant. However, as Canary, Cupach, and Messman (1995) suggest, “[C]onflict behaviors do not appear to have a direct influence on relational outcomes; rather, people first interpret conflict behaviors in terms of how appropriate and effective the partner [is]” (p. 107). The negative evaluation of the partner (as well as the end result of the conflict) can create relational problems, whereas positive evaluation can strengthen relationships.

A considerable amount of research supports this notion. Previous studies have shown a strong relationship between conflict communication and relational outcomes (e.g., satisfaction and stability) and reveal that relationships can change as a result of different perceptions of conflict behavior (Canary, Cupach, & Serpe, 2001). Relying on the competence model, Canary, Cupach, and Serpe propose that episode-specific evaluation of the quality of conflict communication is the key linkage between conflict behavior and relational outcomes. Judgment of conflict behavior is context-bound.
Sometimes the ideal conflict behavior, judged by an outsider as highly competent, appears to have damaging effects. On the other hand, destructive behavior, in the eyes of an observer, does not seem to affect to the relationship or even have a positive effect. Specifically, this group of researchers suggests that “episodic-specific judgment play a mediation role of partner’s communication competence[,] and one’s own communication satisfaction intervenes between conflict behaviors [sic] and relational outcomes” (p. 82). Messages alone do not have productive or destructive effects on relationship; people’s judgment of the parties filter through the subjective criteria of competence (appropriateness and effectiveness). Satisfaction with such message more directly affects relationship development and maintenance. Figure 2.1 shows the linkage between these concepts.

Figure 2.1: General Conceptual Model of the Role of The Assessment of Competence


Hence, the focus on perceptions appears to be warranted. Understanding how people from different cultures perceive different styles of conflict management can help them adjust their styles in a manner that elicits positive evaluations. This understanding can also further our ability to account for the development and dissolution of interpersonal relationships. No matter how effective and appropriate one thinks s/he is in a conflict situation, if the target of the message does not think so, the person’s relationship with that individual can be weaken.

From the material developed above, and the differences in Thai and American cultures noted, the following hypotheses appear to be warranted:
H3: In multinational organizations, Thais perceive those using avoiding and obliging styles of conflict management to be more communicatively competent than do Americans.

H4: In multinational organizations, Americans will perceive those using integrating, dominating, and compromising styles of conflict management to be more communicatively competent than do Thais.

In-Groups, Out-Groups, and Conflict

In addition to the general evaluation of competence of styles of conflict management, the present study served to reveal whether perceptions of competence lie in the culture of the conflict counterparts. The relationship with the conflict counterpart was viewed from an in-group and out-group perspective. Triandis (1988) defines in-groups as “groups of people about whose welfare [we are] concerned, with whom [we are] willing to cooperate without demanding equitable returns, and separation from whom leads to discomfort or even pain” (p. 75). In contrast, out-groups are the people with whom we are not identified and about whose welfare we are not especially concerned. Intercultural scholars (e.g., Chen & Starosta, 1998; Oetzel, 1995; Ting-Toomey, 1999) suggest that members of collectivistic cultures, especially in East Asia, clearly distinguish the in-group from the out-group members. For East Asians, in-group members have certain characteristics, such as familial relationships and demographic relationships. Collectivists often form small, long-term, and closely-knit groups. Members of in-groups are mutually dependent, and reciprocation among them is the norm. On the other hand, for individualists (e.g., people from North American, West European, and British cultures), the in-group and out-group boundary is not completely or clearly defined. Individualists tend to be affiliated with a large number of groups and establish voluntary relationships that “best fits them” (Chen & Starosta, 1998, p. 128). In this manner, the length of one’s association with and the loyalty to a particular group are limited.

In-groups and out-groups can influence people’s behavior and judgment processes. Triandis (2003) states that individualists usually experience more conflict
with in-group members, whereas collectivists tend to have more conflict with out-group members. Part of the reason for a greater tendency for individualists to be in conflict with the in-groups is weaker family ties. Collectivists, in contrast, usually are more sensitive to others, more helpful, and more willing to support others’ needs, and even sacrifice their own needs for the in-groups’. However, when dealing with out-groups, collectivists are usually indifferent. Many even become hostile if their goals are in conflict with those of the out-groups.

Ethnocentric lenses also contribute to the interactions of in-group and out-group members. When people feel that their own culture, norms, or values are superior, natural, and correct, they are proud of in-groups and tend to reject members of out-groups, which operate on different types of rules. Collectivists have a tendency to deal with out-groups in an extreme way, whereas individualists are less extreme in that respect (Triandis, 2003).

In respect to styles of conflict management, collectivists usually exhibit more harmony-enhancing styles with in-groups and can be more competitively oriented in dealing with out-groups (Leung, 1988; Oetzel, 1995; Ting-Toomey, 1999). Gudykunst and Kim (1997) point out that people often evaluate in-groups more positively than they do the out-groups. In addition, Cole (1989) discovered that Japanese students in the United States exhibited obliging styles more with in-groups than out-groups and competitive styles more in dealing with out-groups than in-groups.

Although the concepts of in-group and out-group are widely understood and discussed, their applicability to intercultural styles of conflict management is not. The few studies (e.g. Cole, 1989; Oetzel et al., 2000) involving this concept has focused mainly on in-group/out-group in terms of different relationship (e.g., friend vs. stranger). The in-group/out-group distinction in regard to cultural background has not been widely tested. This might partly stem from the lack of interculturally based studies that assesses the conflict behavior of people from different cultures.

For the present study, the in-group/out-group distinction, as applied to conflict, concerned people from the same and different cultures, instead of relationship closeness, as in previous studies. In light of the previous research, collectivists presumably would
evaluate in-group members as higher in communicative competence than when they use the same styles of conflict management as out-group members. For instance, a Thai participant would be apt to rate another Thai who uses a dominating style of conflict management more favorably on the communicative competence scale than an American using a dominating conflict style. In contrast, since individualists do not have a clear boundary and are not as strongly identified with in-groups, they presumably would not differ in the judgment of communicative competence of styles of conflict management based on the culture of their conflict counterparts. These considerations suggested the following hypotheses:

H5: In multinational organizations, Thais perceive Thais to be more communicatively competent than they perceive Americans using the same styles of conflict management.

H6: In multinational organizations, differences in perceptions by Americans of communicative competence of styles of conflict management based on the culture of the conflict counterpart are less pronounced than in the case of Thais.

Gender and Styles of Conflict Management

In addition to the cultural dimensions discussed earlier, biological sex groups, which can be considered as subcultures within a broad cultural context, represent one of the variables in which researchers concerned with conflict are interested. Males are presumably more competitive in conflict situations and prefer a direct conflict style, such as dominating, more than do females. Females, in contrast, are ostensibly more cooperative and prefer collaborative, obliging, and avoiding conflict strategies (e.g., Tannen, 1990). Such presumptions reflect gender stereotypes. Relying on American people, Tannen asserts that females are socialized to be interdependent, whereas males are socialized to be independent and separate from the caregivers. As a result, females usually focus on maintaining relationships and view conflict as a threat to harmony. In contrast, males perceive conflict as less threatening and as a way to negotiate their status. Therefore, they are more likely to engage in conflict. However, research evidence shows mixed results, with some supporting the stereotype (e.g., Coccroft & Ting-Toomey, 1994;
Yelsma & Brown, 1985), some showing relatively small or no gender-related differences in preferences for conflict styles (e.g., Ting-Toomey, Oetzel, & Yee-Jung, 2001), and some contradicting the sex role stereotypes (Ohbuchi & Yamamoto, 1990). Most studies of this genre rely on biological sex in studying differences in styles of conflict management.

From the extensive review of scholarly literature on sex differences in conflict interaction and anger, Cupach and Canary (1997) concluded that conflict in close relationships exhibits more similarities than differences. In the research cited, some men and women behaved in the opposite manner one would expect on the basis of the sex-role stereotypes. Specifically, men were more withdrawn and passive, whereas women were more assertive and aggressive than one would expect. The tendencies for women to pursue and men to withdraw from conflict depended on equity in the relationship. The explanation for such pattern was that a person who wants the relationship to change tends to pursue conflict, whereas a person who does not want change tends to withdraw, regardless of sex. Moreover, men and women tended to respond to similar conflict issues in a similar manner. Men and women also responded similarly to anger, except that women shed tears more. Finally, the authors noted that immediate influences, such as preceding behavior, conflict issues, and attributions appeared to have a much stronger effect on conflict behavior than did the sex of the parties experiencing it. However, it is important to note that this review concerned people in close relationships, not people working together in an organizational context. Canary and Hause (1993) feel that using gender role (psychological and emotional characteristics as shaped by culture) in examining communication differences would provide a more useful framework for understanding actual communication differences between males and females.

Given previous scholarship, the following predictions were tested:

H7: In multinational organizations, gender relates differently to preferences for particular styles of conflict management for Thais and Americans.

H8: In multinational organizations, sex relates differently to perceptions of the communicative competence of the conflict counterpart for Thais and Americans as a function of style.
Cultural Adaptation

Culture provides its members with frameworks and standards that guide their behavior and help them understand their surroundings. When moving across cultural boundaries, the “script” that an individual has taken for granted and relied on might not be applicable to the new culture. During this process, sojourners, whether they be students, immigrants, tourists, or business executives, usually encounter challenges and have to adjust or adapt their communication to fit the new cultural settings (e.g., Begley, 2003; Kim, 2001). Whether voluntary or involuntary, sojourners need to go through a similar adaptation process to survive in the host environment. Since the study conducted included American expatriates and Thais (many of whom had a lengthy experience abroad) working in MNCs Thailand, the issue of cultural adaptation to the new culture could not very well be overlooked.

Cross-cultural adaptation refers to “how a sojourner chooses to cope with cultural changes” (Begley, 2003, p. 407), or what Chen and Starosta (1997) refer to as “a process of dealing with maladjustment within a host culture” (p. 164). It is the process by which sojourners increase their level of fitness to meet the demands of a new culture. Adaptation is an umbrella term that encompasses various processes, such as culture shock, assimilation, adjustment, acculturation, deculturation, integration, and coping. Those confronting a new environment engage in processes that include gathering cultural knowledge, adopting different kind of style of communication, reserving judgment about different practices, or even escaping from intercultural interaction. Acculturation is a change in a person who has primary learning in one culture and has taken on another culture’s characteristics (Kim, 2001). When their original cultural standards or behavior are questionable, strangers in the dominant environment might feel surprised and frustrated. Further, they may feel susceptible to the new surroundings, and that feeling forces them to learn the new cultural way of living. This learning of a new cultural system is the key to acculturation, which involves the acquisition of a wide range of cultural practices. While adding on the new system, the unlearning or deculturation of some of the aspects of the old culture takes place. That is, instead of reacting to a
situation on the basis of the old cultural habits, a new reaction, reflecting the new system is, instead, evoked. The adaptation usually occurs at a superficial level, such as overt role behavior, as the deeper value and belief systems are much more difficult to change. Through support systems, as well as explicit or subtle pressure from the host culture, sojourners inevitably adopt the new patterns of thinking, feeling, and acting.

*Assimilation* is the ideal, and the ultimate change at the highest end of cross-cultural adaptation continuum. It is “a state of highest degree of acculturation into the host milieu and deculturation of the original cultural habits that is theoretically possible” (p. 52). Complete assimilation, although possible, is rare since the core belief system is difficult to change.

Regardless of the reasons for resettlement, sojourners often encounter common phases of adaptation. The four-step model of cultural adjustment reflects the experience of intercultural interaction sojourners encounter. This experience can be viewed as a U-Shaped curve that indicates the level of satisfaction or emotional state of the sojourners (Lysgaard, 1955). The first stage, or the *honeymoon* period, is characterized by the high end of the curve, where strangers enjoy and are excited about the host environment. They are fascinated with discoveries of new sceneries, food, and people through their native cultural viewpoint. They neglect differences and embrace the similarities between the old and the new cultures.

The second stage is the *crisis* period. In this phase, sojourners begin to perceive the gap between the old and new environments. They may experience distress and frustration. This point is where the U-shaped curve drops dramatically. At the bottom of the U-Shaped curve is the so called *culture shock* phase or the depression and confusion period, which results from an overwhelming influx of cues that are not understandable to individuals.

After *culture shock*, positive adjustments usually follow. The third stage or *adjustment* period occurs after sojourners learn how to deal with the new cultural pattern and how to solve problems appropriately. Positive feelings and appreciation of the new culture begin to develop, and the curve showing the degree of satisfaction gradually
moves up. Sojourners, at this point, do not rely heavily on their native cultural standard in judging the host culture.

The fourth stage is *biculturalism* or *mastery* period. It is marked by an understanding of the new culture and one’s ability to enjoy living in it even with some anxiety and frustration from time to time. The U-shaped curve ends at this point if sojourners stay in the host environment. However, if a sojourner returns to her/his home country, an extended U-curve or W-curve can evolve (Chen & Starosta, 1997). This *reverse culture shock* process is basically similar to four-stage process that the sojourners experience when they enter the new culture, but this time, it happens when they return to their native culture.

Even though the U-shaped curve suggests a happy outcome in adjustment after crisis has passed, not all adaptation stories terminate in a pleasant state of dual cultural identity. Having to adapt to new cultures is inevitable for sojourners, but degree of adaptation differs for each person. The level and speed of cultural adaptation depend on many factors, such as the reasons and motives for the relocation, commitment to the new culture, the environment of the host culture, attitude toward the dominant culture, the length of stay, and the sojourner’s personality (Begley, 2003).

Cuellar, Arnold, and Maldonado (1995) describe different forms of cultural adaptation as mode of acculturation. Congruent with Kim (2001), *assimilation* refers to the highest level of acculturation and is signified by the total abandonment of the native culture and the adoption of the new cultural identity and characteristic. *Integrating* occurs when the sojourners assume both cultural identities and feel comfortable interacting in both cultures. When the sojourners only desire to maintain their native culture and reject adjusting to the new culture, *separation* is the result. Separation often is the outcome of latent historical or personal animosity toward the new environment. The next mode is called *marginalization*, which is characterized by the feeling of indifference to both cultures. Individuals who fall in this mode of acculturation do not feel that they belong to either the original or the new culture. This might stem from the contradictory nature of the two cultures. Finally, *cultural transmutation* refers to the mode whereby individuals do not identify with any of the conflicting cultures, but unlike
marginalized individuals, these individuals choose to join with a new culture or subculture in a way that represents a combination of the two conflicting cultures.

Communication is the key element in adaptation process since sojourners depend on interaction and participation in the host culture in learning the cultural pattern, values, and standards of behavior (Kim, 1997, 2001). Because of the focus on communication, the present study relied on the definition by Chen and Starosta (1998), which portrays acculturation as a transformational process in which sojourners adjust themselves by means of communication in order to survive in the new culture. This study had no measure of degree of acculturation, nor did it explore acculturation in terms of a wide range of behavior and values. The only focus was on acculturation in terms of conflict behavior, specifically the preference and the perception of styles of conflict management.

As mentioned earlier, the length of time one spends in another culture is one of the major indications of adaptation. A person who plans to be in a new culture for a short term, such as a tourist, can be less motivated to make effort to adapt to the new culture. Sojourners who plan for a long-term stay, on the contrary, are more strongly motivated and willing to make substantial changes in their communication styles (Begley, 2003). Adaptation occurs over time. Sojourners who stay in a new culture for a long period of time tend to be more committed to adapting than those that are there for less time. In addition, members of host cultures tend to expect more conformity and proficiency from long-term sojourners and react more negatively if the expectation is violated than they do when dealing with short-term visitors. A study by Alkhazraji, et al. (1997) provided support for assumption. Muslim immigrants' acceptance of U.S. national culture correlated significantly with collectivism, religious beliefs, gender, and education, as well as years lived in the United States.

Although the experience of moving from one culture to another can be challenging, it also can open sojourners’ minds about the new cultures, as well as lead to more understanding of one’s own culture. It provides opportunity for learning and growth (Kim, 2001). In investigating the re-entry process for Canadian employees who had been working overseas, Adler (1981) determined that what the expatriates learned from their overseas experiences involved managerial skills, not technical ones. They
reported that working overseas enhanced their decision-making skills under ambiguous and uncertain conditions, skills of asking the right questions (vs. knowing the right answers), and skills in looking at the situation from different perspectives, as well as becoming more patient and tolerant of ambiguity.

Degree of acculturation and the outcome of cultural adjustment have been explored in a variety of respects, including, but not limited to, health-related issues, relationship with host culture, self-concept, task accomplishment, psycho-emotional variables, behavioral issues, and perceptual variables (Ward & Kennedy, 1999). Nevertheless, not many scholars have explored the relationship between degree of acculturation and styles of conflict management and perception of styles of conflict management.

One study that deals with this issue directly is one by Boonsathorn (1999). In her study, Asian conflict management styles and the degree of their acculturation were of interest. Degree of acculturation of Asian participants was positively related to the use of integrating and dominating styles and negatively related to the use of obliging styles of conflict management. The study also revealed a strong positive relationship between the length of time in the United States and preference for a dominating conflict management style. However, perceptions of each style were not part of the data.

For this part of the study, the variable of interest was the outcome of acculturation in regard to conflict behavior and perceptions of conflict style in relation to time spent exposed to other cultures. The study explored whether conflict behavior, as well as the perception of each style of conflict behavior, changed over time as other aspects of cultural behavior and values changed. Since Americans in Thailand, or in other collectivistic cultures, would be exposed to collectivistic styles of avoiding and obliging, they might develop different perceptions of such styles with an increase in time spent in residence. In a similar vein, Thais who spent a period of time in individualistic cultures might perceive integrating, dominating, and compromising styles in a different manner or come to adopt such styles in the adaptation process.
Hypothesis 9 reflects the previous considerations:
H9: The time Thais and Americans spend in other cultures relates to their preferences for
and perceptions of conflict management styles. Specifically, for Americans, preference
for and perception of competence in respect to avoiding and obliging styles of conflict
management are positively related to the length of exposure to other cultures. For Thais,
preference for and perception of competence in respect to integrating, dominating, and
compromising styles of conflict management are positively related to the length of
exposure to other cultures.

The Impacts of Organizational Culture

Those who visit other countries, such as tourists and visitors, are affected mainly
by the host environment. However, some sojourners, for example, business people, also
have to deal with organizational culture, which might be similar to or different from that
of the host environment. Griffith and Harvey (2001) suggest that multinational
corporations are affected by national, as well as organizational culture. They refer to
national culture as “the values, beliefs, and assumptions that define a distinct way of life
of a group of people and is based on the fundamental concepts imparted in early
individual development” (p. 88). National culture is an integral part of everyday life, and
it shapes the way people interpret reality. In an organizational context, national culture
may influence the way people interpret distributions of power, relationships among
individuals, and the sense of obligation individuals have for an organization. The
national culture presumably has an impact on the expectations of how employees believe
they should interact and what they should expect in return from the organization.
Moreover, organizational policies, motivation/reward systems, and behavioral norms are
apt to reflect the national culture. When an organization consists of members from
different cultures, the differences in their cultural backgrounds can complicate
communication within the organization. Triandis and Albert (1992) identify five major
domains in which national culture can influence organizational activities, and conflict
resolution is one of them. Other areas include structural factors, values and motives, communication patterns, and decision making,

*Organizational culture* is manifestation of an underlying structure, set of attitudes, and expectations on which members rely in interpreting and understanding policies, behavior, and the overall organizational environment (Griffith & Harvey, 2001). Organizational culture is the product of the cultural background that each individual brings into the organization, as well as the standards and operating processes that have been established within the organization. The organizational culture presumably reflects and is affected by the national cultures of the employees.

Other factors that influence organizational culture are the proportion of the cultural diversity, the compatibility of home and host country organization, the length of operation of the subsidiary, the ownership structure, the degree of cultural distance among the members, the level of control from the government, and the strategic importance of subsidiaries. Adler (1980) suggests three types of management models found in multinational corporations: the Cultural Dominance Model (based on cultural style of management alone), the Cultural Compromise Model (only similar aspects of cultures are used to form organizational policies and practices), and the Cultural Synergy Model (both different and similar cultural aspects are recognized and employed as a basis to form organizational policies and practices). However, often, organizations are trying to craft an organization’s overseas culture to be similar to those of the headquarters’ (Cultural Dominance Model) (Griffith & Harvey, 2001).

Since both national and organizational culture can, in principle, affect preferences for and perceptions of styles of conflict management, this was a matter of interest in the present study. Since no previous work provided a basis for research hypotheses, this part of the study was object of qualitative assessment.
Other than exploring the styles of conflict management and the perception of the styles of conflict management of people from collectivistic and individualistic cultures, the present study had as an aim providing an improved perspective on cultural research. To date, studies exploring differences in styles of conflict management have reflected a cross-cultural perspective (the comparison of the interactions of people within the same culture with those of people from another culture). Although study from an intercultural perspective of how two people from different cultures interact can provide a different viewpoint, few, if any, studies have taken this approach. Representatives of a culture might interact one way with people from the same cultures and interact another way with the people from other cultures (Ting-Toomey, 1999; Leung, 1988). Since people in MNCs have to interact with people from other cultures, as well as their own, the intercultural perspective appeared to be appropriate for the research reported herein.

One of the a few studies that relies on intercultural perspective is by Coleman (1992). Coleman examined perceptions of intercultural communication competence in American and Japanese dyads. Determining whether the actor’s rating of effectiveness and coactor’s rating of appropriateness were more predictive of the overall communication competence ratings was the main purpose of the study. Moreover, the study also focused on the relationship between overall intercultural competence score and collectivists rating of appropriateness and individualist rating of effectiveness. The manner in which the Americans evaluated the Japanese behavior or vice versa was not compared or explored.

To the best of my knowledge, there are no studies that focus on preferences or the perceived effectiveness and appropriateness of styles of conflict management from intercultural communication perspective. The present study served to fill this void.
Chapter 3

Methods

This study was designed to explore the preferences for conflict management styles by Thai (collectivistic) and American (individualistic) employees in multinational corporations (MNCs) in Thailand. In addition to the preferences, perceptions of competence of those enacting each conflict management style were evaluated to determine how Thais and Americans might differ. Other factors, such as gender, the ingroup/out-group relationship of the conflict counterpart, and the length of time participants spent in other cultures, were also examined to determine how they might influence preferences for and perceptions of the competence of those exhibiting different conflict management styles. In addition to the main investigation, individualism-collectivism orientations were assessed to assure that the participants from the selected cultures represented collectivists and individualists as Hofstede (1980) has described them. This was important since the theoretical framework for most of the study assumed that collectivism/individualism, rather than nationality, was the critical variable.

Participants and Instrumentation for the Quantitative Part of the Study

Participants

The selection of the MNCs was based on random sampling (using computer-generated numbers), as well as convenience sampling of major American owned/co-owned MNCs that operate in Bangkok and nearby provinces. Most of the companies were members of the American Chamber of Commerce in Thailand. Employees of the MNCs who had to deal with colleagues from the same and different cultures were
contacted and asked if they would volunteer to participate in a survey. For the qualitative part of the study, the participants involved in the survey were asked to indicate, upon completion, whether or not they were willing to participate in an interview. The forms indicating intention to participate were handed in separately from the survey to ensure anonymity of responses to the survey items. The forms were randomly selected in identifying interviewees, except that an effort was made to have equal numbers of males and females from each cultural group.

There was a total of 319 respondents from the 73 companies participating in the quantitative part of the study. Of those, 250 reported their native country as Thailand, 64 reported that they were from the United States, 2 were from Australia, and 2 were from Canada. One reported being Thai-American. Since the study focused specifically on people from the United States and Thailand, data for the participants who were not from the national cultures under investigation were discarded. Even though some of the other national cultures can be categorized as individualistic or collectivistic, each national culture varies in types of face concerns (Oetzel et al., 2001), which could lead to national-specific behavior or differences in conflict styles and perceptions of conflict styles. Data for the participant who indicated being Thai-American were discarded as well because of the mixed nature of the person’s cultural background. In the end, data for 314 participants were retained for further analysis. As a result of missing data, however, some analyses consisted of information from less than 314 respondents. For the American participants, of those who reported their gender, there were 49 (87.5%) males and 7 (12.5%) females. Among the Thai participants, there were 95 (38.9%) males (one participant reported his gender as gay and was put in the male category because the study focused on the biological sex), and 149 (61.1%) were females.

The average age of the American participants was 43 (SD=9.51), and for Thai participants, it was 34 (SD=6.96). The American participants were racially diverse; how diverse was difficult to say, as they used both racial and non-racial categories to identify themselves (see Table 3.1 ). Forty-two (42) (75%) considered themselves European American, 9 (16.1%) American, 1 (1.8%) Asian, 1 (1.8%) Asian-American, 1 (1.8%) Pacific-Islander, 1 (1.8%) White, and 1 (1.8%) Filipino. Two hundred forty-five (98.4%)
Thai participants predominantly reported that their ethnicity was Asian, with 2 (.8\%) describing themselves as Asian-American, 1 (.4\%) as Chinese, and 1 (.4\%) as Eurasian.

Table 3.1: Descriptive Statistics Involving the Ethnic Makeup of the Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Native Country</th>
<th>United States</th>
<th>Thailand</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>245</td>
<td>246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>98.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian-America</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European-American</td>
<td></td>
<td>75.0%</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American</td>
<td></td>
<td>16.1%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td></td>
<td>.4%</td>
<td>.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eurasian</td>
<td></td>
<td>.4%</td>
<td>.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Islander</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filipino</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>56</td>
<td>249</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regarding the educational background of the participants, 33 (58.9\%) of the respondents from the United States reported having graduate degrees, 16 (28.6\%) reported having bachelor’s degrees, 3 (5.4\%) had associate degrees, and 4 (7.1\%) had some college education. In a similar vein, 134 (54.5\%) Thai participants reported having graduate degrees, 100 (40.7\%) reported earning bachelor’s degrees, 3 (1.2\%) had associate degrees, 6 (2.4\%) had some college education, and 3 (1.2\%) had high school diploma (see Table 3.2 ). Note that the educational backgrounds of the American and Thai participants in this study do not represent the general educational level of each country’s population. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2000), among the population who were 25 years and older, 7.5\% have less than a 9th grade education, 12.1\% have 9th-12th grade education, 28.6\% are high school graduates, 6.3\% have associate degrees, 15.5\% have bachelor’s degrees, and 8.9\% have obtained graduate or professional degrees. For Thailand, the Population and Housing Census (1990) report
that 10.7% of the population does not attend school, 70.7% complete primary school, 13.6% complete secondary school, and 5% have university degrees. American and Thai people who work in MNCs, then, represented a generally well-educated group of people.

Table 3.2: Descriptive Statistics for the Educational Background of the Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Native Country</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>Thailand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate degree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate degree</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>246</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The participants reported a considerable variety of positions in their companies, including support staff, accountant/auditor, sales/marketing staff, manager, secretary, engineer, geologist, lawyer, pilot, flight attendant, researcher, CEO, and others. A summary of the positions mentioned by the participants appears in Appendix D.

The average length of time the American participants spent working in their current companies was 12 years ($SD=8.25$), whereas Thai participants had spent an average of 7.5 years ($SD=12.32$) in their companies. In respect to experience in other cultures, all (100%) participants from the United States had lived in other countries, and 88 (36.5%) of Thais had lived in other countries. Of those who had lived in other cultures, American participants spent an average of 7.5 years ($SD=8.25$) in them. Thai participants had spent an average of 4 years ($SD=5.63$) living in other countries.

There were 73 companies from 39 business areas participating. The companies from which the participants came could be broadly placed into 7 types of businesses based on the American Chamber of Commerce categorization: Food and Animal Products; Chemical Product Industries; Machinery, Electricity, and Electrical Equipment; Transport Equipment; Product Classified by Material; Manufactured Articles; and
Services. A more detailed description of the types of companies whose employees took part in this survey appears in Appendix D.

Instrumentation

The language for all instruments was English. This assumed, of course, that Thai employees whose tasks involved dealing with Americans had sufficient knowledge of English to use them. However, prior to conducting the study, two Thai graduate students at a university in the northeastern United States, a class of approximately 30 Thai graduate students at a university in Thailand, as well as two Thais who worked in MNCs completed the survey, indicated whether or not the format, instructions, and items were clear and assessed the difficulty of the language. They also reported the time spent in completing the survey and provided any additional comments they wished.

After the preliminary review, appropriate revisions in the questionnaire were made. The first adjustment involved the length of the survey. Originally, each participant had to complete a measure of competence for all five conflict styles. However, because of the amount of time the participants spent and the repetitious nature of the questions, the survey was reconstructed into ten versions (five versions with an American conflict counterpart and five versions with a Thai conflict counterpart). Each version contained one conflict behavior for the participants to evaluate. As a result, a larger number of participants than originally envisioned was necessary after this revision to enhance the power and meet the requirements of the statistical tools to be used. A second revision related to the language. Some unfamiliar/difficult words and phrases were simplified, and some explanations were added to enhance the clarity and comprehensibility of the items comprising the questionnaire.

For the quantitative survey, three measures (conflict management styles, perceived competence, and individualism-collectivism orientation) and one set of demographic questions was included (see Appendix A). Ten forms of the survey were distributed. All of the different versions had the same four basic sections. The difference
was in Section 2, the perceived competence measure. Each participant randomly received one of the five conflict styles to evaluate. The versions were constructed in an identical manner, except for a change of wording directing the participants as to whom to consider in the conflict situations. In one set, the participants were to focus on conflicts with people from the Thai culture. In the other set, they were to focus on conflicts with people from the United States. This resulted in four combinations: Thais in conflict with other Thais, Thais in conflict with Americans, Americans in conflict with Thais, and Americans in conflict with Americans.

**Conflict Management Styles**

An adapted version of Rahim Organization Conflict Inventory (ROCI-II) (Rahim, 1983) was the measure of conflict management styles (Appendix A, Section 1). ROCI-II consists of a series of items having 5-point scales in the Likert format (5=Strongly Agree…1=Strongly Disagree) that reflect conflict management styles based on individual dispositions. A high score indicates greater reported identification of the conflict management style of interest. The five conflict management styles reflect different combinations of “concern for self” and “concern for others” (dual-concern model). Originally, for each conflict management style, there were seven items corresponding to each conflict style. However, some of the items having low factor loadings were discarded. Therefore, the final version of questionnaire consisted of 28 items. The items used to indicate the preference for each conflict management style were as follows: integrating: 1, 4, 5, 12, 22, 23, and 28; avoiding: 3, 6, 11, 16, 26, and 27; dominating: 8, 9, 18, 21, and 25; obliging: 2, 10, 13, 17, 19, and 24; and compromising: 7, 14, 15, and 20. In principle, the measure indexes the relative preferability of each of the five conflict interaction styles noted from the point of view of the respondent.

ROCI-II also served as a basis for constructing scenarios reflecting each of the five different conflict management styles of conflict counterparts that the participants were to imagine (Appendix A, Section 2).
I used the items above to identify specific characteristics of the behavior attributed to the conflict counterparts in the five scenarios. It is important to note that when applying ROCI-II (Appendix A, Section 1), a respondent was indicating how s/he sees her/himself generally behaving in conflict situations. When applied to the conflict management of others (Appendix A, Section 2), each participant imagined individuals whose behavior descriptively matches a particular conflict management style. Then, the participants indicated how they would assess the hypothetical parties’ communicative competence in exhibiting the behavior specified. The participants were to draw on the experiences they had with their co-workers in real life in imagining the situations to which they were responding.

ROCI-II has been used widely and has been shown to have an acceptable level of reliability and validity. For example, in a recent study, Gross and Guerrero (2000) reported the following Cronbach’s Alphas for the subscales: Integrating, .86; avoiding, .84; dominating, .77; obliging, .83; and compromising, .78. ROCI-II also has been satisfactorily tested for construct, convergent, and discriminant validity (Rahim, 2000).

The preference for conflict management styles was the average of the derived ratings for the questions associated with each conflict management style.

**Communication Competence**

The Conversational Appropriateness and Effectiveness Scales (CAE) (see Appendix A, Section 2) developed by Spitzberg and Canary (1985) served as the measure of perceptions of competence the participants had about the imaginary conflict partners’ conflict management style. This version is suitable for evaluating conflict behavior and has been used by many scholars to assess the competence of conflict strategies (e.g., Canary & Spitzberg, 1987; Gross & Guerrero, 2000). Moreover, Coleman (1992) used the scale to assess competence in intercultural dyads in an organizational context and reported that the two subscales (Appropriateness and Conversational Effectiveness) combined to predict essentially 100% of molar impressions of competence.
Items comprising the CAE were accompanied by 5-point scales in the Likert format, with higher scores’ indicating more favorable assessments of the reported perceived effectiveness and appropriateness of the other party’s conflict style. The reliability coefficients that Gross and Guerrero (2000) reported for their study were relatively high (Alpha of .73-.89 for specific appropriateness, of .75-.82 for situational appropriateness, and .87-.92 for effectiveness). The CAE, in general, also exhibited high construct validity when correlated with measures of conflict strategies, satisfaction, trust, intimacy, and mutual control.

For this study, the CAE served in the assessments of the competence of hypothetical individuals enacting particular conflict management styles. The participants reported how they rated their conflict counterparts in terms of effectiveness and appropriateness when they displayed different conflict management styles in the descriptions provided in five scenarios. Nine items (1-9) from Conversational Appropriateness Scale (CAS) and eleven items (10-20) from Conversational Effectiveness Scale (CES) comprised the sets participants evaluated for conflict management styles. The items that were repetitive (that is, items that assess similar concepts) and those not applicable to the context provided (e.g., rating of specific remarks) were excluded. The items were adapted in respect to wording to reflect how a respondent would assess another person’s competence if that person were behaving in the way indicated in a hypothetical conflict situation. For the adapted version of CAS, both situational and relational appropriateness were assessed.

The sum of scores for items relating to perceived appropriateness and perceived effectiveness were calculated. The averages of each subscale were determined for each participant. For some items (the ones which were underlined in Appendix A, Section 2), a transformation of the reported scores (the conversion of 5 to 1 and 1 to 5, respectively) was necessary to make a higher score consistently reflect a more favorable evaluation of the target conflict management style and the low scores consistently to reflect less favorable evaluations.
Individualism-Collectivism

To test the robustness of the assumption that Thais hold collectivistic values, whereas Americans hold individualistic values, as proposed by previous researchers (e.g., Hofstede, 1980), the Individualism-Collectivism Scale (INDCOL) developed by Hui (1988) was employed. INDCOL is a target-specific, multi-faceted scale that measures one’s individualism-collectivism value orientation as a personality construct. Because the scale taps various beliefs, attitudes, behavioral intentions, and forms of behavior, its generalizability is enhanced, even though its reliability might be compromised. Moreover, depending on one’s relationship with the persons with whom s/he is interacting, Hui contends that there are many types of collectivist tendencies. Relevant categories are: spouse, parents, kin, neighbors, friends, and co-workers. For the present study, a modified version of INDCOL (see Appendix A, Section 3) was used.

The three or four highest items from each subscale were selected on the basis of item-total correlations to reduce the length of the survey and, thereby, the likelihood of fatigue. In addition, a 5-point scale, instead of the original 6-point scale, was used for the consistency with other measures in the survey. The extent to which the participants from each country involved (Thailand and the United States) subscribed to individualistic or collectivistic values was indexed by the summed score for 19 items. In the calculations, a transformation of scores for certain items (the underlined items in Appendix A, Section 3) was necessary for higher scores consistently to reflect a stronger orientation toward collectivism and lower scores consistently to reflect a stronger orientation toward individualism. The summed score for each subscale was also calculated to indicate whether Thais and Americans differed in their individualism/collectivism orientation as a function of the six target groups.
Demographic Information

The demographic information reviewed at the beginning of this Chapter was solicited in Section 4 of the questionnaire (See Appendix A) as well as after each interview was over. The participants provided information concerning their country of origin, gender, education, and age. Some information about the conflict counterpart on the survey (i.e., her/his position in relation to the participants and her/his culture of origin) was to be used as a manipulation check. However, these two manipulation check items did not accurately reflect the concept in need of checking (the culture and position of the target) because the wording of the questions created some confusion, which was revealed in the participants’ answers. Therefore, these questions were discarded from the analysis.

After completing the previous four sections of the survey, each participant provided information concerning whether or not s/he was willing to take part in an interview at a later date. If interested, s/he gave the researcher contact information. This information appeared on a form to be handed in separately from the survey to ensure that survey responses could not be traced to the volunteers. Certain aspects of the demographic information, such as culture and gender, served as independent variables for pertinent statistical analyses. The other demographic information was solicited for a better understanding of the characteristics of participants. Such knowledge may help with determining the scope of generalizability of the study.

Reliability and Validity for the Quantitative Instrumentation

Reliability

Cronbach’s Alpha served as an estimate of the reliability of the three scales used in the study (ROCI-II, CAE, and INDCOL). Cronbach’s Alphas for the ROCI-II
subscales ranged from .63-.78. The reliability value for each subscale, respectively, was as follows: integrating, .76; avoiding, .72; dominating, .63; obliging, .78; and compromising, .69. In respect to the CAE, Cronbach’s Alpha for the CES was .90, and for the CAS, it was .92. Finally, for INDCOL, Cronbach’s Alpha for the entire scale was .61. For the relationship subscales, the reliability values were as follows: spouse, .34; parents, .44; kin, .41; neighbors, .66; friends, .34; and co-workers, .22. The value of Cronbach’s Alpha for the overall scale suggested that the reliability of the instrument used was at a moderately low to an acceptable level for social science (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). As mentioned earlier, since INDCOL covers various beliefs, attitudes, behavioral intentions, and forms of behavior, that may have affected the reliability of the scale. Even though the reliability of the subscales was low (because of the limited number of items comprising each subscale), the overall value was at an acceptable level.

**Internal Validity**

In addition to face validity, which I assessed by closely examining the items to assure that each scale intuitively reflected the conceptual definitions of the constructs measured, I undertook a form of triangulation (Frey, Botan, & Kreps, 2000) involving both quantitative survey data and interviews to measure the same construct. Consistencies in the conclusions to which the two types of data point provided further assurance of internal validity.

**External Validity**

Since the population of interest for the study consisted of collectivists and individualists in organizational contexts, the generalizability of the results was necessarily limited (Frey, Botan, & Kreps, 2000; Hatch & Lazaraton, 1991). Sampling from the designated population was both random and nonrandom. I first contacted the
American Chamber of Commerce in Thailand and asked for the names of American owned/co-owned MNCs in Thailand. I used random sampling to select fifty MNCs and contacted each for permission to conduct a study involving their employees. The names of the Thai employees, whose responsibilities involved dealing with American employees, and American employees who also dealt with Thais, were sought. This approach to sampling served to enhance the external validity of the study, in that every MNC, as well as its employees, had a nearly equal chance to be selected. However, since the random sampling alone did not provide sufficient data for the study, I employed convenience sampling by using a network of people to help distribute questionnaire to Thais and Americans in MNCs. To assure the highest level of representativeness of the sample, I tried my best to involve MNCs in as many diverse types of business as possible. In the end, 73 companies from 39 different areas of business participated in the study (See Appendix D).

In the first part of the study, participants responded to questions about situations in which they engaged in conflict communication. They were to reflect on actual behavior. The participants thought about their own behavior and reported how they thought they usually behaved in a conflict situation. The first part of the self-report survey used conflicts reflective of real-life situations. This helped to establish the external validity of the data. The survey questions relating to style urged the participants to think about how they actually interacted with others in general. This should more or less have indicated how the participants act in real life. They presumably would have no reason to misrepresent their behavior. Moreover, the participants knew best how they tend to act in different situations. An observational method might capture more “objective” evidence of behavior, but many observations across many conflict situations would be needed to reveal the participants’ general tendencies.

For the second part of the survey, the participants each imagined conflict situations with a counterpart who exhibited a particular conflict management style, reflected on real-life interactions they had with others, and shared their perceptions of the appropriateness and effectiveness of the other party’s style in the pertinent scenario. The hypothetical situations were designed to elicit the participants’ reactions to the type of
conflict management style of interest in real life, which provided further evidence of external validity. In regard to competence, the way people perceived and evaluated others, with respect to their own personal biases, was what the study was, in part, intended to illuminate—especially, how cultural factors may have shaped the views of the participants. Self-reports are good ways to capture the perspective of the participants.

**Participants and Instrumentation for the Qualitative Part of the Study**

**Participants**

The participants who indicated upon completion of their survey that they were willing to take part in the interview were contacted, and appointments for a face-to-face or telephone interview were made. For the qualitative part of the study, there was a total of 27 interviewees from 13 companies. The interviewees consisted of 13 Americans, 1 British person, and 13 Thais. The British national was included in the American participants group, since the person had spent a good deal of time in the U.S. (8 years) and admitted to absorbing a lot of American culture. Among the 13 Americans (and 1 British interviewee), 11 (78.6%) were males, and 3 (21.4%) were females. There were 8 (61.5%) males and 5 (38.5%) females among the Thai participants. The average age of the Americans plus British participant was 42 (SD=8.95), and the average age of the Thai participants was 38 (SD=9.69).

The American interviewees described their ethnicity as follows: 6 (42.9%) European-American, 3 (21.4%) American, 2 (14.3%), White/Caucasian, 2 (14.3%) European, and 1 (7.1%) Pacific-Islander. All the Thais considered themselves Asians (100%). The demographic information regarding ethnicity appears in Table 3.3.
In respect to education, 2 (14.3%) American interviewees reported having some college education, 3 (21.4%) with a bachelor’s degree, and 9 (64.3%) with a graduate degree. Three (23.1%) of the Thais reported having bachelor’s degrees, and 10 (76.9%) reported having graduate degrees (see Table 3.4).

Table 3.4: Descriptive Statistics for the Educational Background of the Interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Native Country</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>Thailand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate degree</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
<td>23.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>64.3%</td>
<td>76.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The 13 companies in which the participants worked were in the following industries: Petroleum and Petroleum Products (37%); Aircraft and Associated Equipment (7.4%); Legal (3.7%); Beverage (3.7%); Clothing and Footwear (14.8%); Electronic or Computer-controlled Machinery and Apparatus (7.4%); Road, Motor Vehicles, and
Parts (3.7%); Telecommunication (3.7%); Finance (7.4%); Reporting, Information, and Publishing (7.4%); and Government Agency (3.7%).

The positions the American interviewees reported included: owner, management (e.g., manager, director), professional (e.g., geologist, engineer), consultant, business developer, and coordinator. The Thai participants reported such positions as: management, professional, accountant/auditor, researcher, executive secretary, and specialist. Both American and Thai interviewees tended to have similar positions in their companies.

The average length of time the Americans spent working in their companies was 14 years and 5 months ($SD = 7.84$), whereas the Thai spent an average of 9 years 3 months ($SD = 7.85$) working in their companies. Since the study was conducted in Thailand, all of the Americans had been exposed to other cultures. The average length of time spent in other cultures for American participants was 9 years and 1 month ($SD = 7.43$). On the other hand, 10 (76.9%) of the Thai interviewees had lived in other countries, with an average length of 5 years 4 months ($SD = 6.64$). The average time of the interviews was 35 minutes ($SD = 6.34$).

To assure confidentiality and make the interview data more personal, pseudonyms were assigned to each interviewee. The number corresponded to each interviewee’s pseudonyms. Demographic information for each interviewee is shown in Table 3.5.
### Table 3.5: Pseudonyms and Demographic Information of the Interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Pseudonyms</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Education</th>
</tr>
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### Interview Protocol

The interview protocol (the format was adapted from Siddo, 1996, see Appendix B) was used in face-to-face and telephone interviews to acquire additional in-depth information, as well as to provide for triangulation with the information obtained from the quantitative survey data. The interview protocol consisted of 18 open-ended questions and tentative probes. During the interviews, participants described the conflicts...
they experienced with persons from a different culture (American-Thai or Thai-American). Those who could not recall such a conflict with people from a different culture described the conflicts with people from the same cultures (Thai-Thai or American-American). In either event, the participants were to imagine or recall a specific conflict. They received the definition of a conflict as “a situation in which you and the other person have different goals, opinions, or approaches to some issues and you see the other person as potentially interfering with the achievement of these goals.”

Detailed explanations and examples of their own behavior, the counterparts’ behavior, and their perceptions of the conflict counterparts were elicited. The major focus was on perceptions of conflict styles, as related to effectiveness and appropriateness. In addition to perceptions of conflict behavior, I also sought to uncover reasons behind any evaluative judgments that surfaced. The participants discussed the respects in which they believed that their own culture and organizational culture, as well as the exposure to other cultures, had shaped their judgments and how the culture of the conflict counterpart, whether the target person was from the same or different culture, might also have affected their judgments. Finally, the participants provided recommendations concerning how to manage conflicts with people from different cultures in the workplace.

**Standards for Qualitative Research**

Two matters important for examining responses interpretively are bracketing one’s experiences and the handling of questions. Because interpretive researchers rely mainly on participants’ narratives concerning their experiences, they need to be patient and skillful in raising appropriate questions if they are to elicit the rich, accurate descriptions. For qualitative research, in general, there are many standards that one should observe. These standards are not clear-cut. The qualitative part of the study was relatively subjective; for the most part, the findings depended substantially on how I framed the questions, conducted the interviews, and interpreted the participants’ experience as reflected in their responses to questions. As a result, I made very careful
judgment calls for each decision relating to what a response revealed to make sure the findings and the conclusions I drew from them were trustworthy, credible, dependable, conformable, and transferable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Credibility and Transferability

In an attempt to produce valid, accurate, and complete data concerning the participants’ own conflict management styles and their perceptions of the competence of the conflict management behavior of counterparts, I did a number of things in line with Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) recommendations.

To enhance credibility, I rephrased responses and asked if I had accurately represented the participants’ thoughts. Even though I tried my best to set aside biases and previous knowledge, I might not always have succeeded. Reflecting on and articulating my assumptions, as well as worldview regarding intercultural conflict management styles, should help readers maintain an appropriate perspective in regard to the interpretation of results.

In respect to transferability, the extent to which the findings apply to other situations was another crucial concern. In qualitative research, the applicability of findings is often context-bound. Readers are the ones who assess the situation and judge whether or not the findings are applicable to contexts in which they experience or have experienced intercultural conflict. To help the readers make better decisions, I aimed at achieving rich and thick description of the interview data. I also provided extensive details of the interviewees’ personal characteristics to help the readers understand the nature of the samples involved in the interviews. I discussed above the ways in which I would be able to determine external validity from the quantitative data. Thick description and reporting details about the participants helped establish evidence of it in respect to the qualitative data.
**Dependability**

Consistency of findings refers to the extent to which a study can be replicated. Another researcher who conducts the same type of inquiry with similar participants in similar contexts should arrive at similar results. To maximize possibilities for replicability, I assured the participants of the confidentiality of the interview data so that they would be more apt to provide accurate information and thoughts concerning the questions. I also provided a clear operational definition of the term *conflict* to the participants which other researchers could employ or compare their findings. During the interviews, I framed the same questions differently and asked them again to ensure that they understood the questions correctly and to determine whether they would answer the same questions in a similar manner. In respect to topic coding, I tried to be as explicit as I possibly could concerning the basis for deriving particular interpretations and judgments.

**Ethics**

I took every precaution to protect the participants from any harm. Recalling conflict situations during the interview process could be stressful for some people. I tried to help any overly stressed participants to relax by giving them a break or changing the topic for a moment. In terms of job security, providing confidentiality by not disclosing the names of the participants and the names of the companies in the study helped reassure the informants that they were not at risk of any personal or professional sort. I, of course, received Institutional Review Board approval before acquiring any data.
Design

The first dependent variable in the study was the respondents’ preferences for the five conflict management styles (ROCI-II): integrating, avoiding, dominating, obliging, and compromising. This dependent variable assumed interval/ratio-level data. A respondent’s choices on 5-point continua indicated the extent to which s/he saw the particular conflict styles the corresponding items reflected characteristic of her/himself.

The perceived competence measure (CAE) served as the second dependent variable and reflected two attributes: effectiveness and appropriateness. CAE was determined by the responses to assumed 5-point interval/ratio scales in the Likert format. Both the effectiveness and appropriateness subscales reflected the respondent’s perspective. The participant evaluated whether s/he felt that an imaginary conflict counterpart would reach her/his goals and whether the conflict counterpart was acting suitably, that is, according to relevant situational and relational rules, in each of the five hypothetical scenarios involving the use of one of the five different styles of conflict management.

The final dependent variable was individualism-collectivism orientation, as indexed by a modified version of INDCOL. For this study, it was necessary to confirm the assumption that Americans held individualistic values, whereas Thais endorsed collectivistic values, if, indeed, the results of the analyses were to apply to culture rather than nationality only. The individualism-collectivism assumption was tested for six types of relationships: spouse, parent, kin, neighbor, friend, and co-worker.

The first independent variable for this study was culture and corresponded to the participants’ native countries. Culture in this case was a nominal scale, consisting of two categories, Thai and American.

Three moderator variables (gender, nature of conflict, and length of time spent in other cultures) were included to determine whether they might have affected the relationship between the major independent (culture) and the dependent variables. Data for these variables came from the demographic information section of the survey. Gender represented a nominal measure, consisting of two categories: male and female. It
was derived from the respondents’ identification of their biological sex. The nature of conflict also represented a nominal scale with two categories: in-group and out-group. The in-group condition was operationalized in terms of the conflict between two co-workers from the same culture, and the out-group condition involved conflict between two co-workers from different cultures. The nature of conflict was a between-subjects variable, as half the participants reacted to scenarios concerning persons from the same culture, and the other half reacted to scenarios about conflict with persons representing another culture. Length of exposure to other cultures was a continuous variable, as assessed by the number of months spent living in a culture other than one’s home country. However, since there were not sufficient American participants in the study, only the data for Thai participants were analyzed to indicate whether there was a difference in perception of competence between the in-groups and out-groups. Also, there were only 7 females in the American sample; consequently, gender was excluded from some of the analyses.

**Data Collection Procedure**

Data collection for this study took place in MNCs in Thailand. First, the MNCs that were members of the American Chamber of Commerce and operated in Bangkok and nearby provinces in Thailand were randomly selected on the basis of computer generated numbers. After the selection, more research was done to indicate whether they were owned or co-owned by Americans. Then I contacted the American MNCs and asked them to indicate whether they had Thai and American employees working together. If so, I sought permission to conduct the study using their employees. The companies were informed about the purpose and procedures of the study, assured of confidentiality, and apprised of the risks and/or inconveniences participants might experience, as well as the benefits they might realize. In addition, since I work in a highly regarded university in Thailand and gathering data for a dissertation was a part of my education at a reputable university in the United States, I used this information to establish credibility in gaining access to MNCs and their employees. To the letter seeking permission from the
company, I also attached a letter explaining my study and the letter seeking cooperation from the Dean of my department in Thailand.

Because some of the companies declined to participate and a large number of participants was needed for my study, I included a convenience sampling procedure. I contacted networks of people who had connections with MNCs and gained access to these MNCs through them.

After receiving permission from the MNCs, I asked the contact person to identify employees whose daily jobs involved dealing with colleagues from a different culture, as well as their own and to indicate that those who did would be asked to complete a questionnaire requiring about 30-45 minutes at most.

The participants who agreed to take part in the study were informed about the process for completing the survey, the risks and the benefits, and the time required. Then they signed informed consent forms. The participants completed the survey on their own in relatively private spaces, such as at their desks. They received contact information so that I could answer any questions they might have.

The participants first completed the part of the questionnaire involving their own conflict management styles (ROCI-II for self) (Rahim, 1983). Second, they read one of the five conflict scenarios (each version contained one conflict style scenario) and imagined similar conflict situations involving conflict counterparts in a work-related setting with similar positions who displayed the styles as described in the scenarios (all of which, as mentioned earlier, are derived from the ROCI-II). Half of the participants were to imagine a conflict they had with someone from the same (Thai or American) culture. The other half were to imagine a conflict with some from the other cultures (Thai or American). Then the participants completed the measure of perceived communication competence (CAE) (Spitzberg & Canary, 1985) for the other party for each scenario (one scenario per person). As mentioned earlier, since there was a very small number of American participants, all American participants evaluated only a Thai counterpart. The participants next responded to the items on the modified version of INDCOL (Hui, 1988), that I used as a check on the extent to which my assumptions concerning Thais as
collectivists and Americans as individualists were warranted. Finally, the participants supplied a variety of demographic information.

The participants indicated on a separate form whether or not they were willing to participate in a face-to-face or a telephone interview that would required approximately 20-30 minutes of their time. If they were, they provided contact information and then detached and handed in the form separately from their surveys. They had up to three weeks to complete the survey and the interview forms. After receiving all the materials, I randomly contacted and scheduled interviews with those indicating a willingness to participate in this part of the study.

The in-person interviews took place in the participants’ private offices. The participants were informed about the general information of the study, the risks and benefits of the study, their right not to answer any questions, and confidentiality safeguards. I asked for permission to record the interview before continuing. I followed the same procedure for the remaining interviews. The only difference was that the interviews were conducted via a medium, namely, a telephone. Interviews related to the participants’ experiences in conflict situations with the people from the same and different cultures and their perceptions of the competence of different conflict management styles the conflict counterparts used. After each interview, I thanked the participant and offered to provide a summary of the study upon completion of the dissertation if s/he was interested.
Analyses

Quantitative Analyses

Bases for Inferential Statistics

Theoretically, when using a nonrandom sampling procedure, nonparametric statistics are the appropriate tools for data analysis. True randomization is very difficult to attain, and the majority of studies published, especially in the area of social sciences, usually depend on nonrandom sampling procedure. For such studies, inferential statistics or parametric statistics, however, have been employed, despite the use of nonrandom sampling. Smithson (2000) presents arguments to support the use of the inferential statistics for nonrandom sampling, as well as nonrandomized assignment. He opines that “we are justified in adopting this strategy whenever we are satisfied that we can model a phenomenon via a statistical model, and are sufficiently careful in specifying what inferences can and cannot be made” (p. 370). Similarly, Huck (2000) suggests that the definable accessible populations that are tapped through convenience sampling method usually represent the abstract population of interest. Originally, random sampling was the intended data collection procedure for the present study, but the attempt fell short of the ideal, as both random and convenience samples had to be used to achieve a satisfactorily sized data set. However, to assure the representativeness of the MNC population to the great extent possible, I contacted large numbers of prospective participants from a wide variety of business areas.

Statistical Analyses

First, I computed Cronbach's Alpha to establish the reliability of the three dependent measures used in the study (ROCI-II, CAE, and INDCOL). I then presented
and tabulated data relating to the demographic items and utilized such descriptive
statistics as were appropriate, including percentage by sex, ethnicity, and country of
origin, and showed the summary of data in regard to position, as well as company type.

One analysis served as a check on the extent to which the assumptions that Thais
are collectivists and Americans are individualists were warranted. One-Way ANOVA
was the test for this analysis. The INDCOL overall score served as a dependent variable,
and culture was the independent variable.

Another analysis permitted testing of Hypotheses 1 and 2, which posited that
Thais (collectivists) prefer using avoiding and obliging conflict management styles more
than do Americans (individualists), whereas Americans prefer using integrating,
dominating, and compromising conflict management styles more than do Thais. In
addition, Hypothesis 7, which focused on gender as a moderator variable in respect to the
preference for conflict management styles, was tested as well. To compare the reported
conflict management styles of Thais and Americans and assess the effects of gender,
univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) was the statistical tool. Preferences for each
conflict management style (ROCI-II) served as a separate dependent variable, while
culture and gender served as independent variables. The ANOVA for this set of
hypotheses was based on a 2 x 2 factorial design (culture x gender), with the five conflict
management styles as dependent variables. One-tailed tests were used for the directional
hypotheses.

The next analysis related to Hypotheses 3, 4, 5, and 6. Hypotheses 3 and 4
involved the comparison of perceived competence of different conflict management
styles between Thai and American managers. For Hypotheses 5 and 6, this study
focused on whether the effects of the nature of the conflict (in-group versus out-group)
mediated the perceived competence of conflict management styles for Thais and
Americans. The dependent variables for this analysis were the two dimensions of
perceived competence (CAE): appropriateness (CAS) and effectiveness (CES). Culture
and nature of conflict served as the independent variables. Originally, a 2 x 2 x 5
factorial analysis MANOVA (culture x nature of conflict [in-group vs. out-group] x
conflict management style) was the desired statistical tool. However, because of an
insufficient number of American participants, 2-way ANOVAs were used to analyze the scores on CAS and CES for Thai participants only. The scores for CAS from Thai participants toward Thai participants (in-group) and Thai participants toward American participants (out-group) were compared. The CES scores of Thai participants toward the in-group and the out-group were compared in a similar manner.

An additional analysis was used for the American participants. One-way ANOVAs were the statistical tools used in assessing how American participants perceived different types of conflict management styles displayed by Thais (out-group only). CAS and CES scores were the dependent variables (one at a time), and the different conflict management styles served as the independent variable (with five levels) in this analysis.

The analysis for Hypothesis 8, which involved the extent to which gender mediated the effect of culture on the perceived competence of the other party in a conflict situation in relation to her/his predominant style, involved ANOVAs for detecting differences in perceptions of conflict counterparts by Thais and Americans for the two dimensions of competence (CAE), as a function of different conflict management styles. Gender served as a moderator variable. Whether or not there was an interaction effect between culture and gender was the main focus of the analysis. A 2 x 2 x 5 factorial design (culture x gender x conflict management style) was indicated. Nonetheless, since there were a small number of female in American participants, the analysis was conducted for Thai participants only.

To determine whether the length of exposure to other cultures was related to the preferences and the perception of the styles of conflict management, the analysis involved Pearson correlations. For the preferences for conflict management styles, the scores from ROCI-II for each style of conflict management served as the dependent variables, and the time Thais and Americans spent in other cultures served as independent variables. For the perception of the conflict management styles, CAS and CES for 5 conflict management styles served as the dependent variables, and the time Thais and Americans spent in other cultures served as independent variables.
Qualitative Examination

The final part of this investigation dealt with the interview data. These qualitative data were systematically examined using Moustakas’s (1994) guidelines consisting of six steps: data transcribing, data managing, reading and memoing, describing, classifying, and interpreting.

Data Transcribing

After the all the interviews were conducted, I transcribed them by listening repeatedly to the audio-tape to familiarize myself with the data and gain the understanding of the nature of the responses. I made an effort to create the transcripts that represented the interview conversation as accurately as possible (see Appendix C). The transcripts were verbatim. The symbols used for the transcripts are described in Chapter 5. Most of the interviews (21) were in English, but 6 interviews were in Thai. I did the translation of these interviews into English. For words or phases that were highly cultural-related and did not have the exact one-to-one Thai-English translations, I consulted with Thai graduate students to create jointly the descriptions that we felt representing the ideas. Since the same word (e.g., Kreng Jai) had different meanings depending on the context, the translation was not identical in different locations. After the translation was completed, a Thai graduate student listened to the audio-tape and checked for accuracy.

Data Managing

I stored the data from the interviews in a computer file, with a large space on the right margin for jotting down notes and ideas. In this space, I recorded tentative topics, as well as many thoughts regarding the participants’ experience with intra/intercultural
conflict phenomenon. Each transcript had an identification at the top of the first page. Each line was numbered for purposes of analysis when referring to sentence or meaningful word unit. I stored the data and backed them up in different ways, such as on a hard drive, diskette, and hard copy.

**Reading and Memoing**

I read each file, including the responses (on the hard copy) 3 times to try to understand the experience and perception regarding the competency of conflict management styles as a whole and form the perspective of the respondent. Any thoughts, concepts, or emergent ideas regarding the participants’ conflict management styles and their feelings and attitudes toward the conflict counterparts from each reading I recorded in the right margin on the transcripts. I identified initial codes and tentative topics in this stage.

**Describing**

The theoretical framework for this study was Face Negotiation Theory, as articulated by Ting-Toomey (1988). This frame guided this part of the study by focusing attention on the examination of the data relating to how culture (which included the individualism-collectivism and facework concepts) influenced the conflict behavior, as well as perceptions, of people from individualistic and collectivistic cultures. I explicitly described the theoretical background that guided my study in the writing of my research so the readers can understand and use their judgments in interpreting the results accordingly. Although the focus was within this framework, I simultaneously had to be sensitive to other issues that emerged in the data.
Classifying

Find and List Statements of Meaning for Individuals

I selected significant statements regarding the feelings and attitudes toward the conflict phenomenon from the transcripts and treated them as equal in importance. I further consolidated overlapping statements.

Group all Statements into Meaning Units

I extracted meanings from each statement by paying particular attention to the original context of the conflict phenomenon. For example, I took the entire conflict situation into account. I considered many factors, such as adjacent statements, issues of the conflict, cultures, and looked at positions or the relationships of the conflict counterpart. I then grouped the statements with similarities to create “meaningful units.” The topics common to participants emerged in this phase. I modified the topics in this step and in other steps as the data suggested. Flexibility was the key to this part of the analysis.

Interpreting

Develop a Textual Description of “What happened” and “How” the Conflict Phenomenon is Experienced

In this step, I reflected on my own textual description of the conflict phenomena and exhaustively scrutinized all possible ways of interpreting, categorizing, and
constructing a description of the participants’ feelings and attitudes regarding the same culture and intercultural conflict experiences.

Develop an Overall Description of the Experience

I was able to describe the essential overall structure of the reported conflict management styles and the perceived competence of the conflict counterparts from the same and different cultures from the integration of the results from each step and from all participants. This step included the interpretation of the data from an overall perspective with the aim of capturing the entire conflict experiences reported.

The results of the quantitative analyses appear in Chapter 4, and the results of the qualitative investigation in Chapter 5.
Chapter 4

Results of the Quantitative Analyses

The purpose of this study was to explore the preferences for and the perceived competence of styles of conflict management displayed by Thais and Americans working in MNCs in Thailand. Other factors, such as gender, culture of the conflict counterpart (in-group/out-group), and length of exposure to other cultures were also included in the analyses to determine their relationships to the styles of conflict management the participants reported using and the attitudes they had toward these styles. This chapter presents the results of the quantitative analyses.

Cronbach’s Alpha for Reliability

The first set of analyses involved the computation of Cronbach’s Alpha to assess the reliability of the instruments used in the study (ROCI-II, CAE, and INDCOL). The reliability estimates for different instruments were shown and discussed in Chapter 3.

Demographic Information

Descriptive statistics, such as frequencies and means, were calculated for demographic information gathered in Section 4 of the survey. The results were used to describe the general characteristics of the participants. Background information for sex, ethnicity, country of origin, and length of exposure to other cultures appears in Chapter 3 (Table 3.1- Table 3.4). Since the summary of data in regard to the positions of the participants, as well as the company types to which the participants belonged, were quite extensive, the tables summarizing these results are shown in Appendix D.
ANOVA for Individualism-Collectivism Orientation

This analysis served as a check for the individualism-collectivism orientation of Thais and Americans in the study. According to Hofstede (1980, 2001), the United States is a culture that is high in individualism, whereas Thailand represents a culture that is high in collectivism. Since the study was based on this assumption, univariate analysis of variance (one-way ANOVA) was conducted to determine the extent to which the assumption held with Thai and American participants who were working in MNCs in Thailand. The INDCOL overall score served as a dependent variable, and culture of the participants served as the independent variable. ANOVA (see Table 4.1) showed a significant difference in individualism-collectivism orientation between Thais and Americans. Contrary to expectations, however, American participants in MNCs in Thailand responded in a more collectivistic manner \( (M=3.50, SD=.36) \) than did Thais \( (M=3.27, SD=.36) \) in the same environment \( (F=21.57, p < .001) \). Hence, the original assumption did not receive support.

Table 4.1: Univariate Analysis of Variance for Individualism-Collectivism Orientation

<table>
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<th>SD</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>F</th>
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<td>64</td>
<td>21.57</td>
<td>.000***</td>
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Note. *** \( p < .001 \) (one-tailed)
A higher score reflects a higher collectivistic orientation.
The scale ranges from 1 to 5 with 1=Strongly Disagree and 5=Strongly Agree.

ANOVAs for Preference for Styles of Conflict Management by Culture and Gender

The fourth analysis allowed for testing Hypotheses 1, 2, and 7. Hypotheses 1 and 2 posited that in MNCs, Thais, as compared to Americans, would prefer using avoiding and obliging styles of conflict management, whereas Americans would prefer using
integrating, dominating, and compromising styles of conflict management. In addition to the culture of the participants, gender (as reflected in Hypothesis 7) was a moderator variable and revealed whether males and females had different preferences for styles of conflict management that varied according to culture.

To test these hypotheses, two-way ANOVA was the statistical tool. Preference for each style of conflict management (ROCI-II) served as a separate dependent variable; culture served as the independent variable and gender as the moderator variable. The ANOVA for this set of hypotheses was based on a 2 x 2 factorial design (culture x gender). A one-tailed test was used for Hypotheses 1 and 2 because the hypotheses were directional. The relevant means and significant differences are shown in Table 4.2.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Effect</th>
<th>Integrating</th>
<th>Avoiding</th>
<th>Dominating</th>
<th>Obliging</th>
<th>Compromising</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>American</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>2.57*</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>3.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thai</td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>2.88*</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>3.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>4.19</td>
<td>.55</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>3.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>2.79</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>3.04</td>
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<tr>
<td>Native Country x Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>.44</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>.59</td>
<td>3.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thai</td>
<td>4.13</td>
<td>.59</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>3.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>2.62</td>
<td>.60</td>
<td>3.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thai</td>
<td>4.21</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>2.94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. * p=or < .05 (one-tailed)
The scale ranges from 1 to 5 with 1=Strongly Disagree and 5=Strongly Agree.

There was a significant main effect for culture for the two styles of conflict management: avoiding and obliging. Post hoc analysis showed that Thai participants reported using more avoiding ($F=4.92, p < .05$) and obliging ($F=4.65, p < .05$) than did American participants. Neither gender as a main effect nor the interaction effect between
gender and culture was significant. Since Thais preferred avoiding and obliging styles more than Americans, Hypothesis 1 was confirmed. Hypothesis 2 was not supported, as there were no significant differences in preferences for integrating, compromising, and domination styles between Thais and Americans. Gender also revealed no significant effect. Hence, Hypothesis 7 was not supported. Note that even if the results for gender as a moderator variable had been significant, one still would need to use caution in the interpretation of the effect of gender because of the low number of American female participants. There were only 7 females (and 49 males) in the American sample, whereas there were 149 females (and 95 males) in the Thai sample.

**ANOVAs for Perceived Effectiveness and Appropriateness of Styles of Conflict Management by Culture of the Participants and Culture of the Conflict Counterpart**

The fifth set of analyses served as tests of Hypotheses 3, 4, 5, and 6. These analyses concerned the perceived competence of different styles of conflict management displayed by Thai and American counterparts. The tests of Hypotheses 3 and 4 were designed to reveal whether Thais and Americans in MNCs evaluate styles of conflict management differently in term of competence (appropriateness and effectiveness). Hypotheses 5 and 6 focused on the effects of the cultural background of the conflict counterpart, that is, whether the culture of the person involved in the conflict (in-group or out-group) moderated the perceived competence of styles of conflict management for Thais and Americans. Two dimensions of perceived competence (CAE), appropriateness (CAS) and effectiveness (CES), served as dependent variables for this analysis. Culture (Thai versus American) and nature of conflict (in-group versus out-group) were the independent variables. Because of an insufficient number of American participants, MANOVA could not be used as planned. Univariate analysis of variance was the replacement. The analysis was further divided in two major parts: Thai’s perceptions of appropriateness and effectiveness and American’s perceptions of appropriateness and effectiveness.
ANOVAs for Thais’ Ratings of Perceived Effectiveness and Appropriateness of Styles of Conflict Management

Two-way ANOVAs were the statistical tool in investigating the perceived appropriateness (CAS) and effectiveness (CES) of Thai participants toward Thais and Americans. The in-group (Thais versus Thais) and out-group (Thai versus Americans) nature of conflict was the point of comparison. Table 4.3 shows the results for the perceived appropriateness and effectiveness of different styles of conflict management from the perspective of Thai participants’ toward Thai and American target cultures (culture of the counterpart).
Perceived Appropriateness (CAS)

For the perception of appropriateness from Thai participants’ points of view, the findings revealed a significant effect for conflict management styles \((F=32.84, p < .001)\). Post hoc tests indicated that, regardless of the target culture, Thai participants rated the integrating style as significantly higher in appropriateness than dominating \((p < .001)\),

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effect</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thai</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrating</td>
<td>3.77a</td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compromising</td>
<td>3.58a</td>
<td>.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obliging</td>
<td>2.93b</td>
<td>.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoiding</td>
<td>2.52c</td>
<td>.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominating</td>
<td>2.47c</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.3: Univariate Analysis of Variance for Perceptions of Appropriateness and Effectiveness of Styles of Conflict Management by Thais Toward Americans and Thais

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effect</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thai</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrating</td>
<td>3.81a</td>
<td>.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compromising</td>
<td>3.53b</td>
<td>.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obliging</td>
<td>3.05c</td>
<td>.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoiding</td>
<td>2.93d</td>
<td>.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominating</td>
<td>2.57d</td>
<td>.59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. **p < .01 ***p < .001 (one-tailed)
Means with the same superscript indicate that there were no significant differences between them.
The scale ranges from 1 to 5 with 1=Strongly Disagree and 5=Strongly Agree.

Perceived Appropriateness (CAS)

For the perception of appropriateness from Thai participants’ points of view, the findings revealed a significant effect for conflict management styles \((F=32.84, p < .001)\). Post hoc tests indicated that, regardless of the target culture, Thai participants rated the integrating style as significantly higher in appropriateness than dominating \((p < .001)\),
avoiding ($p < .001$), and obliging ($p < .001$). They also rated compromising as significantly more appropriate than dominating ($p < .001$), avoiding ($p < .001$), and obliging ($p < .001$). They rated obliging significantly higher in appropriateness than dominating ($p=.01$) and avoiding ($p < .05$). There was no significant difference in the appropriateness ratings of the integrating and compromising styles. Neither culture of the conflict counterpart nor the interaction between the culture of the counterpart and conflict management styles displayed by the other person showed significant effects for the assessments of perceived appropriateness.

Hypothesis 3 was partially supported, in that Thai participants evaluated obliging as more appropriate than dominating. However, for the most part, the hypothesis was not confirmed. Thai participants did not rate avoiding and obliging as more appropriate than integrating or compromising. Avoiding was also rated as low as dominating in terms of appropriateness.

Hypotheses 5 was not confirmed, as there were no significant differences for the ratings of appropriateness when comparing the scores that Thais assigned the two target cultures. The sample scores indicated that Thais did not consistently evaluate Thais higher in appropriateness across the five styles of conflict management. In addition, in this case, the lack of a significant interaction effect between the target culture and conflict styles revealed that Thais did not evaluate Thais and Americans differently for any conflict style.

**Perceived Effectiveness (CES)**

In regard to perceived effectiveness, the findings revealed that native culture of the counterpart alone did not show a significant main effect. There was a significant main effect for the style of conflict management displayed by the other person ($F=29.20, p < .001$), however. The findings indicated that the conflict management style displayed by the other party was rated differently by the participants regardless of the participants’ culture of origin. Thai participants rated integrating as more effective than avoiding ($p < .001$), dominating ($p < .001$), obliging ($p < .001$), and compromising ($p < .05$). They
perceived compromising as more effective than avoiding \((p < .001)\), dominating \((p < .001)\), and obliging \((p = .01)\). Thais saw obliging as more effective than avoiding \((p < .001)\). They rated dominating as more effective than avoiding \((p < .01)\). Finally, the results revealed that they rated avoiding as less effective than the other conflict management styles: integrating \((p < .001)\), compromising \((p < .001)\), and obliging \((p < .001)\), and dominating \((p < .01)\).

For perceived effectiveness, there was a significant interaction effect for culture of the counterpart and the styles of conflict management displayed \((F = 3.51, p < .01)\). When there is a significant interaction, significant main effects may not be interpreted in a straightforward manner. In other words, a style of conflict management does not act alone in determining ratings of effectiveness. Therefore, the disordinal interaction effect was the focus of the interpretation. The style of conflict management and the culture of the person who displayed the styles, in combination, showed different relationships to the judgments of effectiveness. Thai participants evaluated Americans as more effective when they displayed integrating, compromising, and avoiding styles of conflict management and rated Thais as less effective when they displayed these same styles. They rated Americans as only slightly more effective than Thais when displaying the avoiding style. On the other hand, Thai participants viewed Thai counterparts as more effective when they employed dominating and obliging conflict styles than when Americans employed these same styles. The interaction effect of target culture and conflict styles displayed by the target culture is shown in Figure 4.1.
Thai participants did not rate avoiding and obliging higher than other conflict management styles in regard to perceived effectiveness. In fact, they rated avoiding the lowest among all styles. They rated obliging higher than avoiding, but still lower than other styles, except for dominating, for which no significant difference was apparent. In addition, since there was a significant interaction effect, styles of conflict management did not act alone in influencing the perception of effectiveness. In sum, Hypothesis 3 regarding the perceived effectiveness of avoiding and obliging from Thai participants’ viewpoint received no support.

The findings for effectiveness (CES) scores also failed to confirm Hypothesis 5, which posited that Thais evaluate in-group members (Thais) as more effective than they do out-group members. The significant interaction effect between target culture and conflict management styles suggested that Thai participants did not assess Thais as more
effective across all conflict styles. For some styles, they rated Americans higher in effectiveness; for other styles, they rated other Thais higher.

**ANOVA’s for Americans’ Ratings of Perceived Effectiveness and Appropriateness of Thais’ Styles of Conflict Management**

Since there was only a small number of Americans involved in the survey, those who were willing to participate completed the survey for the out-group nature of conflict only. Therefore, the nature of conflict (in-group and out-group) could not be compared. Univariate analysis of variance (one-way ANOVA) was employed only to determine the manner in which Americans evaluated each style of conflict management displayed by Thais in terms of appropriateness and effectiveness.

The ANOVA revealed a significant effect for style of conflict management displayed by the counterpart for the measures of both perceived appropriateness ($F=15.58, p < .001$) and perceived effectiveness ($F=18.35, p < .001$). In regard to perceived appropriateness, American participants assessed integrating styles displayed by Thais as significantly higher than dominating ($p < .001$), avoiding ($p < .001$), and obliging ($p < .001$). In a similar vein, they viewed compromising as more appropriate than dominating ($p < .001$), avoiding ($p < .001$), and obliging ($p < .001$). They rated dominating the lowest in perceived appropriateness ($M=2.11$), but similarly to avoiding and obliging. No other significant difference for the appropriateness ratings emerged in the post hoc analysis.

For perceived effectiveness, when Thais displayed integrating styles of conflict management, the American respondents rated them higher than when they displayed dominating ($p < .001$), avoiding ($p < .001$), and obliging ($p < .001$) styles. They also rated the compromising style as more effective than dominating ($p < .01$), avoiding ($p < .001$), and obliging ($p < .001$). They saw dominating as higher in effectiveness than they did avoiding ($p < .05$). They rated the avoiding ($M=2.33$) style as significantly lower in effectiveness than they did other conflict styles, except for obliging, which they rated
similarly. Specific means and standard deviation for the score of CAS and CES for each conflict management style appear in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4: Analysis of Variance for Perceptions of Appropriateness and Effectiveness of Styles of Conflict Management by Americans Toward Thais

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conflict Styles of the Thai Counterpart***</th>
<th>Perceived Appropriateness (CAS) M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Perceived Effectiveness (CES) M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Integrating</td>
<td>4.17&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.59</td>
<td>Integrating</td>
<td>3.95&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compromising</td>
<td>3.93&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>Compromising</td>
<td>3.77&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoiding</td>
<td>2.61&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.56</td>
<td>Dominating</td>
<td>2.93&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obliging</td>
<td>2.55&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.59</td>
<td>Obliging</td>
<td>2.49&lt;sup&gt;b,c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominating</td>
<td>2.17&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>Avoiding</td>
<td>2.26&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: ***p < .001 (one-tailed)
Means with the same superscript indicate that there were no significant differences between them.
The scale ranges from 1 to 5 with 1=Strongly Disagree and 5=Strongly Agree.

The findings supported Hypothesis 4 for the most part. Americans perceived the display of integrating and compromising styles of conflict management as more appropriate and effective than they did avoiding and obliging styles. However, in the case of appropriateness, they did not, as expected, rate the dominating style as higher than they did avoiding and obliging. When judging the effectiveness of styles, they rated dominating higher than avoiding, but similarly to obliging. Note that these results only reflected the perspectives of Americans when rating Thai counterparts’ conflict behavior. Because of the insufficient number of American participants, it was not possible to complete the analysis for Hypothesis 6, which posited that Americans would not rate Thais and Americans differently when they exhibit the same styles of conflict management.
ANOVA for Perceived Effectiveness and Appropriateness of Styles of Conflict Management by Culture and Gender of the Participants

Hypothesis 8 addressed the effect of gender on the perceptions of appropriateness and effectiveness of the styles of conflict management displayed by members of the same and different cultures. Originally, MANOVA [2 (culture) x 2 (gender) x 5 (conflict styles) factorial design] was the intended statistical tool for this analysis. However, because of the insufficient number of female participants in the American sample, the analysis for the perceptions of American participants was removed. Only the perceptions of Thai participants applied. Hence, univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) was the test for the remaining part of the hypothesis. The CAS and CES scores for Thai participants served as the dependent variables, and style of conflict management served as the independent variable. Gender was a moderating variable in this analysis. The findings for both perceived appropriateness and effectiveness appear in Table 4.5.
Univariate analysis of variance for perceived appropriateness revealed a significant main effect for style of conflict management the other party displayed ($F=36.42, p < .001$) and another main effect for gender ($F=4.50, p < .05$). The interaction between the styles of conflict management and gender was not significant. Because the significant main effect of conflict styles was elaborated previously (see Table 4.3), only the effect of gender is discussed in this section. Overall, Thai females rated others (both Thais and Americans) as more appropriate ($p < .05$) than Thai males did, regardless of the styles displayed. The lack of significant interaction suggested that...
both Thai males and females did not evaluate other people differently because of the conflict management styles they displayed.

When evaluating others in terms of effectiveness, both the main effect for style of conflict management ($F=31.13, p < .001$) and the interaction between style and gender ($F=2.33, p < .05$) were significant. For perceived effectiveness, the data for gender as a main effect were not significant. Since the different perceptions of effectiveness toward different conflict management styles (main effect) was presented earlier (see Table 4.4), and because the main effect cannot be interpreted in a straightforward manner when there is a significant interaction effect, this section discusses only the interaction of style and gender. The findings indicated that Thai females evaluated integrating, avoiding, dominating, and compromising as more effective than did Thai males; Thai males evaluated obliging as more effective than females did. Figure 4.2 displays the disordinal nature of the assessments as related to gender and conflict style.
Hypothesis 8 focused on suspected differences in how males and females evaluate different styles of conflict management. The hypothesis was that there would be differences in the perceptions of both appropriateness and effectiveness by males and females as a function of styles. The results showed that the expected differences in perception held true only for effectiveness ratings ($p < .05$). Thai females ($M = 2.78$) rated obliging as a less effective style than did Thai males ($M = 3.02$). For appropriateness, there was no significant difference in the ratings of Thai males and females in regard to different styles of conflict management. Hypothesis 8, then, received only partial support. It is important, however, that one take into consideration the fact that only the perceptions of Thai participants entered into the analysis.
Correlations Between Length of Exposure to Other Cultures and Preference as Well as Perceived Effectiveness and Appropriateness of Styles of Conflict Management

The purpose of the final set of analyses was to determine the relationships of the length of exposure to other cultures and preferences for styles to perceptions of the styles of conflict management. Pearson’s correlations were the statistical tool for these analyses. To determine the relationships between preference for styles of conflict management and the time spent in other cultures, ROCI-II scores for the five conflict styles were the dependent variables. The time Thai and American participants spent in other cultures served as the independent variables for the pertinent analyses. For Thai participants, only those who reported living in other cultures were included. All Americans were included, since they were in Thailand and at least were exposed to the Thai culture.

The data revealed three significant correlations for the Thai participants. The longer the time Thais spent in other cultures, the less they reportedly relied on avoiding ($r = -.207, p < .05$) and obliging ($r = -.271, p < .01$). On the other hand, the more time Thai participants spent in other cultures, the more they indicated a preference for dominating styles of conflict management ($r = .226, p < .05$). No significant correlation between Americans’ preferences for conflict management styles and the time they spent in other cultures emerged. Table 4.6 displays descriptive statistics for variables used in this set of analyses, and Table 4.7 reveals the related correlational data.
Hypothesis 9, which posited a relationship between the time spent in other cultures and preference for particular conflict styles was partially confirmed. A relationship existed among the Thai participants, but only for certain conflict management styles (namely, avoiding, obliging, and dominating). The relationships were also in the expected direction. However, for American participants, there were no significant relationships between the time of exposure to other cultures and preferences for particular styles of conflict management.

Table 4.6: Descriptive Statistics for Variables Used in the Correlation Analysis of Length of Exposure to Other Cultures and Preference for Styles of Conflict Management

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Months in other Cultures for Americans¹</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>276.00</td>
<td>90.54</td>
<td>61.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Months in other Cultures for Thais²</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>264.00</td>
<td>50.28</td>
<td>46.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrating</td>
<td>313</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>4.19</td>
<td>.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoiding</td>
<td>313</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominating</td>
<td>313</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>4.75</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obliging</td>
<td>313</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>4.83</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compromising</td>
<td>313</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>.60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. ¹ Median = 84 and IER = 87 ² Median = 36 and IER = 36
The scale ranges from 1 to 5 with 1=Strongly Disagree and 5=Strongly Agree.
To illuminate the relationships between the length of exposure to other cultures and the perceived appropriateness and perceived effectiveness of the five styles of conflict management, correlation analysis again served as the tool. CAS and CES for the five styles were dependent variables, and the time spent in other cultures for Thais and Americans were the independent variables. Descriptive statistics for the variables in the analyses appear in Table 4.8; data pertaining to perceptions of the appropriateness of each conflict management style in relation to length of exposure to other cultures appear in Table 4.9.

The only significant correlation that surfaced was for evaluations of the appropriateness of avoiding style and length of exposure to other cultures ($r=.521, p < .05$). Specifically, the longer the Thai participants stayed in other cultures, the more they perceived avoiding as an appropriate style. For American participants, there were no significant relationships between the length of exposure to other cultures and their perceptions of appropriateness for different styles of conflict management.

Table 4.7: Pearson Correlations Between Length of Exposure to Other Cultures and Preference for Different Styles of Conflict Management

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Months in Other Cultures for Americans</th>
<th>Months in Other Cultures for Thais</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$N=48$</td>
<td>$N=80$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrating</td>
<td>.071</td>
<td>-.027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$p$</td>
<td>.315</td>
<td>.407</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoiding</td>
<td>.087</td>
<td>-.207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$p$</td>
<td>.278</td>
<td>.033</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominating</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>.226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$p$</td>
<td>.491</td>
<td>.022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obliging</td>
<td>-.080</td>
<td>-.271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$p$</td>
<td>.296</td>
<td>.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compromising</td>
<td>.224</td>
<td>-.047</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$p$</td>
<td>.063</td>
<td>.338</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The first set of values represents correlation coefficients; the second set of values represents probabilities ($p$).
Table 4.8: Descriptive Statistics for Variables Used in the Correlation Analysis of Length of Exposure to Other Cultures and Perceived Appropriateness of Different Conflict Styles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Months in Other Cultures for Americans</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>276.00</td>
<td>90.54</td>
<td>61.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Months in Other Cultures for Thais</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>264.00</td>
<td>50.28</td>
<td>46.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAS for Integrating</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>2.11</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAS for Avoiding</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAS for Dominating</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>4.22</td>
<td>2.39</td>
<td>.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAS for Obliging</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>1.44</td>
<td>4.56</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAS for Compromising</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>.71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* The scale ranges from 1 to 5 with 1=Strongly Disagree and 5=Strongly Agree.

Table 4.9: Pearson Correlation Between Length of Exposure to Other Cultures and Perceived Appropriateness of Different Styles of Conflict Management

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Months in Other Cultures for Americans</th>
<th>Months in Other Cultures for Thais</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CAS for Integrating</td>
<td>.410</td>
<td>.017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.157</td>
<td>.482</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAS for Avoiding</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.470</td>
<td>.016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAS for Dominating</td>
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<td>-.091</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.215</td>
<td>.340</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>23</td>
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<tr>
<td>CAS for Obliging</td>
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<td>-.043</td>
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<td></td>
<td>12</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAS for Compromising</td>
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<td>-.194</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>.476</td>
<td>.253</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* The first set of values represents correlation coefficients; the second set of values represents probabilities ($p$); and the third set of values represents valid cases ($N$).
Correlation analysis showed no significant relationships between the length of exposure to other cultures and the way Thai and American participants evaluated effectiveness of conflict management styles. Table 4.10 displays descriptive statistics for the variables in this correlation analysis, and Table 4.11 presents the correlational data.

Table 4.10: Descriptive Statistics for Variables Used in the Correlation Analysis of Length of Exposure to Other Cultures and Perceived Effectiveness for Different Conflict Styles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
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<tr>
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<td>264.00</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>CES for Integrating</td>
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<td>5.00</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>CES for Avoiding</td>
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<td>1.55</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CES for Dominating</td>
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<td>4.18</td>
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<td>.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CES for Obliging</td>
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<td>.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CES for Compromising</td>
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<td>2.09</td>
<td>4.91</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>.53</td>
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*Note.* The scale ranges from 1 to 5 with 1=Strongly Disagree and 5=Strongly Agree.
In sum, the findings partially supported Hypothesis 9. In regard to the preference for styles of conflict management, there were significant relationships between the length of exposure to other cultures and the Thai participants’ preferences for avoiding, obliging, and dominating styles. The longer they resided in other cultures, the more Thais preferred a dominating style of conflict management. On the other hand, the more time they spent in other cultures, the less they preferred avoiding and obliging. No other significant correlation was found, either for Thais or among the American participants. The length of exposure to other cultures did not significantly correlate with the evaluation of conflict management styles (perceived appropriateness and effectiveness), with one exception. There was a positive correlation for the Thais’ exposure to other cultures and ratings of the appropriateness for avoiding styles.

Table 4.11: Pearson Correlation Between Length of Exposure to Other Cultures and Perceived Effectiveness of Different Styles of Conflict Management

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Months in Other Cultures for Americans</th>
<th>Months in Other Cultures for Thais</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* The first set of values represents correlation coefficients; the second set of values represents probabilities (*p*); and the third set of values represents valid cases (*N*).
Chapter 5 presents the results of the qualitative examination and their role in providing answers to the research questions in the study.
Chapter 5

Results of the Qualitative Investigation

In addition to quantitative analysis, this study relied on a qualitative process of topic coding so as to obtain a fuller picture of the ways Thais and Americans in MNCs in the study saw themselves interacting in conflict episodes and whether the other parties’ behavior was effective and appropriate. This technique of systematically exploring the data provided rich information. In addition, the results from this latter part of the study served as a form of triangulation that revealed consistency between the survey results and the interview data. This chapter presents the topic codes discovered in the discourse of the interviews.

The interview protocol and sample of an interview transcript appear in Appendices B and C, respectively. The general characteristics of the participants were described in Chapter 3. The data coding of the interviews followed the procedure described by Morse and Richards (2002) who suggested that topic coding is a very common technique for uncovering patterns of responses and “dimensions” (p. 112) of experience.

Topic coding is used in almost all qualitative research methods. It is necessary in any project where there is emphasis on finding all the data about an aspect of the site or experience studied, or on accurately portraying the distribution of different attitudes, experiences, and so forth. (p. 118)

During the coding process, topics emerged, and then tentative categories were created. They were readjusted to assure that they satisfied Holsti’s (1969) criteria: reflective of the purpose of the study, exhaustive, mutually exclusive, independent, and derived from a single classification system.

The interviewees were designated by numbers (e.g., Interviewee #1) to assure the anonymity. When quoting a statement from an interview, line numbers from the hard copy of the transcript were shown in parentheses. To illustrate, #1 13-15 represented
lines 13 to 15 from Interviewee #1’s interview. When the excerpts involved statements by
the researcher, the lines noted at the beginning were inclusive of the material that
followed the interviewer’s question or comment.

The investigation employed various symbols to indicate different aspects of the
verbal and nonverbal interaction in the interview in the transcript. Pauses and long
pauses were represented by “(pause)” and “(long pause)” respectively. The nonverbal
behavior, such as laughter, was shown as “(laugh)”, and the emphasis words or phrases
were shown in boldface characters (e.g., “this is unacceptable”). When a sound from the
recording was not clearly identifiable, the symbol (unclear) was employed. If the sounds
were identifiable, but not very clear, they were followed by a question mark (?) and
“(unclear)” (e.g., cycopines? unclear). An ellipsis (…) was used to indicate the omission
of words, phrases, or statements. In addition, the interview transcripts were slightly
adjusted in terms of grammatical features, as well as some wordings, for a better
understanding and to protect dignity of the interviewees. The modification was done in
the manner that preserved the original meaning of each phrase and the entire content of
the interviews as much as possible.

The investigation had two parts. The first part involved the topics that emerged
from the interviews conducted with American participants; the second part related to
those of Thai participants. In each part, the results were organized according to the
research questions. To provide general ideas for a better understanding of the conflict
situations in the interviews, the exploration began with the description of the attitude the
participants revealed about conflict and the descriptions of conflict issues they recalled.
After the general descriptions, the order of the investigation presented was guided by the
research questions posted. The topics emerged from the discussion about conflict
management styles (RQ1), the competence of conflict behavior (RQ2), the effects of
national and organizational cultures (RQ3), the effects of the cultures of the conflict
counterparts (RQ4), and the effects of exposure to other cultures (RQ5) were reported
(the effects of gender were not explored in the investigation). Since the participants
offered insight into other factors they believed to affect the way people deal with conflict,
as well as recommendations concerning how to manage conflict with people from
different cultures in MNCs, such information was presented at the end of each major part of the chapter.

Face Negotiation Theory and the individualism-collectivism constructs were the lenses that guided the investigation; however, the topics identified were not only matters of face and individualistic-collectivistic orientations. All the ideas were treated equally. Some quotations contained multiple topics. In those instances, subsequent references to the quotations focused only on the portion that is germane to the topic of interest.

I was also aware of the possible impact of my own cultural background, a Thai female, in gathering the responses of the participants. Some participants might not have been willing to attack or harshly criticize Thais out of worry about offending me. Many participants, nonetheless, did describe some behavior displayed by Thais about which they felt negatively. In addition, it is important to note that I did not use other raters to analyze the data. However, I did do some member-checking by contacting interviewees and asking them to verify the accuracy of my interpretation of their words and experiences.

Perceptions of American Interviewees

Attitudes Toward Conflict

When asked to describe a conflict situation, American participants revealed some common attitudes toward conflict.

Conflict is Pervasive

Some participants viewed conflict as a pervasive phenomenon. They indicated that conflict was a normal phenomenon that frequently occurred when people interacted. Interviewees #7, #21 and #23 stated:
#7 12-13: Yes. Certainly, I think there are certainly conflicts arise on a weekly basis, if not on a daily basis.

#21 19-22: I interact with Thai people all day long, everyday, doing a million different things. It is normal to have disagreement based on my approach to arriving at an opinion, dealing with clients, or some legal issues.

#23 13: Yes. There are probably conflicts everyday.

**Simple Disagreement is not Considered Conflict**

Even though many American interviewees perceived conflict as pervasive, some felt that mere differences in opinion or disagreements in the workplace did not constitute conflict. Three Americans revealed this thought.

Interviewee #7, for example, said:

#7 19-21: Most of the conflict I had has been so minimal that are hardly even consider a conflict, that really (pause), they are just considered professional disagreements. So I don't even look at them as a conflict. That is part of the problem that I don't remember them because it's just too professional, discussing different points of views and so they didn't mean, struck me as conflict.

**Conflict can be Functional or Dysfunctional**

One participant believed that conflict does not necessarily lead to negative outcomes. Interviewee #6 maintained that as long as the conflict parties are professional, conflict can be functional. It could help the parties reach a good business decision. He felt that it was reasonable and legitimate to have a conflict.

#6 19-22: We have differences of opinion when we were interviewing university students to place in a job here. Nothing serious, just differences of opinion which I think was legitimate.

#6 167-176: I think that conflict is ok as long as it maintains a professional level. It is certainly ok to disagree about how to conduct the job or [what is] the best choice in a business decision. I have always been that way. If we want to talk about the decision and come to settle an agreement on how
to proceed, which isn't (pause), I'm not always the one who fights, but the way someone might cross the line and whose behavior (pause), where it become personal, something that insults individual, like saying, “Well you are just stupid,” that will be going too far. But if you are saying that, “I disagree with you because (pause),” that you can (pause).

Conflict Issues

In an organizational setting, conflict can be related to task, as well as personal, issues. The conflicts described did not always fit neatly into these categories. Some conflict involved elements of both, and some were difficult to distinguish. Nonetheless, the decisions were based on whether task or relational issues received more emphasis. Task-related issues refer to activities performed to reach a goal or goals associated with substantive work. Relational issues are those that relate to connections, relationships, and the interpersonal sides of the people involved in a conflict (Frey & Barge, 1997). Among 14 participants, 12 conflict issues recalled were in task-related conflicts; only 3 issues were relationally oriented (one person reported two conflict scenarios).

Task-Related Issues

Among the task-related issues, three major topics emerged: having different opinions about a task, having different approaches to a task, and having miscommunication about a task.

Having Different Opinions about a Task

Several conflicts emerged because differences of opinion about the task. A total of six participants expressed this topic. Interviewee #17 recalled a conflict of opinion concerning whom to recruit for the position at the company.
Actually it’s not (long pause), it was very usual. We were choosing a new hire. And we had (pause), basically, it has been going on (pause). We made the final cut, and she was one of the final two. And there was a disagreement between various people in the committee of 6-8 people.

Interviewee #9 had different ideas of what he considered as success than what his Thai colleague.

When I first got here, there was an individual that (pause) he would do an acid (pause), he would do some type of work in the field. And that would increase production. And a lot of ways, he was sending out an e-mail to everyone stating how successfully it was at that. And I went to him and simply said that, “It's not successful yet. You have just got an initial rate increased on the well but it has not paid out the well. And so you should wait to say it's successful until it is economically paid for the cost associative with doing the job.”

Having Different Approaches to a Task

Two interviewees noted that the conflict was not about the task itself, but rather the approach to accomplishing it. Interviewee #1, for example, recalled a conflict he had with one of his Thai employees about how she did not feel comfortable reporting employees’ violations of company policy. They disagreed about the approach to dealing with employees who violated the rules.

I have [thought] about one of my staff, who is a senior manager in our company. [She] complained that she did not like to write people up for violations of the company’s policy in being late or things like that. And so she presented that to my partner who is another American guy.

Interviewee #26 had a conflict about implementing changes to the business practice.

Well, it’s about (pause), it was business practice that that person was used to doing and part of my project that was working on was to change those practices. Our conflict was [that] he doesn’t want to make any changes.
Having Miscommunication about a Task

Interviewee #13 felt that the conflict he had with the Thai colleague occurred primarily because of miscommunication. There were some communication problems in understanding the importance of fulfilling the work objective. The Thai manager continuously did not meet job objectives and goals.

#13 15-29: Well, I think specific example might be particular manager that work for me and I think the conflict were primarily arose around that particular manager, in my opinion, inability to meet his, agreed to objectives. We do it on an annual basis and [it] seems like, every quarter, when we look at them there seems to be some reasons why those particular objectives or goals weren’t met. … It was just a question of making sure that that individual understood what the objective was. There were some communication problems and the understanding of the importance of fulfilling the objective.

Personal/Relational Issues

Many issues were relational in nature. The topics that emerged concerned differences in opinions and face threats.

Differences in Opinions

For this category, the parties involved in conflicts depicted the different opinions about the relational issue at hand. For example, in the second conflict reported by Interviewee #1, the Thai employees wanted him to introduce them to a high-ranked Thai government official so they could explain the benefit of the religion they strongly believed in to him. Interviewee #1 felt uncomfortable about doing this and rejected the request.

#1 296-275: They came and asked me if I could introduce them to a friend of mine in Thailand, who is a very very senior (pause), the most senior guy in the Ministry of Finance, to explain about the benefit of [name of a religion] to him. And that was a very interesting one, and the conflict
continued on. But I basically told them, “I don't want to,” which was very upsetting to them.

Face Threats

Relational conflict also occurred because of interaction that threatened the loss of face. Two participants reported conflict that revolved around face issues. The conflict reported by Interviewee #8 directly related to this issue.

#8 21-28: She was a good person, and was somebody who had been with [name of the company] for a while. And I hired somebody else to come into a similar position that the person was in, and then later wanted to promote the newer person who came in, who was younger. And the person who was older came in and was extremely upset. And let me know that I couldn't do this. I kind of surprised, but I was not too surprised because I knew that titles and seniority are big things, sometimes (pause), a kind of the face issues

Conflict Styles (RQ1)

This part of the investigation addressed Research Question 1: “What styles of the conflict management do Thais and Americans working in multinational organizations prefer?” Style of conflict management refers to the tendency for a person to use a certain type of conflict behavior repeatedly and across situations (Cupach & Canary, 1997). For this study, each participant was to recall a specific conflict situation and describe her/his own behavior and the behavior of the other party to provide a precise picture of how the participant evaluated differences in conflict behavior. However, some participants who indicated that they could not recall a specific situation at that moment were asked to provide general descriptions of their own conflict behavior, as well as the behavior of their American counterparts in general. Therefore, the descriptions might or might not reflect styles used across situations.

To determine the conflict styles, I focused on the action or behavior reportedly displayed during the conflict episodes. The conflict management style categories were
based on the five (dominating, integrating, compromising, obliging, and avoiding) in ROCI-II (Rahim, 1983) and three additional ones (emotional expression, third-party help, and neglect) proposed by Ting-Toomey et al. (2000). The latter ostensibly captures cross-cultural conflict differences that ROCI-II does not.

**Dominating**

Dominating refers to conflict behavior that reflects the use of one’s power or authority to secure her/his position or achieve a goal, while ignoring the other party’s needs. The following quotation is an example of a dominating style. Two American interviewees reported their own dominating behavior, as well as one of their Thai counterparts. One of the instances of dominating behavior was displayed by Interviewee #8. When one of the staff came in to discuss her disappointment about his decision to promote a younger person who spent less time in the company over her, he indicated that he had the authority to make a decision about a promotion and that he would not change it because of the face issue. However, he was not strongly dominating, since he gave the other party some explanation of his decision.

#8 29-38: And I made it clear that in this the company, we were not looking at that. While I respect that opinion, we're not looking at the seniority or age or time in the position. We are looking at who is going to do the best job. And it is clearly, it's my call to be able to promote somebody who may be younger or perhaps less experienced or less time in (unclear). It was extremely upsetting for this person. It was a deal. And it got worked through. I worked through this and I explained and made it easier for her and other people who are wondering about the situation.

#8 41-47: She was very upset; she was crying and was making it clear that I absolutely couldn't do this. And I am pretty calm to begin with, so I let her know that (pause), ultimately, there is a choice to be made if she is going to give me an ultimatum. And that was in that she could choose to stay and deal with the situation or she can choose to leave because it wasn't (pause), because I wasn't allowed to be dictated to in the situation like this.
**Integrating**

The integrating style is characterized by behavior that aims at examining the issues and exploring the interests of the parties involved to find solutions that are mutually beneficial and satisfying to them. Three American participants reported that they themselves, as well as their conflict counterparts, behaved in ways that could be categorized as exhibiting an integrating conflict management style. Integrating behavior suggests the cooperation of both parties, but Americans tended to imply that they initiated the investigation of the issues more than the Thais did.

Interviewee #1 did not agree with his Thai management staff’s ideas about not writing up the staff violation of policy. However, he initiated the discussion to explore the issue and came up with a creative solution that both parties could endorse. If the results of not reporting the staff’s violation turned out well, his company would benefit; if not, he could employ the alternative approach he preferred. For the management staff person, she would feel that her ideas was accepted and valued. She could also accept the alternative approach if her idea fail to produce a satisfying outcome.

#1 35-44: But then I met with her, and then we talked about it a little bit. And what I said was, “Why don't we just try for one month and you managed the staff the way you think that you can do it. If you could get the results, and may be we can think about it differently. We don't necessarily want to be super tough on people, but if you have a better way (pause).” Now, I cannot say that I completely allowed that because there has been one case during that month period that my partner insisted that we write up on something that they did because there was a loss of money.

#1 60-63: The first thing I did was I just asked, "Please explain to me what that is? What are the problems that you talk to [name of his partner] about? Then let’s listen to what you're arguing on this? What's your idea?"

**Compromising**

The behavior that represents the compromising style involves the willingness of the conflict parties to give up some resources in order to gain some resources in return.
Similar to integrating, this style requires both parties’ cooperation. Two American participants indicated their, as well as their Thai counterparts’, use of a compromising style.

The following conflict scenario reported by Interviewee #26 reflected this sort of give-and-take behavior. Neither party got all s/he wanted. The change had to be made as the American participant wanted, but implementation of the change would depend on the Thai person.

#26 72-92: Well, this is about business practices and how things were being done. His opinion was to introduce huge amount of change, I mean 100% changes, would be ineffective because there would be a lot of people impacted and they would have a difficult time making the change. He was the one that wanted things to stay the same. In my requesting the change, his justification for not changing was the amount of people and the amount of time it would take to make the change. Not to mention the change in practices, it’s the change in thought process, and the change on function; and there are just so many changes. And we are introducing too many too fast too soon. And he is the one with the opinion that we shouldn’t do too many things at once. So we negotiated on the business practices that we would change the pieces that we needed to change for the project. But as far as how they work them into their work flow, they would utilize the old methods and not make use of everything that they could make use of.

**Obliging**

The behavior that signifies an obliging style entails minimizing differences by surrendering to another party’s wishes. Unlike previous categories, this type of conflict behavior was predominantly displayed by the Thais. There were five responses that could be placed in this category. Illustrative is Interviewee #13, who described conflict behavior of Thais people as follows:

#13 126-140: As far as goal achieving goes, if the individual doesn’t believe they can meet the goals, they should never agree to them to begin with. That was one way he should have approached that. Maybe that is a problem. Maybe he was incapable of doing it for whatever reason. He had never done that. That might be somewhat a sign of the Thai thinking. Often times it is Thailand, Indonesia, or the Philippines, or wherever I worked, often times when the boss says this is your goals, you'll say, “Yes,
or yes sir. No problem.” There's no push back and there's no “This goal could not be achieved with the resources I have or something.” That certainly is the way of avoiding conflict. If right there (pause), if someone would have pushed back and say something like, “A serial number is not realistic.” And you don't get that a lot from Thai people. If the boss says, “Jump,” they will ask, “How high?”

Avoiding

The avoiding style encompasses attempts to refrain from direct confrontation about conflict issues. The behavior that indicates this style includes withdrawal from a conflict situation, withholding complaints, and abstaining from open discussion. Similar to the data for an obliging style, none of the American participants indicated using this style; instead, they reported four apparent incidents showing that their Thai counterparts relied on this style of conflict management. Interviewee #23, for instance, pointed out the Thai conflict avoidance and the related concern about face.

#23 67-74: [They should] be more forthright. Saying, “Look we are not going to accept this. This is unacceptable.” They were very Thai in nature. Very avoiding any kind conflict that causes any loss of face they reside, whereas the Taiwanese and the Chinese guys were just, no, no, no (pause). He didn’t seem to care whether the Thai was trying to (pause), [that] kind of screwed the issue a bit. Instead of coming straight out that this is a problem. This is where they [the Thais] were at fault.

When she and her Thai colleague had a conflict, Interviewee #25 recalled that her Thai counterpart did not say anything about it. She realized that the person was upset from his nonverbal behavior.

#25 64-66: No, he [Thai] just gets quiet and shy. His body language was (pause), he was more pulling away, and was quiet, and not says good morning and things he normally does.

Emotional Expression

Emotional expression is characterized by the use of one’s emotion to guide communication in a conflict situation. There was only one instance of such emotional
expression reported by the American participants. This style was displayed by a Thai person, Interviewee #8’s conflict counterpart. This person was crying and showed her disappointment in a very emotional manner. (This excerpt was quoted earlier to describe Interviewee #8’s “dominating behavior.”)

#8 41-42: She was very upset; she was crying and was making it clear that I absolutely couldn't do this.

Third-Party Help

Third-party help involves the use of an outsider to mediate a conflict. Four American participants relied on the third-party help to gather information, as well as to help deal with the conflict directly. The following examples captured this style. Interviewee #17 exemplified the use of a formal third party, an arbitrator, to help manage the unresolved conflict that had been continued for a while.

#17 48-57: Well, we went back and try to arrive at consensus for the next time, but that didn’t work. So then another expat proposed that we would take votes because there was no compromise on that. But we were to a limit. So we took it to the head of the company, basically put it back. And finally it was the head of the group who came and basically said this is the way we were going to do it. And the arbitrators made the choice. There was, in a way, a compromise. We had to make sure that the person we were not hiring, we would support. We actually ended up sponsored them and find them jobs.

Because of the avoidant nature of her Thai counterpart, Interviewee #27 learned to gather information and transmit messages about the conflict she had through the third party. She felt that Thais often discuss issues with their Thai colleagues, instead of discussing them directly with the person they have conflict with.

#27 58-66: Yes, she was supposed to do that. She just didn’t know that. It was part of her contract to help me out. But it was actually (pause), kind of (pause), the whole chemistry of it was very funny. I have to approach someone else to get the message to her. And after that, I keep making reminders after that, “I really appreciate your help. I really appreciate that you are doing this. I know it is an addition to some of your work.” So I just (pause) kind of like almost overkill of just [being nice] to keep her happy.
**Neglect**

Neglect is a passive-aggressive response to avoid direct confrontation and still get indirect reaction from the other party at the same time. This style was mainly displayed by Thais. Two accounts by Interviewee #27 reflected this topic:

#27 32-40: No, you don’t really get to talk directly here. I didn’t even know that she was really questioning her role and all this until I heard this from other people because on the surface, she was really smiley and kind of helping me out. But I didn’t realize, in a little way, I guess she wasn’t really helping me out. I mean things I thought she was doing, she wasn’t doing because she was very aggravated about it. But also she was telling people that she didn’t think this was right, and she shouldn’t be doing it.

#27 46-49: No. I just thought it was her performance was not up to my expectation. But I didn’t realize that intentionally she was not completing things I had asked her to do because she was (pause).

**Perceived Competence (RQ2)**

One of the main purposes of this study was to investigate the perception of competence as related to conflict management styles. Research Question 2 asked: “What types of communicative behavior do Thais and Americans working in multinational organizations perceive as effective/ineffective and appropriate/inappropriate in conflict situations?” The pertinent investigation focused on situational appropriateness, relational appropriateness, and effectiveness. After describing the conflict behavior the other party displayed in the reported conflict situation, participants evaluated the behavior. They were to provide their opinions concerning what the other parties should have behaved and the standard used in assessing the behavior. The responses for each competence category (situational appropriateness, relational appropriateness, and effectiveness) were combined to indicate the types of behavior that the participants perceived as appropriate or effective.
Perceived Situational Appropriateness

The behavior that the American participants viewed as appropriate according to the situation reflected task and relational topics.

Task-Related Topics

The following topics were identified for situationally appropriate behavior that contributes to the accomplishment of substantive outcomes.

Expressing Thoughts and Ideas Openly

The most prevalent behavior that the American participants viewed as appropriate was direct verbal expressiveness. American participants tended to value those who were straightforward, forthright, outspoken, open, and honest in expressing their thoughts and ideas in conflict situations. Seven participants reported a positive attitude in terms of the appropriateness of those who dealt with conflict in such manner. Two examples of responses reflecting the topic are as follows:

Interviewee #6 stated that his conflict counterpart behaved appropriately according to the situation as follows:

#6 114-115: He expressed his thoughts. He shared his opinion and listened to the opinions of others.

Interviewee #27 rated her counterpart as inappropriate because she was not being forthright.

#27 100-111: In my opinion, No. I think it is definitely cultural. I mean if I were Thai, I probably would think it was appropriate because it was less (pause) nonconfrontational. But to me, as an American, I would have expected her to say something. … As I said, I think she should have told me, or at least tell someone, if she didn’t want to tell me directly tell someone or ask someone to ask me directly instead of going behind my back and talk more about it and complaining.
Accepting Reasonable Ideas

American participants evaluated the ability to listen, understand, and accept reasonable ideas as situationally appropriate behavior. Four participants reported their thoughts in a way that reflected this topic. Examples of what one said follows:

Interview #5 commented about his Thai’s colleagues’ behavior and thought that the person acted quite appropriately, despite his expression of anger, because after they discussed the situation, he listened and conform to the reasonable explanation.

#5 32-39: And I said "Look, when you changed your mind about [name of a project] that you didn't like a couple of weeks ago, I sat down and I talked about why, and tried to come up with a situation that made you feel more comfortable. Why can't you do this for me? I am clearly not comfortable with this anymore. And I mean if we have a problem, we can work it out.” He said, “No no, it's not a problem. It is ok, it's is ok.” And that's the end of the conflict.

#5 119-122: Again, my first reaction was I didn't understand why he did this [being angry and showed his anger nonverbally]. So I guess he should have behaved differently (pause). And I was the one pointed out, and he could handle it. Somebody telling him, “Just a minute,” and he did it. But I think that is about as good as you probably can get [in this stressful situation].

Relying on Linear Logic

Relying on linear logic refers to a thought process that entails inductive or deductive reasoning. Two participants based their judgment of situational appropriateness on such reasoning. As an illustration, Interviewee #20 insisted that to be considered more appropriate in the situation, the Thai person should provide a step-by-step logical explanation to why the productivity rate set forth was not possible.

#20 148-155: I think he could have acknowledged what the actual (cycopines? unclear) are in that particular point in time. And then he could have laid out an expectation whereby they had an opportunity to improve over time. The case that he made was quite insistent that there should be this X level productivity right now. And in speaking to it, he
didn't really have building a learning curb for them to come up to productivity rate. So he came across as unreasonable.

_Being Prepared_

Being prepared reflects concerns about the organization of facts, evidence, and information needed for the discussion. In the study, this included the analysis of the situation and audience before entering into a conflict situation. One participant stated that to be appropriate according to the work related situation, it is important to be well-prepared with enough facts and evidence.

#23 122-123: No, because she wasn’t appropriate. She hasn’t been prepared with enough parts and facts.

#23 200-207: Being prepared, knowing your facts, perhaps being prepared before you go into a meeting where you know that there is going to be a conflict (pause). In my industry, things like the vendor’s name, the delivery dates, materials, names of people involved, surrounding yourself with the appropriate people, you need to pull in people who perhaps (pause), maybe you don’t bring in someone because of their titles. You bring in someone who can give you the correct information in timely manner.

_Being Outcome-Focused_

This topic was evident when the participants identified their concern for the end results of the conflict. One participant showed her concern about how conflict avoidance can bring overall progress to a halt.

#25 179-183: I don’t think it is appropriate because it shuts down communication. It stops communication. And when that happens, then progress is not continued. You have to leave him alone. You can’t talk to him anymore. And let him work out his feelings in stead of (pause), work kind of shut down.
Separating Personal Issues from Work

One of the standards for assessing situational appropriateness is the ability to separate personal issues from work. This topic suggests that when dealing with conflict at work, the argument should be directed to the task. The parties involved should not take the issue personally. One participant addressed this matter. Interviewee #25 noted that people should not mix personal issues with work:

#25 281-285: I feel like I am repeating myself (pause). Just keep on communicating. Don’t hold personal feelings (pause), work-oriented about work against someone you have conflict with. Just keep your communication going and get your point across. I think that’s it (pause) keep talking.

Relational Topics

Relational topics revolve around relationships, connections, and face issues.

Displaying Emotion

Five participants reported paying attention to the way people express their emotions in a conflict in determining appropriateness. The first group (three people) of participants felt that the other party should not have displayed emotion in the workplace. As one said:

#25 186-191: I think he should have (pause), I don’t think he should have gotten angry. I think he should have talked about what he didn’t understand or (pause). But I think he got frustrated because he doesn’t think he has good English. So it’s hard for him to talk because he doesn’t think he can explain himself well either. So there were two things going on.

The second group (two people) felt that emotional expression was acceptable and considered appropriate when it was not harmful to other people or directed at the task not at other people. Interviewee #5 evaluated his partner as appropriate even with the
expression of emotion. He felt that an emotional reaction to stress was natural and acceptable as long as it did not affect other people and the person knew how to deal with it.

#5 100-109: Absolutely, because he responded to stress. I do it too, and I expect my colleagues and partners to allow for it too. Under stress, sometimes you snap. For me, it is not that people sometimes lose control of their emotion; it's more of how often they do it and how they deal with it. If somebody continuously behaving badly, so it affects everybody, and they need to be told not to do that. But if somebody snaps once in a while, and say something that is a little bit inappropriate (pause). I think that it is unrealistic to expect that not to happen in the workplace like this.

Having a Personal Relationships

The personal relationship between the conflict parties entered into the evaluation of appropriateness. In a typical situation, some forms of emotional behavior would not be considered appropriate; however, because of the nature of the relationship, such behavior was considered acceptable and sometimes appropriate.

Interviewee #8 articulated that extreme emotional expression was considered acceptable to him because he had known the person for a long time and knew what was going on in her life at that time.

#8 143-151: I know that this one particular person is very emotional. But I have dealt with her on some personal issues that she would come to eat and talk to me about, I mean the one who was very upset about getting bypass or whatever. And so I knew that it was a little bit of history with the emotion and it was ok that I could listen to and would be able to talk through these things. So I think when she brought it up to me she was very emotional but I think she was looking for me to explain it.

#8 163-167: I think so [appropriate] because we were close, we work really closely proximity-wise, and you know, I had the other communication with these people. It was (pause). In the relationship that we had, not totally appropriate, but it wasn’t something that shocks me.
Being Concerned about Face

This topic is related directly to face issues. An American participant declared that too much concern about face was not appropriate in a work-related situation in which he was involved. Interviewee #20 referred to the situation in which the Thai counterpart worried so much about his projected self-identity or face that it affected the situation at hand.

#20 141-145: In the conflict situation? I think his [Thai] pride maybe got the better of him. What happened was that in that meeting, both sides were kind of stood off. He wouldn’t budge on his position the factory wouldn’t budge on their position. It was sort of degraded to where it almost got personal.

Being Respectful

Respectfulness involves the acceptance and acknowledgement of the importance of a person’s belief or customs and avoidance of behavior that would offend another person. One American participant referred to this idea. Interviewee #27 reported that appropriateness, to her, involved respect for others’ ideas.

#27 209-210: Umm (pause). I don’t know (pause). I think they should, I don’t know (pause) respect where each other is coming from and what their effective are.

Following the Chain of Command

One of the factors that affected the evaluation of situational appropriateness was the acknowledgement of the chain of command. Two participants raised the idea that respecting and following the organizational hierarchy was appropriate behavior. Interviewee #27, for instance, contended that when interacting in a conflict situation, one should be aware of the chain of command and behave accordingly.

#27 210-223: And the appropriate in management type of position (pause). If you are having a conflict with a superior person and based on their
position that they occupied, whether they are your boss or something, there is some acknowledgement of that. You can’t just ignore that in a conflict, two people are just two people, that is unrealistic. In American culture, there is still an appropriate level of superiority or consciousness of your position. If you ignore that, you might conserve even more conflict. I don’t believe in someone making someone inferior or anything, but I am not trying to say that superior is definitely always right. I just think that, in handling something that does, your appropriate position does, play role and you have to be conscious of that.

**Perceived Relational Appropriateness**

From indications of the participants’ thoughts about appropriate behavior displayed toward people in different relationships, the following categories of topics and sub-topics emerged.

**Task-Related Topics**

Some recurring topics were associated with the primary goal of accomplishing tasks.

**Expressing Thoughts and Ideas Openly**

Similar to judgment of situational appropriateness, six American participants indicated that being straightforward and directly expressing one’s ideas was appropriate behavior when interacting with people in different relationships. Following is an example among these comments.

Interview #25 asserted that regardless of relationship, the expression of ideas would be highly valued.

#25 204-212: I guess I think appropriate behavior, in this case when you have different opinions, is the same whether the person is over or under you. I think you need to explain your point of view. If the person is over
you and they decide your point of view is not a good one, you do what they say. But if they are under you, then they would do what you say. But at least, instead of getting angry, no matter if the person is under or over you, you need to explain your position, you ideas.

Accepting Reasonable Ideas

Three American participants pointed out that the understanding, listening, and the willingness to accept reasonable ideas, as well as understanding the situation at hand, were important factors that contribute to being relational appropriate.

Interviewee #8, for example, felt that expressing thoughts and feeling of disappointment was suitable as long as the person understood and was ready to accept reasonable arguments.

#8 170-175: If you are looking at it like what would have been the best way for her to communicate the same thing, [it] was to come in a little bit more under control and also realize that by her coming in and say that, “This can't happen,” would definitely not changing anything. Because that wasn't (pause), she should have realized that that wasn't an alternative.

Being Prepared

Being prepared and planning ahead before going into a situation or meeting in which conflict is likely to occur were regarded as important aspects of relational appropriateness. Two American participants in the study noted that it was important to know with whom one was dealing and who should have been included in the situation and to plan strategies accordingly.

#8 190-196: You have to know what you exit strategy is, so to speak (pause). If the boss is not going to change his stance and what is your option? You don't want to put yourself up against the wall and say, “This has to change.” And so if it doesn't, what you are going to do. Luckily, we were able to talk through it. And it was clear that this is not going to change; and you have to deal with it.

#23 218-230: I try not to (separate? unclear) between the lower and a higher level. It depends on if they are as part of the decision making, or if
they are there as window dressing. A lot of times in Asia, I see people bring in people because of the title, but that person doesn’t really bring anything into the table. A lot of times, in the States, there will be only people in the meeting who are there to make decisions. They might be an administrative assistant who has the facts. But in Asia, you will bring in a managing director, or Vice President, or something like that. And they don’t have a fact. Things just keep on going, and you push off, and we will meet in 3 hours. We are meeting a couple of days. I believe working with Thais, if they know my expectations, they should be prepared.

**Being Outcome-Focused**

Not only was the behavior during the conflict important, but making sure that the performance led to a resolution or prevention of further conflict was of great concern to some respondents. Interviewee #13 observed that appropriate behavior should encompass such qualities as understanding of each other’s positions, following through in an agreement, and performing well so further conflict would not emerge.

#13 150-154: What I would expect is that the behavior should be to come up with a consensus on what caused the conflict to make sure that both parties are very clear as to their positions. And then when it is said and done, the conflict doesn't arise again because of the poor performance.

**Separating Personal Issues from Work**

The following two American participants felt that once conflict arises, it is crucial that the conflict parties do not take it personally. Keeping the work flowing and moving on to the next task without holding onto the previous conflict, they felt, relationally appropriate. (The statement from Interviewee #25 below reflected the topic of “separate personal issues from work” in situational appropriateness as well.)

#17 121-125: Well, he is a co-worker, and he behaved professionally. I know if I found a problem, he would be willing to help. Likewise, if he has a problem, I feel (compelled? Unclear). I have a lot of respect for him.

#17 128-129: Yes, it was on a professional level. In my opinion, it was not personal. But you have to ask him if he took it personal.
Relational Topics

**Displaying Emotion**

In a work-related environment, some respondents viewed controlling of emotion as an important factor that determines the level of relational appropriateness. Three participants presented their thoughts about this issue. They considered displaying emotion to be relationally inappropriate, unlike situational appropriateness, for which some emotional displays were acceptable in certain situations.

Although he was not surprised by the expression of the Thai counterpart’s emotion, Interviewee #20 evaluated the excessive emotional display as unprofessional and low in relational appropriateness. He understood such displays, but was not accepting of them.

#20 169-172: I guess I wasn't really all that surprised by his behavior and how he was put on the defensive by the factory. So I didn't really feel the factory behaved appropriately. Therefore, I was not surprised. His [professionalism] deteriorated along with that.

When asked about what behavior was considered appropriate when dealing with people in different relationships, Interviewee #26 simply stated two main qualities.

#26 279: Professional, nonemotional behavior.

**Having Close Personal Relationships**

The nature of the relationship between the conflict parties influenced evaluations of relational appropriateness. Two participants made comments relating to this topic.
Certain behavior might not be viewed as appropriate when displayed with some other colleagues, but when displayed among people who have been working together for a certain amount of time, the behavior was acceptable. (The latter passage was quoted to explain the topic “having a personal relationship” in the judgment of situational appropriateness.) For relational appropriateness, Interviewees #8 elaborated this issue:

#8 154-157: In a typical situation, if it was a very clear black and white boss and subordinate situation, it would have been uncomfortable because she was crying and not what I would call a real typical professional approach to it.

#8 163-167: I think so [she was appropriate according to the relationship] because we were close we worked really closely proximity-wise and you know I had the other communication with these people. It was (pause), in the relationship that we had, not totally appropriate, but it wasn’t something that shocks me.

On the other hand, Interviewee #13 was concerned about the effects of personal relationship in the workplace. He believed that one should balance the level of closeness in the business relationship. Having a close relationship could adversely affect the achievement of business goals.

#13 171-175: Yes. One of my self-observed weaknesses as a manager is that sometimes I get too close to people from the personal standpoint. There is, unfortunately, a certain line, if you cross it, often time it gets in the way of getting business done.

Following the Chain of Command

Following and recognizing the chain of command was apparently crucial in some respondents’ minds for positive assessments of relational appropriateness. Five participants mentioned this topic. Even though individualistic cultures tend to be low in the power-distance value dimension, Interviewee #26 felt that people in lower positions usually listen; however, they still should speak up if they are the one who initiate the matter in dispute.

#26 254-265: Coming from Westernize background, a lot of (pause), when you are in a (pause), we are talking about the professional situation
(pause). In a workplace when you are dealing with conflict, and there is somebody in a lower position, they usually listen; don’t talk, unless they are asked for their opinions, or [when] they ask questions. It depends on what the conflict is, and where it starts. If it starts from the bottom, from the trainee people in the lower level, they have the freedom to speak up.

To communicate appropriately in terms of relationship, Interviewee #21 suggested framing the conversation into question format. He also indicated that he tended to be more straightforward with peers in the same level than with superiors.

#21 258-266: If they [lower-ranked individuals] are bringing a conflict to you, it is appropriate to cast it in the form of question. Actually, I would do the same thing to a person lower or higher.

Researcher: How about the same level?

#21: Maybe the same way, well, or maybe a bit more direct and open for the same level. I think [I] tend to disagree more quickly openly to the people I feel in the same level. I would feel like they are my contemporary, my friend, maybe, so you can speak to them that way.

Listening and Being Sensitive

To be judged relationally appropriate, the ability to listen and being sensitive were crucial in the view of one participant who forcefully expressed that both parties, especially the superior, should be sensitive and listen to one another:

#27 228-244: Well, I think that there is listening that has to be done. But also it’s not making a scene in front of other people. Make it very isolated, making sure that you are taking the time to be more attentive to the sensitivity of that person. You know that you are the boss. You are coming from the higher position. You know that you have some kind of superior role over this person. By going out and making a scene or making it known or reinforcing that than it just make the conflict even more (pause). You know that you are coming from that position so you can be a little bit more sensitive and listen. Not reinforce that, “I am right.” You should go in there knowing that the other person is going up to you because you are a superior. And the other way the other person should not step over the bound and yell at the superior person. The approach you take depends up on where you are coming from.
Involving only Relevant People

To be relationally appropriate, when dealing with people at the same level in an organization, Interviewee #27 suggested that the conflict parties should treat each other as equal and try not to bring other unrelated people into their conflicts.

#27 246-254: Just keep it between you all. If you are the same level, you have the superiors and the inferiors that can probably be involved in the conflict. So I think it is important that you deal with the person as an equal and have a one-on-one thing, and make sure that you don’t bring other people into this, or [do not] do anything that is going to affect the relationship with other people like tell your boss that this person is doing something wrong instead of telling that person yourself.

Perceived Effectiveness

For the present study, perceived effectiveness referred to the extent to which the participants felt that their conflict counterparts reached the goal or objective they had in mind. The American participants introduced two general topics and a variety of sub-topics in evaluating the effectiveness of their conflict counterparts.

Task-Related Topics

Expressing Thoughts and Ideas Openly

Expressing thoughts and ideas and being straightforward in the conflict situation was the most prevalent value among American participants. Eight based their assessment of effectiveness on being open, honest, outspoken, and forthright. Even when some of the intended goals were not reached, five American participants contended that their conflict counterparts were effective by virtue of creating the opportunity to voice their opinions and feelings. Some examples of their remarks are shown below:
#1 122-125: Yes, I think she felt like she reached her goal. I think she felt like she reached her goal because she just sat down and explained it. Our meeting wouldn't have happened if I didn't say, “Talk to me about it.” I think she felt happy.

#17 62-64: Well, he didn’t reach his goal because it wasn’t the person he chose got hired. But he was effective in that he got his point across. And it was very obvious to us that he wanted it.

Plainly speaking their minds and dealing with conflict directly, and not necessarily reaching self-explanatory or concrete goals, in the view of some, is effective. Five participants (including Interviewees #1 and #17 above) made comments reflecting this line of thought. Following are two examples.

#25 248-252: Saying what their opinions are (pause). That is effective to me if a person says that they don’t think my idea is good because this reason, this reason, and this reason or “I have a different idea, and this is what it is,” just a normal respond, not necessary angry. Even if they get angry or frustrated, that is OK as long as they don’t decide not to talk to you for 2 days. It’s OK to be a little forceful as long as [they are not too emotional].

Interviewee #17 felt that his conflict counterpart was effective, but being more forthright and outspoken would make him even more effective.

#17 77-83: This is probably a (intractable of a? unclear) situation, the truth is (pause), well because we have to set it up one way or the other. From his position (pause), I really think he was really effective, I think he could have putting things forward (pause). It may have had more, a little more, influence. He should have volunteered to be the one who talks to the management in the next level. I think he was pretty effective.

Accepting Reasonable Ideas

Listening, understanding the conflict situation, and accepting reasonable arguments were qualities that, for some, contributed to perceptions of effectiveness. Four participants noted that not holding onto a position and being open-minded were part of their standards for judging effectiveness. The following two comments are illustrative.
#9 91-93: Yes, I think he was effective in the fact that, one, he listened. He was receptive to change because usually a lot of conflict involved people not willing to make a change.

#26 163-169: [Effectiveness depends on] whether or not they listen to the other side of the conflict. Whether or not they are well-informed in their opinion of the conflict or the opinion of the situation. Whether or not they have supporting material. Whether it’s facts, history, or precedents vs. reacting emotionally and saying, “No, this is how I want it. That’s it.” That tends to tell you how effective people are.

*Relying on Linear Logic*

Another behavior some viewed as effective in dealing with conflict was the use of deductive or inductive reasoning in analyzing a conflict situation. Two American participants (Interviewees #1 and #21) discussed this topic. Interviewee #1, for example, maintained that:

#1 192-195: For American culture our goal is to (pause). My goal is to think about something through, analyzed it (pause), decide what is the right way, (unclear) how to do it, and do it. And get it done. And convince someone and something like that. So from that perspective, she did that.

*Being Prepared*

Interviewees #22 and #26 attached importance to preparation with facts and information before entering into a potential conflict situation. Understanding the situation, as well as good preparation, reportedly would contribute to even more effective outcomes. Interviewee #22 believed that with a better preparation in respect to facts, other important information, and conflict strategy before going into the conflict situation, his Thai counterpart would be more effective.

#22 81-87: To be more effective in that situation, they should have, instead of acted and requested, they should have their decision making process set engaged in a different way. Basically say, “This is what happens, and you are at fault. And you need to recompensate us for this
many pairs.” Because they didn’t do it upfront, when we tried to do that down the line, it was too late. We lost the competitive advantage.

*Being Outcome-Focused*

Interviewee #9 noted that he primarily focused on the outcome of the conflict. A person can be quiet, but at the end, the behavior should lead to acceptable outcome. He emphasized the value of sharing knowledge:

#9 371-377: I evaluate people based on the results. I am very results oriented. And results encompass a lot of things. Results are not “You got your work done,” but there is the behavior component to it. And the behavior component it's more about sharing and leveraging knowledge in organization. So you can be very quiet, but I would penalize you if you are quiet and do your work, but you never share your work with your colleagues.

*Reaching Intended Goals*

Consistent with the definition of effectiveness, seven American participants rated the effectiveness of the other party on the basis of whether s/he reached a concrete goal. According to Interviewee #7:

#7 104-114: Yes, generally speaking, yes [the Thai counterpart was effective]. We have a very strict goal for these individuals anyway. They basically are rated, and the numbers of iterations it takes to get the data to me correctly is directly reported to their company. So they have a specific goal in mind. So they understand that if there is a problem, and we need to change it, that counts as one iteration. And that is going to be counted as a problem. So that is why they try very hard to get it right the first time. But if there is the iteration necessary they are not shy about that. They understand that it has to be done. And they usually get right to it.

For Interviewee #26, the counterpart did not reach his goal because he did not have the authority to make a decision. Moreover, the nature of the conflict did not provide him an opportunity to do what he wanted, which was prevented making a change that needed to be implemented. Even though the inability to reach the goal was not
solely attributable to the person, the fact that he was not able to reach his goal made him look ineffective in the interviewee’s opinion.

#26 97-115: I would say no [not effective] (pause) because his opinion was to stay the same, but we ended up making change. Well, it wasn’t a matter of being a yes person. He was patient; he listened. He understood. He escalated it to his superior and laid it out. But he couldn’t make the decision himself. He didn’t feel as though he was able to say, “OK, we will make these changes and let the appropriate people know what changes needed to be made.” … It just wasn’t possible. His opinion was there would be no change. And they just bought and paid, and my job was to make changes. Just not possible to keep it the same unless they just want to waste all that time, all that money, and all the effort.

Interviewee #27 also opined that, if the conflict went on without any evident solution at the end, one would be considered ineffective.

#27 78-80: In this conflict? No [not effective], because it went on for too long without reaching a resolution. Without even discussing what was the problem.

Reaching Mutually Satisfactorily Solutions

Merely the ability to come up with a solution or the fact that one party reached her/his goals in a conflict was not sufficient for some participants to judge a counterpart as effective. Five participants asserted that the end results should satisfy all parties if one is to be considered effective. The response from Interviewees #21 provides a vivid example of this idea:

#21 91-104: Sometimes yes [when a person internalize conflict by saying “Yes” and do something else, the person can reach his goal or being considered effective]. Other times, I didn’t really get the answer. But in context of day to day life in Thailand, I think that approach can be effective because everybody is operating under the same rule. But when you are dealing with the people from different backgrounds, it may not be as effective. I would say no because I think, judging from team interaction with Thai lawyers and the clients, for international clients, using those kind of approaches with international clients doesn’t satisfy them. So I don’t know if the Thai lawyer’ goal is not to be bothered with something. So I think about it as little as possible, maybe he achieves that goal, but
the mutual goal of giving the client what they want is not always achieved because if that client is upset and obviously you haven’t reach the goals.

*Having the Ability to Make Decisions*

The inability to make decisions was in the view of Interviewee #26 evidence of ineffectiveness. Because her colleague’s could not make a decision, she would bypass him and take the matter to the person who had the authority to deal with the issue.

#26 152-158: Because he is not effective. He wasn’t able to make the decision. I now know, I actually preanticipate having to escalate decision making. So I explain things to him, but then I take it to his boss to make the decision.

*Managing Conflict in a Timely Manner*

Other than reaching the intended resolution, Interviewee #27 also took into consideration the time one spent in resolving conflict issues. Effective behavior, to her, was evident when the other party reached her/his goal in a timely manner.

#27 178-189: That it gets resolved and both people get to express their sides of the argument or their impressions. If one person constantly is overwhelming the situation and that is not very effective. They cannot see the other person’s side. The thing would be timeliness. That is the most important, is that not to let the conflict goes on for a long time. I tend to think that is cultural as well, but I don’t have patience for letting the conflict go on for a long time. I want a resolution quickly. Try to resolve it and talk it out quickly. And make sure they listen as well. That is the most effective. Something goes on for a long time that is obviously ineffective.

*Having the Ability to Fulfill Task Requirements*

The final task-related category for perceived effectiveness involves having the ability to fulfill conflict management requirements, or what Interviewee #17 referred to as being competent. Interviewee #17 described his effectiveness criteria as follows:
#17 143-144: Whether you are honest, fair, treat other with respect. Whether you are competent at what you do.

Relational Topics

_Displaying Emotion_

Maintaining composure and controlling displays of emotion were essential elements of effective conflict behavior in the mind of some. Three participants elaborated on this topic. Interviewee #25, for example, said:

#25 254-259: I think the standard is do they continue to communicate with you. Do they keep the communication going in a non (pause) um (pause) non (pause). I don’t want to use the word threatening (pause) in the normal (pause), non-angry, not heavy emotional way. They can have some emotion (pause). I hate to use the word reasonable, but I guess.

_Being Concerned about Face_

This topic reflected both self-face and other-face concerns. Three American participants reported that the Thais’ extensive concern about face issue reduced their effectiveness in the conflict situations of interest. The conflict counterpart of Interviewee #23 displayed other-face concerns. The Thai person did not want to use strong words in e-mails and tried to avoid threatening the face of the other party. Interviewee #23 found this to be ineffective when used with people who were more direct and aggressive. (The latter quotation was presented earlier to reflect “avoiding conflict style.”)

#23 62-64: No. They weren’t that effective because they went about it without enough strength behind their e-mails, strength in conversation (pause).

#23 67-70: Be more forthright, saying, “Look we are not going to accept this. This is unacceptable.” They were very Thai in nature. Very avoiding any kind conflict that causes any loss of face they reside.
Although Interviewee #7 felt that the contractor with whom he experienced conflict was somewhat effective, he did not think that the contractor’s concern about being perceived as not having enough knowledge was good. The contractor’s “nervousness” may have stemmed from a concern about “losing face.”

#7 140-149: The contractors are even more shy to come to you because they are working from the outside. And sometimes didn't want it to be the sign of weakness and this is nothing to do with nationality. This is anybody who is a contractor is a little nervous about showing a lack of knowledge on the subject or something. But we work really hard here to make sure everybody, contractors or employees, to know that there is an open door policy. Come ask. And to try to build that, we try to include these people in social activities.

**Being Respectful**

Interviewee #17 also mentioned being respectful as one of the standards he used to gauge effectiveness. (The following quotation also reflected the topics “having the ability to fulfill task requirements.”)

#17 143-144: Whether you are honest, fair, treat other with respect. Whether you are competent at what you do.

**Following the Chain of Command**

Two American participants reportedly believed that, to be effective, hierarchical order should be observed. Interviewee #1 expressed the idea that subordinates should express their opinions, but in the end, one should follow the final decision determined by the superior.

#1 144-146: I see it was OK. What she did was explaining what she didn't agree with and why and then left it to me to advise her whatever, what to do.
Achieving Positive Relational Outcomes

Interviewee #7 judged effectiveness or whether the other party was satisfied with the resolution by the reaction following the conflict. If the relationship afterward appeared to be positive, and the conversation tended to be open and casual, he would feel that the other party was pleased with the outcome and reached her/his goals.

#7 117-128: Yes, I think so [the other party was effective]. I believe so. Because I tend to judge the success of some of those negotiations by later conversations that might not have anything to do with that subject. But I can tell that there is still some problem or something that is not resolved. Generally, I can sense from the casual conversation that they are not quite happy about something and maybe we can pursue it again. But overall when I go back and discuss something later, they are generally very open and good conversations still. So I know the problem still not lying with them. They seem like they are not quiet, they are not shy, and they are quite open in discussing things to me so I feel that they are happy with the results.

Meeting the Other Party’s Expectations

One way to increase the assessment of effectiveness, Interviewee #21 suggested, was to understand and react in the manner that corresponding to the communication style the other party uses and expects.

#21 107-118: I think it is just realizing the question of what the expectation of the other persons are. If they realize the other person expects to approach a problem or an issue or some kind of legal work from a particular position, like a Western lawyer ways deal, which probably a more confrontational, more aggressive. If you realize if the client, for example, expects people who work with him to operate that way so you can gain or gauge or change the way you act toward the particular person, or make sure it was an appropriate communication. So it’s a question of you making sure that you understand the other person’s means of communication and try to address them in that same level.
Being Fair

Interviewees #17 and #23 felt that being fair was one of the criteria used to gauge effectiveness. (The quotation from Interviewee #17 was also employed earlier as examples for “having the ability to fulfill task requirements” and “being respectful.”)

#17 143-144: Whether you are honest, fair, treat other with respect. Whether you are competent at what you do.

#23 210-211: I am not sure. You need to be fair. You need to look at both sides of the conflict if you don’t you will never be successful.

The Effects of the Perception of Competence on Relationships

To help determine how the evaluation of competence affects a relationship following a conflict situation, the participants described their feelings toward their relationships with their conflict counterparts. Focus was on whether it was more positive, unchanged, or more negative following the conflict.

More Positive Relationships

Some conflict interactions contributed to positive relationships. The American participants believed that such positive outcomes were the result of different factors.

Being Listened to and Understood

This topic reflected the positive feeling emerging from the perception of being taken seriously. Two American participants thought their relationships were more positive after the conflict because either the participants or the other party felt listened to and being understood. Both of them evaluated the other party as effective and appropriate.
Interviewee #1 responded that the other party should feel better about the relationship because he listened and implemented the alternative that she proposed. He evaluated her as effective and appropriate (both situationally and relationally) because she expressed her ideas, explained the basis of her opinion, and followed the superior’s advice at the same time.

#1 173-177: It really impacted our relationship. The first thing, it should make her feel like we were trying to listening to her. That should make her feel better. And she would also probably wonder if I would do what I've said, which is leaving her alone for months.

Interviewee #6 also had a positive feeling about the relationship after the conflict. He evaluated his Thai counterpart as effective and appropriate. He noted that the fact that this Thai partner expressed his thoughts and listened to his opinions contributed to a good working relationship.

#6 128-129: I felt good about it. I think it reinforced my opinion that we have a good working relationship.

Gaining Greater Understanding of the Person and Issue

This category focused on how the participants described their relationships as better after a conflict because the discussion made them more understanding of the issues, as well as their counterparts. Five American participants mentioned this topic. Among them, three participants evaluated their counterpart as both appropriate and effective, and two of them rated the counterpart as neither effective nor appropriate. However, the final outcomes of the relationships were all positive allegedly because of the better understanding resulting from the discussion.

Interviewee #7 considered his Thai counterpart to be effective because he reached the concrete goals the company set. He also felt that the Thai counterpart was appropriate in his communicative behavior, but should be more forthcoming. The relationship after the conflict was the same or positively better since they both had learned more about each other and the conflict after the discussion.
Fine. There was no change. It was generally a good relationship already. And I haven't found that it is getting worse in any case. Usually, the relationship only gets better after a discussion like that.

Researcher: Why do you think the relationship was better?

Because we were communicating more. We were talking about it, and they've learned something, and I have learned something, so we both go away with a greater knowledge of a problem.

Because of the lack of strength in the arguments and a tendency toward avoidance, Interviewee #23 rated the conflict counterpart as ineffective. Interviewee #23 also believed that not being forthright and not having enough facts made his Thai counterpart’s behavior less appropriate, both in terms of the situational and relational dimensions. However, he felt that the relationship was better after the conflict, in that they both had a better understanding of the root of the problem and were able to work jointly to solve it.

The relationship probably improved really because in this case, I brought up the subject and initiated the conflict, and then we join teams and present the united front toward the vendor who was really the root of all the problems.

Unchanged Relationships

Three American participants indicated that their relationships with their counterparts remained the same after the conflict. Some of their reasons are embodied in the topics discussed below.

Gaining Greater Understanding of the Person and Issue

Interviewee #17 felt that his counterpart was effective. Although he did not reach his intended goal, he had an opportunity to express his opinions. The counterpart was seen as appropriate because he showed his strong passion toward the topic, and he did so in a professional manner. The conflict did not have an impact on the relationship because
he felt that it gave him more understanding about this person and his approach to work.

17:132-135: I think I gained a bit more understanding about how he worked, his (pause), how he thinks as an individual.

Researcher: Was the relationship better, the same, or worse?

17: It was the same.

Having a Personal Relationship

One participant insisted that the conflict did not affect the relationship mainly because of the nature of it. Interviewee #8 observed that his Thai counterpart was effective, in that she partially reached her goal, which was letting him know how she felt about his decision to promote her younger colleague. He found her behavior appropriate because of the close interpersonal relationship they have. The relationship after the conflict remained the same; there were no hard feelings because the respondent knew her and what other problem she had at that particular time, as well as the fact that she accepted and understood the situation.

8 206-219: I think when we talked through it, I kind of know what I was dealing with, and who I was dealing with. And she was not somebody that I want to lose, and I know she has a lot of issues going on at the same time too. I didn't over think about it as long as she was accepting of the situation and she kind of ultimately understood it. And it was not something that I was going to hold against her. Maybe if it was somebody that I didn't know as well, it, may be, would have been a difference story.

Researcher: So because you know her and you kind of want to keep her so, afterwards, everything is kind of the same after you have explained it to her. No hard feelings.

8: Yes, right. And we talked. No hard feelings. I still talk to her. She worked with another company somewhat related to our business so we still have the relationship.
Putting More Effort into the Interaction

This topic surfaced in the report of a relationship that did not change; however, the conflict reportedly led to a modification of the person’s behavior to be more cautious in dealing with further conflict that might occur. Interviewee #21 noted that his Thai counterpart was not effective, given that his behavior did not contribute to the client’s satisfaction; moreover, his inappropriateness stemmed from excess attempts to save face and to put the conflict aside. The conflict did not affect the relationship between Interviewee #21 and his counterpart, even with the negative evaluation in regard to effectiveness and appropriateness. However, the conflict produced a lesson that taught him to be more careful and modify his behavior to be clearer when dealing with this person.

#21 171-174: It just causes me to, the next time I deal with that person, try to be more explicitly clear about what I want or what I expect.

More Negative Relationships

Putting More Effort into the Interaction

For this category, the participants felt that the relationship was worse after the conflict. They noted a need to modify their behavior and put more effort in dealing with the other person. Three participants reported that after the conflict interaction, they had to work harder in dealing with the Thais. In this category, all participants perceived their counterparts as ineffective and inappropriate.

Interviewee #13 viewed the counterpart’s behavior as ineffective, since neither party in the conflict was satisfied with the outcome. When asked about person’s appropriateness, Interviewee #13 reported that the behavior during the conflict was appropriate (the person agreed to do the job), but his inability to meet the objectives to which he agreed was lacking. This affected the relationship in a negative way; the
respondent was disappointed and disturbed. Interviewee #13 reported that he had to monitor the person’s work more closely after the conflict.

#13 178-180: Certainly. It changed, in that I have to speak with him on a regular basis to help him, frankly, to meet his commitment.

#13 185-190: To a degree, I am sure that there was a disappointment to this person. And as I mentioned, we were friendly. And I was a little bit disappointed and disturbed that he wasn’t able to communicate [that he felt that he couldn’t meet the goal]. His English was fine, and my Thai was not so bad. So I was disappointed, and I think that came off to him a little bit.

Avoiding Interaction

One American participant shared that feelings toward the other party after the conflict led to the outcome led to an attempt to refrain from interacting with this person at all.

Interviewee #26 found her counterpart to be ineffective or unable to reach his goal, partly because the nature of the issues (he did not want the change to occur, whereas the company had to implement changes) and the fact that he was unable to make a decision. The counterpart was seen as appropriate because he was professional. He listened, and he knew he could not make decision. The respondent also felt that he acted appropriately according to the relationship. Despite being regarded as appropriate (although ineffective), the relationship after the conflict was slightly negative. The American participant implied that she lost trust in the counterpart because of his inability to make a decision. Therefore, she tried to sidestep interaction with this person and talked directly with the person who had the decision-making authority. (This quotation also referred to the topic of “having the ability to make decisions” when referring to the perceived effectiveness discussed earlier.)

#26 152-158: He wasn’t able to make the decision. I now know, I actually, preanticipate having to escalate decision making. So I explain things to him, but then I take it to his boss to make the decision.
The Effects of National and Organizational Culture on Conflict Behavior and Perceptions (RQ3)

This part of the investigation relates to Research Question 3: “How do Thais and Americans working in multinational organizations describe the respects in which their cultural background influences their behavior and perceptions of effectiveness/ineffectiveness and appropriateness/inappropriateness in conflict interaction?” For the investigation, the effects of culture were divided into national and organizational culture.

National Culture

In creating the categories for national culture, individualistic-collectivistic and Face Negotiation Theory frameworks were used to identify some topics, but other important topics also emerged. The description of behavior and perceptions of Americans were presented first, followed by those of the Thais.

The Effects of National Culture

The following section revealed the American participants’ belief in the effects of national culture on conflict behavior and perceptions, as well as comments that reflect their hesitance. Those who did not believe in the effects of culture on conflict behavior are described elsewhere, such as in the category “belief in organizational culture and other factors.” When questioned about how they think their national culture affected their behavior and perceptions of others in conflict situations, the American participants’ responses revealed several topics:
Believing in the Effects of Culture

Six American participants explicitly stated a belief that national culture affected their behavior and perceptions in conflict situations. According to Interviewee #21, #21 187-191: Oh yes. I think the most important difference of people from different country is their cultural background, especially something that they’ve assimilated when they were young. So I say culture have obvious effect on the way you set a standard for anything in life, from working to relationship and onwards.

Interviewee #27 revealed her thought about the effects of culture as she responded to the question regarding situational appropriateness. Her expression reflected the topic of “expressing thoughts and ideas openly” in the situational appropriateness, as well as her belief in the influence of culture on perception and behavior related to conflict. (This remarks was cited earlier under the topic “expressing thoughts and ideas openly in “situational appropriateness.”)

#27 100-103: In my opinion, No. I think it is definitely cultural. I mean if I were Thai, I probably would think it was appropriate because it was less (pause), nonconfrontational. But to me, as an American, I would have expected her to say something.

Feeling Uncertain about the Effects of Culture

There was one response that reflected a feeling of uncertainty about the effects of culture on perceptions of conflict and related behavior. Interviewee #25 showed hesitation about the effects of culture on her behavior and perspective because she has been in Thailand for only 5 months and have never been living in other countries.

#25 263-274: Does American culture affect my standard? Yes, definitely. I think that my American cultural standard (pause) it might even be a Thai cultural standard, I don’t know. I kind of think (pause), it’s hard to know when you have been in one culture, whether your standard is different when you only have been in one culture. I have no way of knowing. I have no way of knowing I have bought my culture with me and I don’t know what other standards are. You know what I mean? I don’t know
what the Thai (pause), I don’t think the Thai standard is much different myself. But maybe it is (pause). I think the Thais have some additional standards. But I think to a Thai person, a Chinese person or (pause) if a person gets angry and withdraw, that is not normal, that’s (pause) out of the realm of (pause).

#25 291: I don’t know what to say. It’s the only thing I know.

Individualistic-Collectivistic Orientation

In the accounts of conflict experiences, the majority of the topics that emerged could be categorized according to an individualistic-collectivistic conflict orientation. Face Negotiation Theory framework was also subsumed under “individualistic-collectivistic orientation” under the headings of “outcome-focused” and “process-focused.” Other topics also fell under the individualism-collectivism rubric. For example, the tendency for Thais to discuss problems and issues within their Thai community was placed under a “collectivistic orientation.” The first part of the exploration focuses on the Americans who displayed an individualistic orientation followed by those that deviated from it. Then the Thais’ display of the collectivistic orientation and those that deviate from the orientation are discussed.

*Americans with an Individualistic Orientation*

**Being Outcome-Focused**

An outcome focus reflects individualistic values, such as an I-identity, tangible resources (e.g., salary increases), and content goals (substantive issues) more than identity, relationship, or face issues. Five participants’ comments manifested this tendency during the interviews.

Interviewee #1 followed the proposed solution of his counterpart even though he disagreed with her ideas. The decision to go along with the ideas occurred because he
wanted to please and keep this person with him, as she was a good performer. This participant did not rely on his cultural rule of being straightforward and attacking the weak argument because he was concerned with a more important outcome. He appeared to be relationally oriented, but for the tangible incentives of keeping the good worker with him.

#1 415-416: It [the culture of the other person] probably doesn't matter as much because what matter most to me these days particular is result.

#1 228-231: Yes, I opposed it. I want to take care of my staff and made them do well. And if I really attack that more and investigated more, I don't think that logic really stands up on her side of it, but I didn't go after it too much. Because it's not really (pause), because I really don't want to get (pause), what I want to do is to find someone as good like her. And let her do as much as she can do. And she is very good in other areas too. So it's kind of critical to make sure that how important it is (pause), how important is this. Is it worth upsetting her? If she wasn't that good, I may say “Hey that's it. You have to write someone up if they are late. It is your job. And there is no more discussion. And if you do what you want, you know, I can understand, and you may have to leave." And if someone is a performer, I wouldn't say that.

One good example showing the American goal-oriented tendency was from Interviewee #7. He recognized that American culture is goal-oriented, and the American culture, as well as the corporate culture, reinforced this orientation.

#7 251-263: I would say that certainly Americans are very goal-oriented. So in a conflict, I probably approach it from the standpoint that there is a goal I want to accomplish. But because I was so goal-oriented, so I want to help others with their goals as well. So I actually work hard at seeing whether other accomplish their goals too. So I'm not sure culturally it affects anything except from the standpoint that I am goal-oriented and a corporation is goal oriented. So that means everybody working in this corporation has to be goal-oriented so regardless of their nationality they have to be goal-oriented if they want to work for this company. So knowing that I just work hard to make sure everybody accomplishes their goals.
Working at a Monochronic Pace

This topic emphasizes a concern about time in dealing with conflict. People who exhibit a monochronic pace move rapidly to reach closure involving substantive issues. They pay attention to appointments and usually follow strict schedules. Seven American participants shared ideas that reflected concerns along this line. Two examples follow.

Interviewee #7 showed his concern about getting things done and getting the conflict resolved within the deadline posted.

#7 55-63: Generally, I will go back to the contractor and then discuss. Basically I would ask why they did it the way they did it. Sometimes that's resolved some of the problems because I found out they have a reason to do it. And they couldn't do it any other ways. Or if they did do it wrong, and they explained to me how they did it, I explained to them what I would like done and I usually ask them if there is any sort of problem if they do it that way. Or if it is possible (pause) and usually I try to post the strict deadline.

The response from Interviewee #27 revealed an American reliance on a monochronic pace. She stressed the value of wanting to get the conflict resolved quickly. (This statement manifested the topic of “managing conflict in a timely manner” in the perceived effectiveness as well.)

#27 182-189: The thing would be timeliness. What is the most important, is that not to let the conflict goes on for a long time. … I want a resolution quickly. Try to resolve it and talk it out quickly. And make sure they listen as well. That is the most effective. Something goes on for a long time that is obviously ineffective.

Relying on Linear Logic

This topic represented individualists’ emphasis on inductive or deductive reasoning and point-by-point discussion. Four participants expressed a positive view of this type of analytical ability. For example, Interviewees #20 (as also shown in perceived situational appropriateness under “relying on linear logic”) and #17 stated that:

#20 148-155: I think he could have acknowledged what the actual (cycopines? unclear) are in that particular point in time. And then he
could have laid out an expectation whereby they had an opportunity to improve over time. The case that he made was quite insistent that there should be this X level productivity right now. And in speaking to it, he didn't really have building a learning curve for them to come up to productivity rate. So he came across as unreasonable.

#17 36-39: It’s a while back. What we did (pause), we had tools to the situation (pause). We had a list of what was a strong point, what was the weak point of the person and discussed. “I think it’s like this; it’s like that.”

Emphasizing Factual Details

This topic reflected an emphasis on specific objective data as sources of evidence to support arguments. Five American participants revealed that they paid attention on facts and evidence when discussing the conflict issues. Pertinent examples follow.

Interviewee #9 articulated his frustration about Thais’ argument based on opinion, instead of technical data.

#9 28-42: I have had several Thai engineers that actually pushed back. They did not feel that we should go to do this procedure because they thought it would hurt our (unclear) efficiency. We actually communicated, we had a discussion, and my point of view was based on all the technical (unclear) that I have seen this is the procedure that we should go about, the way that we should complete our wells. All I have heard from the Thai engineers was they didn’t think it should be done this way, but they had not put any technical data on the table to actually present their point of views. And I have said, “If you feel strongly about your opinion on how it should be done, please bring the technical data to the meeting, and we will have a discussion over the technical data, not about how we feel about this subject.” But technical data (pause), and allow technical data to make the decision. We would debate the technical data, not opinion.

Interviewee #23 referred to the types of evidence that should be used for strong arguments.

#23 31-37: Yeah, generally it was a factory manager and myself who kind of spearheaded the whole thing. Level headed, not Jai Ron [rushing through things]. Keeping things as facts instead of guessing at things,
specific numbers, specific pairs, shipment dates, and specific reasons why they are unacceptable.

Using Personal Equity Norm

The notion of “personal equity norm” concerns the distribution of rewards according to the performance of each person in a group. One participant mentioned this topic.

Interviewee #13 noticed that Americans often reward individuals based on their performance more than do Thai people. He had the impression that this might be the reason why Americans were more willing to express disagreements and their opinions, that is, so that they could be rewarded for their contributions.

#13 242-247: I am going to give you my general impression. It might be universal, but I would suggest that American culture probably rewards the individual a little more than Thai culture does in the organization. By that, I mean you are more apt to get a U.S. worker to push back on the boss, sometimes with good suggestions and sometimes just to make noise, than you will in Thailand.

Using Confrontational/Direct Conflict Behavior

In addition to the conflict styles Americans reported using, three described their preferences for a controlling, competitive, and direct conflict approach. Interviewee #27, for instance, revealed her preference for controlling behavior.

#27 192-198: I think I am more controlling and more wanting to fix something quickly and not letting it carry on whereas I think (pause). I don’t know if this is cultural, but I don’t feel like letting it go for a long time, and not confrontational and not want to resolve something as quickly because I think I am less patient too. It’s more of control. I want to be in control of getting the situation fixed.

#27 203-204: For Americans? Confrontation is a bit more acceptable and more commonplace. Here it is definitely not.

Interviewee #7 showed his admiration to people who dealt with conflict directly.
Relying on Low Power-Distance Values

Those low on the power-distance dimension emphasize a symmetrical treatment of people, regardless of their positions. People are respected or receive special treatment based on their ability more than rank, title, position, or seniority. Seven American participants reflected this value in the interviews. Typical comments follow.

Interviewee #1, as the owner of the company, took his subordinate out for casual lunch to discuss the conflict issue. This behavior reflected the informal symmetrical treatment.

#1 78-81: So he [his business partner] told me about it and whatever about it and I thought she [conflict counterpart] is an important employee for a company. So I didn’t want her to be upset. So I called her and have lunch with her and ask her to tell me what happened and tell me what her idea is.

Interviewee #7 recognized the Thai habit of treating older people with more respect. However, he claimed that he show respect to everybody equally, while paying particular attention to their ideas and their ability.

#7 384-397: I keep in mind, would ideally, with other cultures, I know that some cultures tend to respect the elders more than other cultures (pause), and because of that, people would expect me to do the same thing. So if I am dealing with a more senior Thai person, to me, I assume, I know that it's in their culture and that I should be respectful (pause), but again I try to be respectful to all individuals. And I also recognized that that person is the senior individual. So there are the factors that might influence, sometimes, so generally speaking, so I've been trying to show respect to everybody anyway, so it doesn't influence anything. I respect the older ones and the younger ones because they could have good ideas. That is the key. I am trying to utilize all the talents because everybody I work with was bright.
Relying on Low-Context Values

This topic encompasses preferences for and a reliance on direct verbal expression to convey meaning. A great many of the American participants (nine) mentioned their uses and/or their appreciation for direct, straightforward, open, and honest discussion during the conflict. The excerpts that follow are illustrative.

Interviewee #1 gave an example of his frank response to his subordinate:

#1 274-288: I basically told them I didn't want to which was very upsetting to them because it was something that they believed in very much, and the right of people and the benefits of it. And they would not stop until, eventually, I basically said that, “I don't care about [name of the religion].” And that was the way I resolved it. And I said, “This is someone that I really trust and has been helping me on a couple of occasions in Thailand. And that is very important because there are not many people that will step out of the realm to help you if you are foreigner here. And, therefore, I don't know whether he would like to hear that or whether he would not. But there's a whole stream of government people that you can take your case to without involving me. Take it to them. But don't take it to the one guy that I really get along with quite well.” Which they felt really upsetting that I didn't trust them.

Interviewee #6 understood the Thai culture, but he preferred dealing with conflict in an open, direct, and forthright manner.

#6 159-164: To me, I believe in the forthright; I believe in being honest about what I think, what I feel. I recognize that it is not always the case here. Sometimes, it is better to avoid the conflict than it is to resolve it directly. So [my cultural background] is to resolve it directly, but I understand that sometimes it has to be done in a more (unclear) to avoid uncomfortable situation.

Interviewee #27 believed in her right to express her feelings, ideas, or her disappointment to everyone regardless of rank.

#27 271-278: That is what I just said. I think it [culture] has a huge effect because I think I would be more inclined (pause). I feel like nobody is out of my reach. I have the right to tell anyone if (unclear) or if I am being insulted in some way or my ethic is being compromised. I don’t have any problem with that. I feel like here even at the higher level I would dare say, I’ve been in Asia for only 6 years, I don’t think there is anyone here that would do that.
Displaying Emotion

For individualistic cultures, emotional expression is considered natural. Showing anger, disappointment, and confusion openly is not frowned upon, as it is in collectivistic culture. Two participants addressed this topic. As one example, to Interviewee #21, displaying of personal emotion was acceptable and sometimes even to be encouraged.

#21 195-205: Since I am from the United States, people are much more open with their feelings of hostility toward one another, so it’s not like they can hide it at all. It’s kind of seen as there is something wrong with you if you don’t know how to raise your disagreement or your unhappiness with a certain situation. In the U.S., if you are going to McDonald’s and order a hamburger, and they give you a cheeseburger, you are pretty well with in your right to scream at the person behind the register. Something like that will be unacceptable in this part of the world. So they are kind of teaching you that, whatever emotion you have, let them out, great.

Using Jokes and Sarcasm

Another topic that emerged from the interviews was the Americans’ use of jokes and sarcasm. Interviewee #21 was the person who mentioned this idea. He noted that he would use jokes or sarcasm to deal with his anger if he tried to get some answer from his counterpart, but it was not the answer he wanted.

#21 83-85: I probably use sarcasm or say that, “Next time, let’s do it this way,” some kind of approach like that. And kind of incorporated jokes a little bit to control my anger.

Having Personal Accountability for Conflict Problems and Mistakes

One American participant revealed his thoughts about personal accountability in saying that Americans are more accountable of their behavior. They were more willing to admit to making a mistake. The participant, Interviewee #23, said:

#23 182-186: It’s the rushing culture. It’s very demanding. It’s very black and white generally. Whereas some of issues I have in Asia over the years,
there are a lot of gray areas. No one was really willing to stand up. I feel that Americans are more willing to stand up, saying, “This is my fault. No, that’s not my fault.”

Separating Personal Issues from Work

Three American participants felt that people should not take things personally when dealing with task-related conflict. They indicated that they usually can separate task and personal issues, whereas Thais tend to take things personally even after the conflict has dissipated. Interviewee #23 elaborated on this matter:

#23 186-192: They are more, I think, the American tends to rely on facts a little more; they put aside the emotions. They can take emotions out of things. Again, there are other incidents that I was able to deal with people, but 3 months later, you still not see eyes-to-eye because they took it personally. Business is business more in the States than it is here.

American Deviations from an Individualistic Orientation

There were some comments from American participants suggesting that they were leaning more toward collectivistic values.

Being Process-Focused

Instead of paying attention primarily to the outcome or tangible goals, two Americans reported their concerns about face and their relationship with the party involved.

When wanting to discuss issues that might have caused embarrassment to the other person, Interviewee #13 would do it in private.

#13 67-70: The emotion that typically you get from that kind of thing [indication of the inability to meet the objectives] is frankly to some degree embarrassment, being a face loss of being confronted, but I always did in a private, so it is less severe that if I have done it in public.
Interviewee #17 reportedly put extra effort into trying to maintain a positive relationship with his Thai counterpart because the resolution was not unfolding the way the Thai wanted.

#17 68-72: We discussed (pause), basically thinking that the expats were worried because he has been in this company longer. We had to seriously work that out to compensate the man’s attitude. We didn’t want him to think he got rolled over or his opinion wasn’t valued.

Using Indirect Conflict Behavior

In light of their understanding of Thai culture, two American participants reported using nonconfrontational approaches to deal with the conflict.

#25 87-91: No, I don’t talk about the conflict anymore. Not unless there is something unsettled. Then I have to bring it up. But I won’t start with the conflict. I have to wait until he is settling down, and I would try to bring it up in a nonthreatening way.

#27 52-57: I tried to stick with the Thai culture and, not confrontation, being confrontational back to her. I found out through the other person that she was questioning her role and this whole thing, so I went back through that person and transferred the message to her that it is actually her scope of work. And she supposed to be doing that.

Relying on High Power-Distance Values

Two American participants reported being aware of and relying on the different levels of power and asymmetrical treatment according to rank, position, and seniority. Comments by one clearly reveal the topic.

Having been in Asian countries for a while, Interviewee #20 recognized and adapted to the hierarchical order. He felt that if the issues take too long to settle, the superior should have the authority to guide the direction of the issues.

#20 264-273: I have been overseas for a long time; I think my cultural background have become irrelevant in someway, although I always carry it with me. In Asia, in particularly in the shoe industry, there is a certain pecking order that is in place in the business. And the chain of command is more respected in Asian business more than a Western business, or what we like to say in our company, [name of the company] culture. In [name of the company] culture, people’s job titles don’t necessarily befit their
power or level of authority, whereas that is more, given a bit more weight in Asian culture.

#20 288-296: I think they need to be aware of their position up and down. I think there comes a certain point in the conflict situation if you are debating in front of a kind of going to the situation we were talking about. That person I think (pause), there is expectation at a certain level of professionalism, where you are at odds with somebody for 10 minutes and the debate is clearly isn’t going anywhere, if that person’s supervisor is in the room. I think you kind of fall back and let the high level people begin to direct it or steer the discussion.

*Thais with a Collectivistic Orientation*

Being Process-Focused

Being process-focused involves collectivistic values, such as a concern about a *we*-identity, an emphasis on intangible resources (e.g., support and respect), a concern about relational goals (e.g., identity or face) more than content or substantive issues, and a concern about self-face, as well as other-face. This topic was prevalent in Americans’ narrations relating to Thai people. At least eight American participants referred to Thais’ concerns about these issues. The following excerpts provide some examples of the expression of this topic.

Interviewee #20 noted that when dealing with Thais, face and relational issues are very crucial since there will be a long lasting stain in the relationship if the Thais feel offended or lose face.

#20 344-354: I think you always need to be aware of the face issues. The loss of face is true in Thailand, it’s true in Indonesia, and it’s true in Korea. A lot of business success depends on relationships. And you always need to be careful to protect the relationship beyond the specific incident. And really keep the cool head; keep in mind it’s a long-term game. If you lose your cool in certain cultures, you’d better understand what the consequences of that are, if you decide to go off on somebody in particular forum. You know, what the risks are. You could alienate that person for the rest of your expatriate days in that country or for life or for whatever.
Interviewee #6 was frustrated about how expressing constructive criticism required a lot of effort to prevent face loss. These situations implied the Thai counterpart’s concern for other’s face.

#6 159-164: I think criticism of someone's ability, in or criticism of someone's work, even constructive criticism requires the degree of sensitivity. So for example, I work with a lot of inexperienced engineers, and I need to be able to point out better ways to do their work without being critical. In a way, that might make them feel that they lose their face.

Working at a Polychronic Pace

Unlike a culture that relies on a monochronic pace, those from a polychronic culture are more flexible and patient about meeting deadlines and following schedules. People in this type of culture focus more on relationships and try to foster them while trying to accomplish tasks. One American participant compared the relaxed and flexible nature of Thai culture in terms of the use of time to the Mexican concept of mañana (tomorrow).

#8 287-290: I lived in Mexico before and had some unique experience that always makes me think about Mexico. It is about a mañana kind of attitude. And in Thailand, in a lot of ways that is similar. It is a little bit laid-back, a little bit less aggressive.

Using Nonconfrontational/Indirect Conflict Behavior

This category is associated with the use of avoiding, obliging, and other nonconfrontational approaches to conflict. Four American participants described the behavior they encountered when dealing with their Thai counterparts in such terms. Some examples of the Thais’ uses of such styles the participants reported were as follows:

#8 13-18: And when I was doing the thinking about a conflict situation, different scenarios came up. For example, a conflict over, maybe disagreement over salary, for position or for titles. So it's almost you have
to search because of Thai culture is not going to have too many conflicts situations, they are going to avoid it.

Interviewee #25 described an incident in which her Thai conflict counterpart avoided confrontation and showed his upset feeling through nonverbal cues. This behavior was discussed earlier in the avoiding conflict style.

#25 64-66: No, he [Thai] just gets quiet and shy. His body language was (pause), he was more pulling away, and was quiet and not saying good morning and things he normally does.

Relying on High Power-Distance Values

This topic was characterized in terms of the ways people gave priority treatment and asymmetrical respect to people with high-status in the society. Four American participants depicted the Thai way of dealing with people in a business setting and reported that the chain of command and strict hierarchical order were salient among Thai people. Seniority, age, position, and length of working in the company, they felt, had some effects on Thais’ expectations concerning who should be promoted, who should make decisions, and how people should be treated.

Interviewee #13 noticed the strict chain of command, wherein seniors are hardly questioned and have the authority to make decision. There was little distribution of authority found in Thai organizations.

#13 248-262: Typically in Thailand, you are looking at the Confucion or Buddhist hierarchy, where you have the father of the family and the person to (unclear) and the boss are seldom questioned. This is one of the reasons, not just Thailand, but many developing countries have trouble. Because they reach a certain size, and once you reach this size, no longer can one person make all the decisions. So there need (pause), you need to fall back into “American's way” of empowering and flowing the work down and giving the responsible and authority to the right people. So I would say that is the biggest difference. I think for business culture, it’s very clear in the U.S. that when someone reaches a management level, and the higher they go, in the organization, the more authority they have to make decisions. And the more they held to whether what goal and objectives they held for a year.
Interviewee #26 expressed her thoughts about how Thais emphasize job titles more than expertise.

#26 242-248: Coming from a Westernized background, your level doesn’t matter. It’s you knowledge, it’s (not?) your position. Everyone is an expert in what they do. But being here in Thailand, your level implies your expertise. If you are at the bottom of (pause), if you are a trainee and if you are an expert in something, you are not considered an expert. You are considered a trainee, regardless of your ability.

Relying on High-Context Values

Behavior that reflects the high-context value topic relates to how meaning is conveyed and detected through situational knowledge and nonverbal channels. Three American participants mentioned incidents involving Thais’ nonverbal and indirect communication and, hence, their high-context orientation. Interviewee #5, for example, said this:

#5 26-31: Well, if I remember correctly, no he didn't say so much more than his body language. He wouldn't look at me; he stopped talking; and then he finally said, “Well, I don't understand why you changed your mind about this project, one minute you like it and now you don't.” And I can see he was frustrated because his face was kind of red sweating a little.

Restraining Emotion

In Thailand, as well as in many other collectivistic cultures, emotional expression, especially expression of anger, is regarded as unacceptable, unrefined, ignorant, and immature (e.g., Sriussadaporn-Charoenngam & Jablin, 1999). One participant addressed the issue.

Interviewee #26 noted Thais’ tendency to suppress of emotional reaction in conflict situations.

#26 228-232: In dealing with conflict anywhere, but being in Thailand, that [being obnoxious, emotional, and vocal] would definitely not help. People are very calm. They don’t show whole lot of emotion when they
are dealing with other people, whether they are strangers or if friends in conflict situation.

Not Having Personal Accountability for Conflict Problems and Mistakes

Two Americans articulated their frustration about Thais’ perceived lack of accountability for their actions as follows:

#23 294-296: The lack of accepting responsibility, the lack of saying I messed up, I didn’t get something done. A lot of times, that comes covered up in some way.

#26 236-237: Frustration, probably in the lack of the ability to make a decision and not being accountable.

Not Separating Personal Issues from Work

Those from individualistic cultures are known for their ability to separate a conflict about a task from personal issues. On the other hand, those from collectivistic cultures tend not to separate the two. Attacking ideas presumably also makes a person lose face and can affect the relationship between the parties.

Three American participants compared Koreans to Thais in regard to their feelings following a conflict. Thai people tended to take the matter personally, and the conflict tended to affect the relationship adversely even when it was mainly about a task.

As Interviewee #23 pointed out:

#23 114-121: Oh yeah, incredibly. The Koreans, you yell and scream. Just carry on, and they will yell and scream back, and they will scream at each other. But 5 o’clock, you go out, and you can go and have a good time together, whereas if that was happening to Thais, they would exit the room if you came in, especially if you single them out in front of a lot of people.
Discussing Congenially with Other Thais

For another topic that emerged, the American participants reported that there was a better communication among the Thais as a community. Two American participants suspected that some Thais might not be shy in nature. When communicating with other Thais, they were more open and had fewer problems in resolving conflicts, compared to when they were interacting with Americans.

#9 296-298: I don't know if they are shy; the Thais as a community do discuss very well. The engineers are doing very good job with Thais. It's amazing.

#20 79-85: Because (pause), I think what we had going on in this situation was kind of a cultural problem as well. With our business, we deal, see our Thai national staff deal with a Thai factory, those communications pretty straightforward people can communicate in their mother tongue. Those differences were much easier to resolve.

Thai Deviations from a Collectivistic Orientation

Relying on Low-Context Values

Even though most Americans viewed Thais as quiet and often indirect in their approach to conveying meanings, Interviewee #7 noted that the Thais working in his company were quite open and honest.

#7 294-299: That is a good question that I have to think how I would do that (long pause). I have to deal a lot with Thais and the nationals here at the job, and most of them are very open and honest. And I don't judge them any different at all because, again that is what I'm looking for, open and honest discussions even if it completely opposed to my opinion.
Separating Personal Issues from Work

Interviewee #17 brought up an example of a Thai who, he felt, expressed emotion toward the task in a professional manner and did not take the issue personally. (The second comment is an example of the “relationally appropriate” topic regarding “separating personal issues from work” as well.)

#17 114-117: He was appropriate because there was some emotion displayed to show that he cared about the topic. And it was reacted toward, I feel strongly about this goals, not toward the other person in the argument.

#17 128-129: Yes, it was on a professional level. In my opinion, it was not personal. But you have to ask him if he took it personally.

Organizational Culture

Some American participants noted that their conflict interaction was influenced by organizational culture more than their national culture. (The following statement by Interviewee #7 was also presented earlier the “being outcome-focused” of American with an individualistic orientation.)

#7 245- 262: I am not sure if it’s the American culture, or more of individual differences and organizational culture.

#13 214-217: When it comes to a business-related conflicts, most of those have more to do with the company’s approach to business and the process that involved in that than a personal cultural background.

According to Adler (1980), there are three types of management models in multinational corporations: the Cultural Dominance Model, the Cultural Compromise Model, and the Cultural Synergy Model, as mentioned earlier in Chapter 2. For this study, the ways in which the participants described their companies were separated into two groupings: the Cultural Dominance Model and the Cultural Compromise/Synergy Model. The latter two categories were combined to reflect the fact that organization exhibited both the cultural styles of management (American) and the host culture (Thai), without further investigating whether only similar aspects (Cultural Compromise Model)
or both similar and different aspects (Cultural Synergy Model) of the cultural styles were relied on.

The Cultural Dominance Model

Cultural Dominance Model applies to organizations that rely on cultural style of management alone. This part of the investigation focuses on the conflict styles that such organizations fostered and what the employees noted that they relied on. Since the MNCs chosen for this study were American-owned/co-owned, narratives that mainly reflected individualistic values would be expected from the Cultural Dominance Model.

*Being Outcome-Focused*

Two participants asserted that their organization placed a high value on being outcome-focused.

Interviewee #7 explained that his goal-oriented behavior might result from the combination of individual differences, national culture, and organizational culture. He emphasized that his company was goal-oriented and that whoever wanted to work in this company had to be goal-oriented. Therefore, the model for his company is Cultural Dominance, which tended to promote the individualistic value of being outcome-focused. (This excerpt also represented the “being outcome-focused” under the “national culture” topic as well.)

#7: 245-263: Well certainly (long pause), I do know the cultural part of it sometimes bothers me because in any culture you have such varied amounts of personalities and the way people approach problems. …I would say that certainly Americans are very goal-oriented. …So I'm not sure culturally it affects anything except from the standpoint that I am goal-oriented and a corporation is goal oriented. So that means everybody working in this corporation has to be goal-oriented, so regardless of their nationality, they have to be goal-oriented if they want to work for this company. So knowing that I just work hard to make sure everybody accomplishes their goals.
Interviewee #8 maintained that he was sensitive to the Thai culture, but making a business decision was more important. He focused on the outcome of the task and suggested that the company’s culture did not encourage promoting someone on the basis of seniority, nor did it reflect concern about saving employees’ face.

#8 48-52: Because it's against [name of the company’s] philosophy and may be perhaps. Western companies are not as sensitive to “Hey, this is the seniority issue or this is a face saving issues or something like that.” Make it clear, discussed it and talk through it and everybody remain intact and then we have got through it.

#8 94-99: This is American company; we are not going to follow every single aspect of the Thai culture where you have to be very careful if you are going to do something like this is instead of coming out and just do it.

#8 237-246: But the fact that it had been, it just a face thing, it is just a seniority thing, it just age thing, then all of the stuff that I have known about and have to be sensitive to, but I also made it a point that while I personally, I always try to be culturally sensitive, I still work for a multinational company and its not an American company, but is a multinational company that you try to be culturally sensitive, but at the end of the day you have to make the business decisions. And you are not always going to make the decision that people always agree with.

Relying on Low-Context Values

This topic involved the individualistic preference for being straightforward, direct, and open and honest in the expression of thoughts and ideas. One participant reflected on this matter as follows:

Interviewee #7 revealed that his company encouraged employees to be open and honest and communicate it in a positive manner, such as using constructive criticism.

#7 210-223: And certainly the way we look at everything here at [name of the company], as a company, has taught us that we want people, regardless of the mistake you make, we want people to be very open and honest. So we never are negative about somebody who made a mistake. A lot of times we even reward them for making a mistake. Because if you don't take chances, you are never going to make a mistake, and we want people to take chances and learn more. And try to push the envelope in terms of technology. So, generally, I always strive with anybody I worked with, in
any situation, to absolutely be as positive as possible. And make all criticism a very constructive criticism so that there is absolutely nothing accomplished by being negative about somebody about something here. It just that at work, it does turn that person off from a communication standpoint if you are shouting at them, or raising your voice, or making negative implications about the job they have done. That doesn't accomplish anything. So generally people would just shy away from you. And that's not what you want. You want them to open up. So I think most of the people here all work very very hard at approaching everything at a positive manner so we try to keep a very positive attitude even about problems.

Relying on Low/High Power-Distance Values

Three Americans discussed how their organizational culture affected their views concerning how to treat and evaluate people based on their rank and status. Both low power-distance and high power-distance structures were evident in the narrations.

Interviewee #20 described the culture of his company as having a less strict hierarchical order than others of those in Asia. The idea (#20 264-273) was used to describe the American who tended to rely on collectivistic value under the category of “relying on high power-distance value.”

#20 264-273: I have been overseas for a long time, I think my cultural background has become irrelevant in someway, although I always carry it with me. … or what we like to say in our company, [name of the company]culture, in [name of the company] culture people’s job titles don’t necessary befit their power or level of authority, whereas that is more given a bit more weight in Asian culture.

On the other hand, Interviewee #13 indicated that his American organization relied on hierarchical order. The goals and objectives were from those of higher rank and had to be pursued. People also reported back to them about progress. This tended to be more closely related to high power-distance values; however, since he considered this as American corporate culture value, the view reflected the Cultural Dominance Model.

#13 195-202: I think so. Because in our organization, there's pressure, let's face it, that flows down hill. So the objective of a goal of all the team
members I have in Asia, of course, becomes my goals and objectives I have to answer back to America. So distinct and going back to corporate American structure approach to business that the flows down of goals also flows back up. So I would suggest that my corporate culture background makes a difference there.

*Personal Accountability for Conflict Problems or Mistakes*

Two interviewees indicated that their organizations value personal accountability. Interviewee #13 commented that in the American corporate culture, people had the authority and were expected to be accountable for their work.

#13 110-116: American corporate culture, I would say that, probably maybe even to a fault, they are very systematic in the approach to business. When we talk about team we talk about each individual having a specific responsibility and specific authority and through that they were empowered to do the job without a whole lot of management. But there is expectation that they will do the job.

Some other interviewees (e.g., #23, #25, and #26) felt that Thai people are less responsible for their problems and mistakes. Interviewee #26, for instance, expressed her doubt about the effectiveness of people who could not make decision if they are working in American companies.

#26 303-312: If we are talking about two people in the same position and behaving in the same manner, then I would not treat them differently or think of them differently, regardless if they were American or Thai because if they were working for a Thai company, there is a culture that goes along with that. Now, if they were working for an American company, and they are an American in that position that should be able to make a decision, and they just can’t make the decision. And I have to think about that. Then I would wonder how effective that person really is.

The Cultural Compromise/Synergy Model

For the Cultural Compromise/Synergy Model, both cultural aspects were recognized and employed as basis for grouping topics concerning organizational policies and practices.


Relying on Low/High-Context Values

An American participant described his organizational culture as hybrid of multiple cultures. Communication was a compromise of direct and indirect modes. The participant, Interviewee #6, explained:

#6 95-97: But geez (pause), this is such a hyper place to work. It is not really Thai, it is not really American and, but it makes it easier.

#6 187-202: And so I know that it is much more effective to be quiet but persistent and smile and so I find that doing things that are more culturally appropriately (pause), handling conflict in the way that is culturally appropriate, is much more effective. But what is culturally effective outside of the office is different from what is appropriate in the office. And because it's a hybrid culture, it isn't really Americans and that isn't really Thai. … You know we have Europeans and Australians (pause).

Researcher: What is the appropriate way to deal with conflict in the office?

#6: It is very difficult to explain. It is somewhere in between; it is not exactly direct, and it is not exactly the indirect type. It is some kind of compromise. You have to observe it for a while.

The Effects of the Culture of the Counterpart (RQ4)

The behavior and the perception of the other in conflict interaction could vary according to the characteristics of and assumptions about one’s conflict counterpart. Research Question 4, “How do Thais and Americans working in multinational organizations describe the respects in which the cultural background of the conflict counterpart influences their perceptions of effectiveness/ineffectiveness and appropriateness/inappropriateness in conflict interaction,” is the focus of this part of the investigation of the interviews.
**Reaction**

When asked about how they reacted to Thais and Americans when they display the exact same behavior in a conflict situation, the American participants reported that they reacted differently in some instances and similarly in others.

**Different Reactions**

**Being Softer with Thais and Being more Direct with Americans**

Five American participants reported that they react in a gentler manner to Thais, whereas they provide more arguments and are more direct with their American colleagues.

Interviewees #1 and #13 provided examples of reported differences in reacting to Thais and Americans. Interviewee #1 explained that he would be more careful and use a softer approach with Thais. With Americans, he could be more straightforward, forceful, abrupt, and would not have to be as careful.

#1 444-459: I think when you're in a conflict, you have to be as calm as you can when you are with Thais. Whereas with Americans, I can get pretty loud or disagree very strongly, right upfront. In Thailand, a lot of times you have meetings, “Why you think this is? Tell me your ideas about this.” For an American, I may just say, “This is stupid. Why are you even bringing this up because (pause) we have already talked?” “That doesn't make sense. You try it and you see the results.” For example, my partner who came up with his idea of doing a self-service coffee at the Top Supermarket, and I think that is a terrible idea. Thai consumers are not going to go up and measure the coffee. And it was interesting for our staff because they just watching us debating. That idea doesn't make sense. It cannot be done. If it was a Thai staff, I would say, “Yes, that could work. We should think about it.” But with him I could say straight to the point.

Similarly, Interviewee #13 stated that:

#13 319-322: I think I probably adjusted my behavior in the way I would communicate. I might be little bit more to the Thai style when I was
communicating to the Thais and a little more abrupt and straightforward when I communicate with Americans.

**Being More Relaxed with Thais**

When having a conflict with Thais and Americans, Interviewee #13, the one participant who addressed this issue, noted that he was more relaxed, flexible, and forgiving with Thais if they were not as vocal or did not meet his expectations. For Americans, he would assume that, since they were from the same background, they should know the proper way to react in the conflict situation.

#13 298-306: My reaction my behavior to, as you have said, to a conflict, when you talked about dealing with a conflict whether with a Thai and foreigner, I tried to (pause), but I have to tell you that I probably bend over a little backward in relaxing a bit for the Thais. Because I always felt that this is an American guy, [he] ought to know this stuff, he ought to know better. And maybe Thais come from different environment, different background, and that probably cut them more slack and probably help them more.

**Encouraging Thais to Speak Up**

Three American participants reported that they would encourage the Thais to be more vocal about their ideas. As one illustration, Interviewee #20 specifically suggested that when a Thai acted in a direct, straightforward, and proactive manner, he would encourage it and raise the person as a role model for other Thai staff. He implied that since this kind of behavior was typical of Americans, he would not react in any special way to Americans.

#20 304-312: When a Thai manages an openly and freely, if they manage proactively up to me, I encourage that because in our business, that’s not a problem. That’s the exception. And so I find that in my job, I get surprised too frequently, or there is too much “Kreng Jai” [hesitancy to offend or cause discomfort to other]. There are important things that I should be made aware of, very often that I am not. When you find that provocative personality who is willing to (manage? unclear) up, encourage that and even put them to a role model position for other national staff people too.
Judgment

Contrary to the data for reactions, when discussing judgments of Thais and Americans when they display the same behavior, the responses varied. Some Americans indicated hesitancy in regard to forming perceptions; some replied that they would have the same judgment; some felt that they would judge Thais and Americans differently.

Hesitance

Interviewee #1 experienced some difficulty in stating how he would feel toward the Thais and Americans counterparts behaving the same way.

#1 380-383: That [I] judge them better if they do the same thing, I don't know, but (long pause), I don't know (long pause). Or I would think I would be tougher because I think they have got to have a strong argument (long pause).

Same Judgment

For those indicating they would make the same judgment, there were several emergent topics.

Focusing on Outcomes

For this topic, the participants indicated similar evaluation of the target, regardless of culture, because of their emphasis on the outcomes. Two participants mentioned this idea.

#9 381-383: I don't look to (pause), I would look at the behavior and the results of the conflict. So I don't see (pause) culture or race and of being an issue with.
#23 240-245: I would try to [evaluate them the same way], I would (pause), yeah. From ethical business point of view, yes, you have to treat all people equal.

Researcher: How about in reality? Do you feel that way?

#23: Sure, I don’t care if they are yellow, purple, or green, as long as they can give me information I need.

**Focusing on Behavior**

Three participants reported that the feeling toward the counterpart would be the same and that the judgment would be based on the behavior displayed more than the culture of the conflict counterpart. Interviewee #13, for instance, claimed that he would feel the same way about either Thais or Americans. He had a positive attitude toward straightforward verbal expression and encouraged that, regardless of who displays such behavior.

#13 328-336: I would feel the same if they avoid conflict.

Researcher: What if both of them are straight forward?

#13: Yes, absolutely. As I said, I always encourage people to get issues on the table, and the only way to do that is to be straightforward. But it always have to be done in the manner that, if you have a problem with another individual, whether it's me or other co-worker, I always want to focus on the behavior, not the person that they are set at. And often time you kick (pause). You understand what I am saying though? You correct the behaviors (pause). So let's talk about the behavior; let's not talk about person.

**Relying on Corporate Cultural Standard**

One participant conveyed that his evaluation would be based on the organization the person belonged to more than the cultural background of the person. Interviewee #26 said he would consider the organizational culture of the person when evaluating her/his behavior. For example, if the person was working in a Thai company, it might be more
acceptable to delay decision making or to leave it to a higher status individual. However, if it was in American corporation, the person in such position should be able to make a decision. (This part of Interviewee #26’s comment was also quoted earlier to illustrate the topic of “personal accountability for conflict problems or mistakes” for Cultural Dominance Model.)

#26 303-312: If we are talking about two people in the same position and behaving in the same manner (pause), then I would not treat them differently or think of them differently, regardless if they were American or Thai because if they were working for a Thai company, there is a culture that goes along with that. Now, if they were working for an American company, and they are an American in that position that should be able to make a decision, and they just can’t make the decision, and I have to think about that, then I would wonder how effective that person really is.

When asked how he would respond if both Thais and Americans were outspoken, Interviewee #26 stated:

#26 320-321: Oh sure! Yes. I would think Wow! That is great. Wow for both. Assertiveness.

Being Surprised by Deviations

Despite evaluating Americans and Thais in the same manner, responses in this category emphasized a feeling of astonishment when the counterpart behaved in the way that deviated from cultural norms. Two American participants reported such thoughts.

Interviewee #5, for example, responded to the question about feelings toward a display of aggressive behavior displayed by both Thai and American counterpart that he would be surprised if the Thai acted in an aggressive manner. He would also be astonished if an American was quiet. Although he would evaluate them the same way, he would respond differently.

#5: 254-258: Yes [I would feel the same toward both nationals], but I would be very surprised if a Thai person did that.
#5 263-281: Yes. Absolutely, I might respond to it different too because if the Thai person feels motivated enough to get aggressive, my assumption is that they might be extremely upset vs. an American doing it, it might just be another day at the office. And a lot of my American colleagues work with a fair amount of anger just below the surface. It doesn't take much to get to it out. If a Thai colleagues has gone to a point where they are no longer "Kreng Jai" [hesitancy to cause discomfort] about saying something then you know that they are very upset. I would try to wait and back off and try to understand why they're really upset. Whereas with the American, you might just push it back at them because that is who they are. They are just angry anyway.

Researcher: How about if both of them appear to be quiet?

#5: Yes, I would evaluate them the same way.

Researcher: So you would evaluate them the same way, but be surprised when either American Thai behaved in the manner that deviates from their own culture.

#5: Yes.

*Judging Similarly, but Reacting in a Different Manner*

Four American participants reported that they would assess Thais and Americans the same way, but react to them differently. Some of the different reactions were elaborated earlier in the different reaction section. For example, Interviewee #8 indicated that he would evaluate the counterpart from a different culture the same way, but he would encourage Thais to speak up more.

#8 366: I would be surprised, but I would try to evaluate them the same.

#8 393-401: But invariably, it was the expats who are the most vocal in the meeting type of situation, and the Thai managers are kind of sit back and be quiet. And you are really trying to encourage the Thais to voice their opinions, especially if there is a visitor. You want people to build confidence that we have strong people that have opinions and encourage them to bring it out instead of sit there and be quiet or be afraid to say something (pause). It sounds stereotypical, but it is what happened a lot.
Other than encouraging Thais to speak up more, some Americans reported having the same attitude, regardless of the culture of the counterpart, while having a different reaction, and mentioned the previous topic of taking softer approach with the Thais (e.g., Interviewee #5).

Analyzing the Situation More with Thais

Interviewee #17 indicated that he would judge the Thais and Americans in the same way, but felt he had to explore the situation more when he dealt with the Thais to make sure he understood it in view of the different cultural backgrounds.

#17 166-172: Yeah. If they behave exactly in the same way, I will have the same judgment. But I probably wouldn’t have tried to analyze the situation as much [if the other person was an American] because I would have felt that I might have known him (unclear) showing much easier. So I might not have to second guess if the situation was working out OK.

Appreciating Individual Differences

This topic reflected the American participants’ belief in individual differences within each culture. Three participants contended that they would have the same feeling toward the conflict counterparts, regardless of the culture of origin, partly because they felt that whether people from each culture display a wide variety of behavior depends on many factors. Interviewee #25 noted that she did not differ her judgment on the basis of the culture of the target. She would deal with each person case-by-case because there are many factors that can affect people’s behavior other than national culture. She mentioned exposure to other cultures, exposure to media, and age differences as some of these factors.

#25 307-319: I really don’t think [I would evaluate them differently], but maybe I should, I don’t know (pause). I really don’t think about the person culture, where they are coming from when I communicate with them. I just take them as they come to me because lots of, you don’t know, people in Thailand spent a great deal of time in the U.S. They see
television, they see shows, they pick up a lot of different things, especially young people pick up a lot of different thing from other contact. Older people, like in the U.S., older Americans are different than younger Americans, older Thais and than younger Thais. I think for the younger people, there is more commonness than there were from older group because there is more of a common communication across the whole world now because of television.

Different Judgments

*Being More Understanding with Thais*

This category relates to differences in the way some Americans evaluate Thais and Americans. They reported trying to be more understanding, patient, and forgiving with Thais. They would be more upset, angry, and even lost trust with Americans who displayed behavior they view as negative, such as not expressing their ideas or just saying “Yes” to avoid conflict. The reason behind the different judgments was cultural background. If Americans displayed the same behavior that deviated from their cultural norms, most frequently they might have a different motivation behind it. Three American participants expressed feelings consistent with this topic.

As one illustration, Interviewee #21 reported that he would be more understanding of Thais who simply agree and accept his ideas or directives without argument (and might not be able to follow through). He felt that things would turn out fine in the end, since the Thai culture operated this way. In contrast, for Americans, he would be suspicious and lose trust in them because they might have something in mind.

#21 275-293: I think with the Thai person, I would think, “Well, I have dealt with this before. It’s hard to pin down, but he would probably turn out alright at the end.” If it was an American person [who] does it, I would think this person is worthless. I mean the thing is, it is different in the U.S.; if a person kept saying, “Yes, yes, yes,” and not letting you see clearly what is happening, you wouldn’t really have any reason to trust them. But since people do things differently here, it is a completely different circumstance. It’s very different scenario.
Being Surprised by Deviations

When Thais or Americans behave in a manner that does not correspond to their cultural norms, two Americans reported that they would feel surprised and would have a different feeling toward each of them. According to Interviewee #27, she would feel differently toward, as well as react in a more direct manner, with Americans.

#27 285-298: If my conflict was with an American instead of the Thai? I think I would feel differently. It would be less expected. My expectation would be different. And I would probably make more of a point about it to try and change it for the next time. Here I don’t think, in this situation, I don’t think, I am not trying to change the situation. If I can change the reaction because I don’t think it will change. But I don’t know. It would be unexpected sort of reaction from someone of a similar culture. I probably would have said more, “I think you should change this. I would not know the problem until you tell me.” But this I know it’s cultural. It’s not going to change. And I am not going to infringe upon that she is not going to do it. It’s not in their culture.

Dealing with a Large Number of People

Interviewee #13 acknowledged that he would not assess Thais and Americans in the same manner because he had to work with a large number of people, and he was the only foreigner. However, he would try to treat them similarly.

#13 292-296: No, probably not [have the same judgment], even though I try to. I got about 200 people working for me in Asia, and I try to be very leveled. The only difference is that I'm the only foreigner (laugh), I used to have a mix of people. I try to be even-handed in that regard, in handling different conflicts.

Evaluating Outspoken Thais More Favorably

This final topic suggests that some Americans would evaluate Thais more favorably than Americans when they act in a direct and straightforward manner. Two American participants responded along this line:
The Effects of Exposure to Other Cultures (RQ5)

This part of the investigation aimed at exploring data pertaining Research Question 5: “How do the gender of the person and exposure to other cultures affect preferences for and perceptions of the styles of conflict management that Thais and Americans working in multinational organizations report?” Only exposure to other cultures was explored in any detail, because for gender, there were very few American women participants. The interviews focused on how exposure to Thai or other collectivistic cultures affected conflict behavior, as well as perceptions related to it.

Behavior

Change in Behavior

Being More Process-Focused

One American participant indicated that exposure to other cultures influenced his behavior in a way that showed he was now more concerned about face and relationship issues when interacting with the Thais. The participant, Interviewee #20, noted that he was more aggressive and hot-tempered before he came to Thailand. Living in Thai culture made him more aware of face and relational issues. It made him more cautious...
and willing to communicate in a way that fostered positive relationships. (The excerpt was mentioned once in the Thai with a collectivistic orientation under “being process-focused.”)

#20 344-359: I think you always need to be aware of the face issues. ... And you always need to be careful to protect the relationship beyond the specific incident and really keep the cool head, keep in mind it’s a long term game. If you lose your cool in certain cultures, you’d better understand what the consequences of that are. …You could alienate that person for the rest of you expatriate days in that country or for life or for whatever.

Researcher: So you are more careful about the face issue and the relationship issue when you deal with a conflict?

#20: Yeah, I definitely was more fireball when I first came to the country in 1990 than I am today. No question about that.

Using Indirect/Nonconfrontational Conflict Behavior

This topic highlighted Americans’ reported changes that involved greater use of such strategies as avoiding and obliging. Three participants mentioned of these sorts of indirect styles.

Interviewee #13, for example, noticed a change in his behavior and felt that it had been moving toward the Thai styles. He reported using an obliging style once in a while.

#13 339-353: I think the experience of having been in Asia so many many years, my way of handling conflict is moving toward the Thai ways (laugh).

Researcher: Even with Americans?

#13: Yes, even with Americans.

Researcher: Can you expand on that?

#13: I was really taking a softer approach to conflict than I used to. Move to some way that I would be able to prioritize the conflict of to what the importance of it is. And in some cases even go as far as giving in because it is not worth conflicting on it. You can't (pause), there are 3 ways of doing things. My way, your way, and our way. I kind of like our way, but
I never insist on my way if someone can show me their ideas as well even if I am a MD.

Relying More on High-Context Values

This category focuses on tendencies to pay more attention to indirect behavior and context. Four Americans felt that the exposure to the Thai culture changed their behavior in this direction. They reportedly now tend to use a softer approach when dealing with Thais and are less confrontational, less aggressive, and less straightforward with other Americans as well. Interviewee #27 suggested that she had learned more about high-context culture and that she was trying to be sensitive to and detect environmental clues in addition to verbal clues alone. The change of behavior also affected the way she dealt with Americans.

#27 324-337: Yes, definitely. Just that I definitely was just more of an outspoken confrontation person. Now I am actually more conscious of nonvisible nonoutward reactions and stuff. I try to notice things if people are acting a little bit different or I constantly ask around people, “Is everybody OK?” Is there anything, instead of asking everyone directly. “Are you OK?” is asking a lot of people around “If there are anything going on? Are people OK here?” because, there is generally, they would be the first to hear about it. But also more attentive to subtlety. Because you can’t count on anyone to actually tell you when there is a problem. And then also I think personally I am much more patient in dealing with problems. I don’t raise my voice much and I don’t get as vocal as I can be.

#27 340: Yes, it pervades other, just a whole natural office dynamic. I think I am different even toward Americans.

Learning How to Deal with High Power-Distance Values

In a high power-distance culture, the chain of command is strictly followed. Understanding how this works, Interviewee #23 knew whom he should approach and include in meetings so he does not have to be frustrated about Thais’ not being able to make decisions.
You know how to tempering your tone of voice, hierarchical, who you should address in the situation. At this point, I was dealing with the deputy managing director of the factory. That is the top notch person I brought over the owner of the factory. I wouldn’t deal with anybody else, if I deal with anyone else, because ultimately he would make the decision anyway. So at times you can deal with a lesser management, at times you need to pull in the number one guy. Because ultimately, in the decision like that, he is the one who make the decision anyway.

In meetings, you need to know who to talk to. You don’t look at the guy who is giving you the information. You might acknowledge him, but you need to keep in contact with the highest level person in the room. That happens quite a bit.

**Restraining Emotion**

Emotional expression tends to be common and acceptable in American culture. In Thailand, the ability to control one’s emotion is highly valued. Showing anger or extreme emotion is perceived as inappropriate and unrefined. Four American participants reported that they were calmer and less expressive of their strong emotions, such as anger. Interviewee #5, for example, asserted that living in Thailand (as well as some other Asian cultures) helped him learn to control his emotions:

#5 376-380: I have to learn to control my reaction to things that people say. I also come here and have to learn not to snap back at somebody, quite a common thing that you might hear is, we tend to find the topic of, and it is probably the language thing, I don't know, but it's quite rude compare to our cultures.

**Learning How to Deal with Thais’ Quietness**

Responses that reflect this category were those mentioning the specific ways to interact with Thais to solicit their thoughts and ideas. Two Americans shared tips concerning how to deal with Thais’ unwillingness to open up.
Interviewee #7 suggested that asking additional questions would get the process going. He allegedly put in extra effort to try to encourage the Thais to speak their minds.

#7 78-82: I ask additional questions. If they are very quiet about something, I ask either something semi-related to the subject just to get them talking again. And that usually gets them going. And I can redirect the conversation back to the problem and that usually open up some more information.

#7 369-376: I am more tolerant and more open. I work really hard to try and get those individuals to open up to me so I can get them to contribute and tell me things because always they working on good ideas and project so you want to get them to express it so they can get credit for their work. So, I think I'm usually, if I encounter somebody like that, I just am very tolerant. I make sure I go out of my way to encourage them to present their own ideas and then expressed their own opinions.

Interviewee #9 claimed to ask Thais to speak up and express their ideas before offering his own ideas.

#9 254-260: For me the, I understand the culture so most of the time when I go into the meeting I try to solicit their input before I gave my input. Because my mind is not go to change so I know what I'm in to say. So I know if I say something and it's not the viewpoint that they are going to give, the likelihood is that I am not going to hear that. They are going to go ahead and agree.

**Being More Patient**

Becoming more patient was one of the changes in behavior that several American participants mentioned. Being more patient comprises the ability to accept the way Thais operate and not trying to push issues. Five participants reflected on their experience and reported that the exposure to Thai culture, as well some other Asian cultures, led them to be more patient.

Interviewee #21, for example, discussed his understanding of the process by which the Thais deal with conflict, which is quite slow, but effective. He admitted becoming more patient and using calmer approaches to conflict.

#21 286–293: I would say more patient. Because I assume that they have a method of dealing with the issue which is ultimately effective, but from
the point of raising the issue to the point of getting the results, you have to understand exactly what is happening, rather than trying to expedite it by being angry, you have to be patient because you trust that people will eventually do what you want, but it may take a certain period of time.

#21 303-306: I think so. I think I was kind of have changed anyway. But I think I became more patient in dealing with the conflict, approaching it from a calmer perspective. But it wasn’t like a miracle or something like that.

Interviewee #27 simply declared that (This remarks by Interviewee #27 was mentioned earlier in regard to “relying on high-context values”):

#27 335-337: And then also I think personally I am much more patient in dealing with problems. I don’t raise my voice much, and I don’t get as vocal as I can be.

Learning to Listen More

When living in another culture, the ability to listen to others is very important. Because the assumptions and rules from one culture might not apply to another, attentive listening can facilitate interactions. Interviewee #7 found that exposure to other cultures taught him to listen more and commented that better listening benefited him in many ways.

#7 335-340: Growing up in America before I lived internationally, I think a lot of young people don't learn how to listen. A lot of old people don't know how to listen, so overseas experience has taught me to listen a lot more to what other people have to say, and to try to utilize their ideas in successful solutions to a problem.
No Change in Behavior

Behavior Reflective of Individual Differences

One participant declared that the exposure to other cultures did not have an effect on his behavior. He contended that the way he acted in conflict situations was mainly the result of his personality, experience, and common sense.

#8: Definitely depends on who the person is. Sometimes it's just (pause) me personally, no matter if I came over here or not. I am a pretty calm person. It is not going to be an extreme different. Being over here, depends on who is the person you have a conflict with or workplace you have a conflict; for example, if in Korea, I may deal with it a little bit more strongly, or more aggressively, and more directly instead of if I am having a conflict here. Because I know, being a little bit cultural sensitive, we know you have to deal with it differently. So some of that is experience and some of it is just, to me, a lot of common sense.

Perception

Uncertain of Effects

When the discussion involved how the exposure to other cultures affected their perceptions of the other in the conflict situation, some participants indicated that they were uncertain about the effects. For instance:

#17 210-212: Um (pause), you might see a lot more of cross section on how people deal with conflict, so that might give you a little more insight. I really don’t know (pause).

#21: 312-317: I think it’s strange, but I think when people come here, first, they became more sympathetic. But when they come here and understand how things work, they become more of cynical. From my perspective, I would say my comprehension has changed in 4 years. But (pause), it’s hard to answer the question, I am not sure.
Change in Perception

*Being More Understanding of Other Cultures*

Five participants felt that the exposure to other cultures provided them with the insight into some cultural values, the way people think, and act. Interviewee #6, for example, showed an understanding of the different way people do things in different cultures and noted he felt comfortable with those different ways.

#6 134-138: Because I have worked in other countries that are outside of my own country for so long, and [I am] comfortable with [the way] other cultures do things, I recognize that sometimes the Thais have the appropriate way of doing things. And I am comfortable with that.

Understanding of the culture did not always imply being influenced by or conforming to the culture. Although contending that he understood the counterpart’s way of thinking and her objectives, Interviewee #1 still felt that his counterpart was not as persuasive when she proposed not to report the employees’ violation of company’s rules.

#1 211-217: I know the exposure to Thai culture makes me know a lot more about what she is thinking, what is her objective in this whole thing. But from my own perspective, when I look at it through my own culture, I think she has a pretty weak argument. And I am not that impressed by it. And I'd just don't think that the workers should be treated that way.

*Being More Tolerant*

The *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (2003) (from the website: http://dictionary.cambridge.org/results.asp?searchword=Tolerance) defines tolerance as “Willingness to accept behaviour [sic] and beliefs which are different from your own, although you might not agree with or approve of them” and “The ability to bear something unpleasant or annoying, or to continue existing despite disadvantageous conditions.” Two American participants stated that they were more tolerant after having been overseas for a while.

Interviewee #5 talked about his ability to stand frustrating situations:
#5 426-436: I'm a lot more tolerant. Tolerance is one thing you have to have when working in any new cultures. But especially in Asian cultures, I think. Your ability to just deal with things that normally would frustrate you (pause). If you allow yourself to become frustrated, you won't get anywhere. You won't get help. Or if you will, you won't get respect, or it won't be done very well.

Interviewee #7 was more accepting and open to different behavior.

#7 363-365: I would say I am more tolerant than before I lived overseas. I think how I judge people is much more (pause), I am less judgmental of other people than I used to be.

*Withholding Judgment*

This category encompasses responses pertaining to the way the participant tried to search for reasons behind an action before making a decision or judgment about the counterpart’s behavior.

Among the seven participants who mentioned this topic, Interviewee #9 provided a vivid description of the change in his evaluation of others in a conflict situation because of the softer, gentler approach Thai people often use.

#9 397-401: Yes, because Thailand is a more kinder and gentler country, I would say. So working here has allowed me to step back more before I made a decision or an impression of an individual versus Americans usually very forthright very easy to just snap.

#9 403-412: If you see an individual that is not getting work done, it is very easy to say this guy is a poor performer, and that is all there is to it versus if there is something of that causing this poor performance. Is there something in his personal life that affects his work environments? And so I think, the kinder gentler Thailand allows me not to make negative judgment up front. It's more when I made a judgment by trying to get a little bit more to make sure I have the facts, whereas before I might say I have enough information here and there is only two pieces of information.

Interviewee #17 also revealed how he tried to find explanations for the counterpart’s behavior, such as displays of shyness, and might even have evaluated the person more favorably than he would have prior to exposure to other cultures.
#17 218-228: Yes, that’s true. I might be a little more (unclear) someone as shy. Still not as much as (unclear) (pause). You talked about I am going back to the U.S. and see someone as shy (pause) I can’t say it. It has been so long (pause). I might (pause). I don’t know. I would be more aware that there might be somebody that there might be a lot going on. They might just not be forthcoming. From that aspect, I would, I am more aware, give a higher mark. Likewise, I am more tuned to the guy who is not being shy all the time. So maybe it would give me more perceptive. But whether I would still rank them 5 or not, I don’t know. But I would put more reasons to it.

Seeing Shades of Gray

This topic reflected the change in tendencies to see things as absolutely right or wrong, with nothing in between. Two American participants recognized a change of their thought process and believed that they were more flexible and saw things more in a gray area.

Interviewee #13, for instance, noted that he saw things as gray after being in Asia for a while; however, there were certain matters that he still considered in a black and white manner, such as follow-through with the promise to get work done.

#13 361-371: Sure, I think over the year, my attitudes have moved a little bit, maybe that might be a function of age too (laugh). I think I am wiser now, so I have to see what battle’s worth fighting. I see a lot more gray areas than when I was younger or before I came to Asia. There are a lot of gray areas. It is not everything we see is black and white. I see a lot more in the gray zone. I usually do the black and white. And there are certain things that I always push, like when someone agrees to do something, they either do it or not do it.

Widening Perspectives

The ideas encompassed by this topic were ones involving awareness of differences that exist in other culture. Six participants reported that being in another culture gave them broader perspectives about many issues, such as how people behave, different reasons behind behavior, human frailty, etc.
Interviewee #23, as one illustration, reported that he was more open to the fact that there are many sides of an issue, and it was easier for him to admit that he was wrong.

#23 262-266: I am much better looking at both sides knowing that what I know is not always correct. I might not have been given the correct information. I am much easier to say that I am wrong, much more willing to admit that maybe I don’t have the facts or maybe there are two sides of the issues.

Interview #27 allegedly came to the awareness that there are many types of people and the way messages are communicated.

#27 352-367: The whole experience has given me a different appreciation for how to treat people over all. … I am much more sensitive to other types of communication rather than what people are saying. You kind of taking for granted if you are in the U.S. that everyone is going to tell you what’s wrong, that you can just communicate what you are trying to say. And here it’s not. There are all these other ways that you have to try to communicate your messages. That had changed my impression of other people and over all reaction to other people. Whether it be someone working in the store or someone working directly with me or the big minister that I meet with. Anyway, it definitely, I am much more comfortable to other ways of getting messages across, instead of the direct language.

Losing Respect for People Who are not Culturally Sensitive

Two American participants noted their disapproval and negative judgments when seeing people, especially Americans, reacting in an aggressive or a culturally insensitive manner toward others.

Interviewee #8 admitted seeing such situations as comical and even losing some respect for the person displaying the behavior.

#8: 448-463: Yes, probably [my perspective has changed]. I have seen a lot of situations whether there is a tourist or the expats. You see them come in and deal super aggressively with or get angry with the situation, and you kind of see it’s comical, where you can see that this person is going to go nowhere in dealing with a conflict situation like this. And I don't mean to say that a lot of times you don't be very aggressive. Sometimes you might be frustrated, and you have to get your point across,
but you have to be careful, as I've seen a lot of situations where I would look at and lose a little bit of respect for somebody who didn't deal with it as smartly or as culturally sensitive as they should be. Because if you are going to come into a place like this to work, a place like this, or place like Korea, or anywhere, you should do a little bit of homework and knowing what the characteristics are, what are the cultural sensitivities. You can see it, a lot mistakes being made.

**Thai Exposure to American Culture and Behavior Change**

Using Direct/Confrontational Conflict Behavior

Two American participants mentioned that some of their Thai colleagues who had been educated in the U.S. and exposed to American culture acted in the same manner as typical Americans. Both of them talked about the use of a direct conflict style. For example, Interviewee #25 recognized that her Thai colleague was not shy and tend to deal with conflict directly.

#25: 12-15: Yes, I have two [Thai people that she conflict with]. One was with a peer, well not a peer actually. Well, this guy, he is my peer in every way. He has been educated in the U.S. so he is not shy about (pause) handling conflict. He is not shy about getting involved in them.

#25 36-39: His English was very good. There was no difference communicating with him or another American. He was in a college in America for probably 4 years. So he used to deal and used to the USA way of doing things.

Other Factors

In addition to national culture and organizational culture, the American participants noted other factors that could or did influence the way they manage conflict in the workplace.
Age/Experience/Maturity

The experience and maturity that comes with age were reportedly factors that are important to conflict behavior and perception. Four American participants made comments in line with this topic. Interviewee #6, for instance, stated that:

#6 243-252: The way an individual deals with conflict, I would say, absolutely age and experience. As the person matures, s/he learns more about the world and learns how to accomplish all tasks more effectively. Hopefully, right? So what I see with young employees as they worked here are not only do they gain professional competency, but they gain a cultural competency for working effectively in this hybrid environments. And so they grow personally, they are growing knowledge, and they've grown experience and that includes interpersonal relationships.

Nature of Occupation

Four participants suggested that the type and characteristics of an occupation also make a difference in how people deal with conflict in the workplace. Working as analyst, Interviewee #1 responded that his focus on strong argument and analytical skills partly stemmed from his daily job.

#1 360-371: So I think in some case people don't think it through. They just come at you. And that is a weak argument. And when I hear weak arguments, I just attack. And that is my job as an analyst. My job is to build arguments that based upon evidence that I can come up with and promote those arguments and then attack the arguments that seem to me to not based on evidence, based on feelings or wrong feelings, or whatever. And your job is to judge based upon how strongly, how good argument you come up with, and how strongly you can defend those arguments, and how strongly you can counterattack another argument. So in that way, my (pause), because my job may be a typical for what's a manager type of job is.
**Education**

Comments mentioning the effects of education on the way people behave and their perception in a conflict situation surfaced. Three participants discussed branch of study, college environment, and level of education as making differences. For example, Interviewee #17 stated that people with different levels and types of education have different worldviews that could influence their behavior and thoughts in conflict situation.

#17 176-188: That was about the real conflict I went into. In general, I think you have to make sure that there is no misunderstanding in terms of language and (pause) that is mostly it. The thing is the people we work with here, they all have been to universities, and they all are scientists or engineers in general. So they pick up (pause), they have a different worldview than, say, someone who may not have much education or someone who didn’t go to college somewhere. That may lead to different values just like Americans who have come from different backgrounds. So we have common ground and that well of thought. You know, people value things differently.

**Language**

Reliance on a different language created additional obstacles for communication. Two participants indicated that sometimes a conflict emerged merely because of misunderstanding in regard to language.

Interviewee #7 recalled:

#7 83-87: Generally speaking, a lot of times, it's just a language barrier more than anything else. They don't know the right words necessarily in English to explain to me what the problem is, and my Thai is still not good enough to be able to discuss it with them in Thai.

Interviewee #25 recalled that the language barrier affected the way she and her counterpart dealt with conflict:

#25 93-97: I don’t ever talk about why we had a conflict or what is the matter with you. We have never talked about that. Because (pause), first of all there was a language problem. Though he speaks English, but he doesn’t always understand the finer language.
#25 186-191: I think he should have (pause), I don’t think he should have gotten angry. I think he should have talked about what he didn’t understand or (pause). But I think he got frustrated because he doesn’t think he has good English. So it’s hard for him to talk because he doesn’t think he can explain himself well either. So there were two things going on.

**Individual Differences**

Various participants were not completely convinced that their behavior and perceptions in conflict situations were the products of national culture. They felt that cultural stereotypes were not always operative. Individual differences, to them, had greater influence. Four participants responded in this manner. Interviewee #5, for example, observed that his instincts guided his interaction more than cultural norms.

#5 139-145: Probably not my cultural background. But maybe my own experiences and the way I grew up. Maybe somewhat to me as an individual with some unpleasant cultural background. I believe I'd rather talk about things than to let things steam under the surface. That if you get into things that is going really bad, it may take a long time to (unclear), and I think that's influences the way I treat people.

#5 162-169: I guess to some extent my culture, or the one I've been exposed to told me to do something totally different. My instincts told me to do something, to understand why the guy was racking the way he was, not taking it personally. That would probably not be what cultural norm is in that kind of situation. We have to fight fire with fire. That was the culture in which I worked, but not my personal culture, which is culture I try to spread.

**Multiple Backgrounds**

Instead of attributing the sources of behavior and perception to one factor, Interviewee #13 reported that the multiple backgrounds he carried with him combined to affect the way he dealt with conflict.

#13 206-219: No. I think I understand the question, but it's hard to put this together because my cultural background is rather odd. I was born and
raised in the middle of nowhere in Canada. So consequently, I have a little
different culture background. I think you will find this in your study. It
depends on where the person is born and raised in America. If they are
city dweller, they might have one co-culture, but if they are country folks,
they will have another. So it's difficult to answer the question. Most of
(pause), when it comes to a business related conflicts, most of those have
more to do with the company's approach to business and the process that
involved in that than a personal cultural background. And I also have a
long military background as well, so that probably play a lot into it, the
way I personally do things.

**Recommendations**

At the end of the interview, recommendations and additional comments about
how the interviewees thought people should manage conflict in MNCs that consisted of
people in different cultures were solicited. Various topics emerged.

**Resisting the Tendency to Overgeneralize**

This category included warnings about a heavy reliance on cultural stereotypes.
Four participants made pertinent comments.

Interviewee #1, for instance, noted that he found that some of the descriptions and
recommendation in books, such as guidebooks to Thailand, were not always accurate.

#1 479-483: The first thing [you are] supposed to say to people is that,
"Don't scream and yell." But on the other hand, I would tell some people
that I wouldn't necessary believe in the books like culture shock or how to
work with Thais. I don't think that I have seen a lot of very tough Thai
bosses.

In a similar vein, Interviewee #27 advised that while stereotypes should be
acknowledged, one needs to deal with the situation at hand without holding onto
stereotypes.

#27 386-389: How can you sort of acknowledge those stereotypes all
those cultural aspects? Acknowledge it, but also make a step from the
beginning to make sure that wouldn’t become a problem.


**Listening**

Two participants felt that listening is crucial when working with people from various cultural backgrounds. Interviewee #25 stressed the importance of listening in the following way:

#25 366-370: I think you have to be listening more. You have to listen and be more sensitive to people around you. You can’t categorize people right off the bat. You have to take another look at the people around you and get to know them a little better before you form opinion.

**Communicating Your Preferences**

Taking action to let others know how you feel and what your preferences are could be beneficial when handling conflict with people from different cultures who might have different values and assumptions. Interviewee #27 regretted not having done that up front, so she made an effort to make newcomers aware of her preferences.

#27 381-386: Also maybe it could be trying to communicate right up front what your preferences are. I didn’t do it then, but with some of the newer people, I told them more. “I am approachable. I want you to come and tell me that if there is a problem. Please do that.”

**Being Patient**

Interviewee #21 simply stated that patience was essential to managing conflict in general, not necessarily intercultural conflict in particular.

#21 388-392: I think patience is one of the most important points of dealing with a conflict. It is the most helpful thing to finally resolution to what you want. That is the only thing I want to add.
**Withholding Judgment**

Finding reasons behind an action before making any judgment about a conflict party was important from the perspective of Interviewee #17.

#17 244-247: Try to understand each other. You have to learn something about the other person. Aware (pause) always give people the benefit of a doubt. Try to figure out why they do what they do.

**Being Prepared**

Being prepared encompassed the collection of evidence, as well as analyzing the conflict situation at hand before engaging in conflict interaction. Interviewee #23 raised the point that being prepared by thinking about the time that will be spent, as well as to whom the issue should be directed, would lead to better outcomes frequently.

#23 300-310: Yeah. You need to maintain, you need to be prepared. In any culture, you need to be prepared. You need to know that everything is not going to get resolved in 30 minutes. It might take a considerably longer time. You need to know who to direct your issues at, who can push the right buttons. A lot of times you don’t need to go to the top. You need to keep the person. If there is a conflict, maybe you need not go to the very top person all the time. One of the things I did when I first got here, I always go to the top person of the factory. It’s just like crying wolf because eventually, they stop accepting your issues. Just like crying wolf.

**Being Sensitive and Learning about Other Cultures**

When having to work in a multicultural environment, knowledge about other cultures, as well as sensitivity toward other cultures, would lead to a better understanding among members of the organization. Two participants reflected on this idea. Interviewee #26, for example, stated that:

#26 350-354: I would suggest that in MNCs, when you emerge in a culture that different than your own, educate yourself. Educate yourself in the cultural behavior that you emerge in and be aware. Ask your colleagues. They help you in a sense to understand these differences.
Perceptions of Thai Interviewees

Attitudes Toward Conflict

The attitudes Thai participants had toward conflict were similar to those of the American participants. The same three topics emerged among Thai participants: conflict is pervasive, simple disagreement is not *ipso facto* reflective of conflict, and conflict can be either functional or dysfunctional.

Conflict is Pervasive

Three Thai participants viewed conflict as a common phenomenon in the workplace. Interviewee #3, for example, indicated that conflict was part of organizational life and emerged on a daily basis.

#3 14-17: There are many conflicts. In fact, there are a lot of conflicts that we can find in the daily life. That is part of the work. But in [name of the company], we have a unique corporate culture. We don't see conflict in a negative way. We see conflict as challenges.

Simple Disagreement is not Considered Conflict

Despite the operational definition provided and discussions about what was considered *conflict* for this study, two Thai participants refused to consider differences in opinion as conflict. To them, the word *conflict* refers to a more complicated and serious interaction than merely a simple disagreement. Interviewee #10 stated:

#10 13-16: Different people might have different definitions for conflict. The conflict may originate from differences in opinion. The differences in opinion might not be considered conflict, or the conflict that is not serious.

#10 79-82: If you call this situation a conflict, it is kind of a little bit too serious. I would call it more different opinions. In my opinion, the word *conflict* contains the connotation that involves some quarrel.
Conflict can be Functional or Dysfunctional

Two Thai participants believed that conflict could have positive or negative results. Interviewee #26 insisted that, depending on how people deal with conflict, they could gain more respect or create enemies.

#16 141-154: In general it [relationship] should not change. It depends on how you handle the conflict. If you deal with it in the right way, I am sure sometimes they may respect you more. Because if you can offer a rationale and explain to them and let them know that, “yes” they are (pause). You don’t want to point to them that they are wrong, but make them understand that they make a mistake. Or in the line of thinking they may overlook something here and there. And you look at it more (unclear) because of your experience and your knowledge, you can handle the situation better. If they agree with you, they accept you, you can end up gaining their respect by doing that, instead of personal hardship or bad feelings. If you handle it the wrong way, you can create an enemy in your workplace. You cannot get cooperation from that person, and he will always be your enemy most of the time anyway.

The same comment from Interviewee #3, which reflected the idea “conflict is pervasive,” also revealed the thought that conflict can be functional. Interviewee #3 maintained that due to his corporate culture, conflict was considered as challenging.

#3 15-17: But in [name of the company], we have a unique corporate culture. We don't see conflict in a negative way. We see conflict as challenges.

Conflict Issues

The conflict issues described were categorized into task-related and relational issues. When the focus was about achieving substantive goals, the narrations were considered task-related. When the conflicts revolved around personal connections, face issues, or relationships, they fell under the heading of relational issues. Among thirteen Thai participants, eight of the issues reported were task-related, and two were relational in nature. Some Thai participants were not able to recall a specific conflict situation, so
they were to talk about conflict situation in general. These general descriptions were not included in this category.

**Task-Related Issues**

Three task-related topics reported by the American participants were also prevalent in Thais’ narrations concerning conflict issues. These topics included: having different opinions about a task, having different approach to a task, and having miscommunication about a task.

Having Different Opinions about a Task

Four participants provided examples of conflicts they had, which revolved around the differences in opinion that directly related to their tasks. Interviewee #3 illustrated the disagreement he had with his American colleague regarding the accuracy of a map created by the company and one created by the government. He believed that the government’s map was correct; the American insisted on using the company’s map.

#3 76-80: This American worker believed that the map created by [name of the company] was correct. At the same time, the Thai workers believed that the map generated by the company was wrong, comparing [sic] to the government’s. The government's map was correct.

Having Different Approaches to a Task

When the conflict issues were associated with different way to complete the task, not about the task per se, they were labeled as “different approaches to a task.” Four participants responded in line with this topic. Interviewee #15, for instance, recalled a conflict with his American superior about the approach to work. Even when the results turned out to be the same, the American counterpart was not satisfied when he used the approach that did not meet the superior’s expectations.
There were some problems relating to work. I worked for the Americans the way they wanted, but sometimes there might be different opinions. For example, I did something and felt that the answer would be the same way as what the American wanted, but the approach might not be what he expected. But I get the same final answer. Sometimes he saw that as incorrect, not right, according to what he expected.

Having Miscommunication about a Task

Miscommunication can be a source of conflict in a workplace. One participant felt that the conflict she had with her American colleague stemmed mainly from miscommunication.

I think my colleague was having a misunderstanding about me trying to interfere into his job and tried to make a decision on his behalf.

Personal/Relational Issues

The following investigation focused on conflict issues that were associated with interpersonal relationship of the conflict parties. Two prevalent topics were face threats and dislike of communication styles.

Face Threats

Conflict that emerged because of the concern about face embodied this category. One participant who voiced this topic discussed the conflict between herself and another Thai person. Interviewee #14 noticed that her conflict party felt offended after she shared the information about some mistakes reported by a foreign branch of the company with her (the conflict counterpart). Even though the interviewee’s main purpose was to share information, the other party felt that she was being held responsible for the mistakes. Presumably, she might have felt that her public self-image was threatened.
Her department was responsible for following up with the factory about the accuracy of the information, so I shared this information with her. However, it turned out that she got defensive.

Dislike of Communication Styles

Personal preference or dislike of certain communication styles can contribute to a conflict. One participant asserted that the conflict she had with her American colleague primarily emerged from her personal dislike of sarcasm. She would not have been disturbed if her American colleague talked to her nicely about the problem with which he needed her assistance. She was displeased by his use of sarcasm.

He said, “Because the place you sit is not as hot as inside, that’s why you don’t really care.” So we were quite unhappy with each other.

No, [the way he dealt with conflict was] not effective. This depends on a person too. I myself don’t like this method, the sarcasm. Just tell me, “I can’t take this anymore.”

Conflict Styles (RQ1)

In response to Research Question 1, “What styles of the conflict management do Thais and Americans working in multinational organizations prefer?,” the conflict management styles reported by the Thai interviewees were explored. Both the styles reportedly displayed by the Thais and their descriptions of the conflict behavior displayed by Americans were included.

The reported conflict interactions were categorized according to Rahim’s (1983) five conflict management styles (dominating, integrating, compromising, obliging, and avoiding) and Ting-Toomey et al.’s (2000) three styles (emotional expression, third-party help, and neglect). In addition, the use of the combination of styles was reported by Thai participants.
Dominating

As mentioned earlier, the interactions that capture the dominating style are those that reflect concern for one’s own goals, while paying little attention to the other party’s goals. Dominating style also refers to the behavior that demonstrates the reliance on authority or power to get what a person wants, without taking much into consideration of others ideas or investing the issues. Five participants referred to the use of dominating styles, which were, in all cases, displayed by Americans.

Interviewee #4 expressed his disappointment with the way the team leader in one of the projects in which he was involved behaved. The American counterpart handled the task the way he wanted and did not listen or pay attention to inputs from other team members.

#4 58-64: Because he is the project manager, so he should have communicated to listen to everybody, to receive inputs, not just to bombard the team members with his inputs, and not receiving anything from the team members. So in that case, [there is] no need to form the team because he himself can do it alone. So in that case, I usually report to the superior rather than to fight back in the meeting.

#4 81-88: In this case, the guy went ahead with the project. The project [was] finished in time, and everybody, including me got the bonus, or what we called a reward for the job well done. But to me, it was not a well done job. I did not agree with that procedure from the beginning. But since the majority of the team or the team leader decided to do it this way, and he got the support from the superior, I had no choice but to go along.

Interviewee #11 provided an example of how his American conflict counterpart (a vice president of the company) used his authority simply to give Interviewee #11 an order without investigating the situation or seeking any of his ideas.

#11 32-33: He just simply said that, “You were ordered to do that, so please do it.” And that is the end of the conversation.
**Integrating**

As mentioned in the first part of the chapter, an integrating style encompasses attempts to investigate issues to find alternatives that are acceptable to all parties. Both one’s own goals and the other person’s goals are taken into account when managing a conflict. From the interviews with Thai participants, two aspects of the conflict behavior described fit this category.

Interviewee #10, for example, implied the use of integrating style when he involved in a conflict with his American colleague. The behavior fell into this category because there was an attempt to explore the issue, and, in the end, both Interviewee #10 and his counterpart came to an agreement about the issue. Although the American counterpart did not get a helicopter to station in his field, he understood the reasons and had learned from the conflict.

#10 54-63: In the end, we discussed this in the meeting. We discussed using reasons. He had the perspective that he should have gotten an equal treatment, if one field had a helicopter, why couldn’t he have one. He just came into the company, so he didn’t know the background. That was his idea. We explained to him that the field that I am responsible for needed to have a helicopter because it was very large and had a lot of people working in it. It was a much larger field. But his field was smaller and had less people. Within the gulf of Thailand, we only had one helicopter station overnight for an emergency purpose.

**Compromising**

A compromising style, you will recall, highlights give-and-take behavior. Each party sacrifices something to receive something in return or to reach a middle ground. One Thai participant felt that American people often use a style that only makes oneself look good, whereas Thais rely more on compromising. She described the Thai general tendency to use compromising style and the behavior that would reflect this style.

#12 125-133: Americans solve problems (pause), American style usually deals with the problem in the way that makes only oneself looks good. But Thai people like to discuss with people. They would ask people about
what they should do, and analyze it, and then solve it. They usually [do] not deal with the problem on their own. Americans would make a decision right then.

Researcher: You said earlier that Americans usually hold on to their ideas and are more aggressive. How do you think Thais usually behave in a conflict situation?

#12: Thai are more compromising.

#12 160-163: Like when there is a conflict, all parties should compromise. You should think about the parties involved. Be sympathetic. Try to put yourself in other’s shoes. Don’t just thinking about yourself.

#12 170-172: Yeah. Not yelling. You might want to give in to others’ wishes on some issues. But in other parts you should get something too, not giving in in all aspects.

**Obliging**

Obliging style includes behavior, such as surrendering to other’s wishes or following the commands, advice, and suggestions of others, usually without much resistance or investigation of the issues. Three Thai participants depicted their use of this type of conflict interaction style. None of the participants reported their American counterparts as employing it.

Interviewee #18, for instance, identified the conflict situation in which he gave in to his colleague’s wishes. He explained that his American counterpart wanted to secure fast approval on a project from the government. Even though he knew it would be difficult and that by doing so, he had to cut through some bureaucratic processes, he still agreed to do what his counterpart wanted.

#18 78-88: He needed to kick out his project within two weeks. He needed to get the answer in two weeks. I should have told him that two weeks was not enough. We needed to send a letter to them [the government officers] if we wanted to know it in black and white [absolute answer], and get a letter back maybe in one month. But I could do that. I didn’t explain to him about the procedure when you deal with the government. But I didn’t tell him. “I said, OK, I can do that.” I bypassed [the procedure]. And he [the person from the government] said, “OK, no problem.” But
when the thing came, the P & ID came, after they took time to review it, it took time to review it, and they said this is not what they wanted. They could not accept that.

Avoiding

When a person attempts to stay away from direct discussion about a conflict or refrain from direct confrontation of the person s/he has a conflict, s/he is displaying avoiding style. From the interview, there was no behavior that fit the category.

Emotional Expression

Emotional expression refers to a display of emotion and a reliance on emotion to guide a conflict. Four Thai participants elaborated on how their American counterparts displayed strong emotion in the conflict (one was an incident occurred in the United States described by Interviewee #2), and one Thai participant described how her Thai counterpart felt offended and depended on this emotional expression style to guide the interaction. (The Americans displays of emotion can be seen in the “displaying emotion” in the “American with an individualistic orientation” section.) Interviewee # 14 described her Thai colleague’s behavior:

#14 115-118: If I were her, I might have been confused as well because the percentage, the performance, and everything that I had been working on were on time and hit the target. But all of a sudden, there was this person brought up the information from the foreign branch and said that I was under target and the performance was weak. That might have been a shock for her. That was why she came to me for an explanation. She might be confused. But her reaction was mixed with her personal emotion.
Third-Party Help

Third-party help is characterized by reliance on a person outside the conflict parties to help mediate the situation. One such incident was reported by Interviewee #3. He described two third-party techniques he utilized when managing conflict with his American counterpart: one was using a lawyer to help clarify the issues, and the other was having a person in authority witness the interaction.

#3 88-89: And the other technique is to ask the expert, basically to get the lawyer involved, both our company's lawyer and the government's lawyer.

#3 136-138: The other tactic I did was, instead of confronting with them one-on-one, I got his supervisor sitting in there too, someone that had the influence over him.

Neglect

Neglect is a passive-aggressive style of conflict. On the surface, this style may appear to be similar to avoiding or obliging, in that the conflict party tends to refrain from direct confrontation or argument. However, when using this style, a person often does something to get back at the conflict party or emits indirect responses in a certain way. For example, some participants talked about reporting the conflict situation or the counterpart’s behavior to the conflict party’s superior, some ignored the conflict party’s comments, and others let the counterpart deal with the task alone. Three Thai participants reportedly used this style when handling conflict with their American counterparts.

Interviewee #3 illustrated several neglect techniques he used with his American counterpart who, he thought, was very stubborn and not listening to other’s advices.

#3 94-115: He was an American. So what we did was, instead of confronting each other and creating more conflict or side effect conflicts, basically, [I] asked his opinion about what he thought about the maps. And he strongly believed that his map was correct. He did not listen to our evidence. He did not listen to our interpretation. So what we did was, instead of talking to him directly, I did two things. One is basically I talked to his supervisor, who happened to be my friend. … And the other
technique was, why confronting him, because the conflict issue was between our company and the government. So what we did was putting together a presentation for a meeting with the government and let him make the presentation. … So he had to listen to the real person, which was the government. There were many lawyers over there. And basically, he had gotten a lot of bad feedback about this behavior so he calmed down.

#3 133-136: The situation did not happen once, many times, and I applied many tactics. For example, one of which was I just smiled and walked away. Basically created frustration for him, let him make a move not me.

Interviewee #16 explained his technique of not paying much attention to the person’s comments and moving on to other topics.

#16 91-99: You don’t really ignore him. You pay attention, but you don’t put the emphasis on what he says there. And you don’t draw any conclusion or make decisions on what he says. You might want to continue to the next point or whatever. You might not want to make him feel bad on that. You don’t pay attention to him that much either. You continue to the next point or slowly move out of the topic he talks about, and you never make any decision or comment on that so people will know and recognize that you might not put an emphasis on that.

Combination of Styles

Responses fitting this category reveal the use of more than one of the styles above at the same time. Two participants shared their experiences of this:

Interviewee #3 characterized the tactics and styles of conflict management he used with his American counterpart, as mentioned earlier in respect to “third-party help” and “neglect.” He, in addition, asserted that the combination of different styles also provided favorable results.

#3 145: I think the combination of tactics work for him.

Interview #16 opined that the best way to deal with conflict was by means of combination of American styles and Thai styles.

#16 207-229: If you blend the two styles that is the best way. I don’t think American styles or Thai styles are the best way. In a conflict, American styles, people speak out what they feel. They don’t care about other people’s feelings. They just speak out and then try to (pause). Sometimes
you are in the world of competition. They try to compete really hard. All they care about are the outcomes. They don’t care about how you get there, as long as “I can achieve my goal. I got the job done, no matter what happen along the way.” That is American style. You look at the bottom line as achievement. If you don’t achieve the bottom line, that’s it. Sometimes they may not care of anything. But the Thai, they are too nice to say “No” or anything, but deep down they may not like it. But in front of the face-to-face, they don’t say anything. Even though they don’t say “No,” but if sometimes, you say “Yes,” or if you don’t say anything, it means “No” also. That style, they don’t want to speak out much. So that’s why Thai styles are too polite. That’s why you want to blend two things together. You want to get the job done, you want to achieve you goals, but try not to [create] hard feelings. The same way as the Thai people, you do anything you want as long as “Bua Mai Cham Nam Mai Khun” [not hurting the feeling of other parties] you can maintain the good feelings and don’t cause bad feelings. However you handle that, if you can do it that way, you are the best.

Perceived Competence (RQ2)

This part of the investigation explored how Thai participants perceive conflict behavior in terms of appropriateness and effectiveness as stated in Research Question 2: “What types of communicative behavior do Thais and Americans working in multinational organizations perceive as effective/ineffective and appropriate/inappropriate in conflict situations?” As in the case of the data for the American participants, perceived competence was divided into perceived situational appropriateness, relational appropriateness, and effectiveness.

Perceived Situational Appropriateness

The topics emerged from the discussion of perceived situational appropriateness were categorized according to their task and relational natures.
Task-Related Topics

When the participants evaluated the behavior of their counterparts in terms of appropriateness and gave reasons for their evaluations in relation to task accomplishment, the responses were placed in the category, “task-related topics.”

Expressing Thoughts and Ideas Openly

Thai participants viewed direct straightforward verbal expression and explanation of one’s thoughts and ideas as appropriate in work-related situations. Four Thai participants provided comments along this line. Two examples that reflected this value were from Interviewees #2 and #22.

#2 124-131: Instead of slamming on the table (pause), he should have convinced us and put the things on the table, pros and cons. If he thought what he had was a better idea, at least he should have brought up the reasons behind it. That explained why it would be a better idea. If he (pause), I don't think he will achieve [his goals] if he reacts like that to people in the meeting. He puts himself in the position that is more awkward in front of people in the meeting. He should have held his emotion for while.

#22 117-125: I think he should have told me directly. He should have came up to me and told me directly that he would like to use this room. … First, he should have told me in advance so I could have fixed it in time because everybody knew that there was this problem [with the air-conditioning]. Second, when he encountered the problem, he should have (pause) asked for my opinion about how we should have dealt with problem, rather than came to me with sarcasm, “Because it’s cool here, that’s why you don’t care.” It made me feel that, “You haven’t told me anything, all of a sudden, you just came to me and being sarcastic.” I didn’t even know what was going on.

Accepting Reasonable Ideas

Six Thai participants considered that if the other party was listening to, open to, and willing to accept other people’s ideas, that would contribute to a favorable
assessment of situational appropriateness. Interviewee #5, for example, emphasized his two main criteria in judgments of appropriateness as being a good listener and respecting group decisions.

#15 167-177: Being appropriate (pause), first of all, is being a good listener. What this means is that, other than expressing your opinion, you should let other express theirs and then compare good and weak points. Good listeners won’t disrupt other people or argue when they are expressing their thoughts and opinions. Second, respect the decision made by the group because it has been made by the people involved in the meetings. If the panel decides to choose “A” route, we should go along with the “A” route. Do not do something else just because you think you are right. Working in a team often is better than working on your own.

Relying on Linear Logic

Two Thai participants highlighted the importance of logical analysis of a conflict situation on their judgment regarding situational appropriateness. The participants reportedly would assess their conflict counterparts more favorably when they rely on inductive or deductive reasoning. Interviewee #14, for instance, felt that her conflict counterpart should have discussed the situation with her to find the source of the problem, instead of being defensive and emotional once the problem was mentioned.

#14 152-157: As I said before, I would schedule a time for discussion formally and do a serious discussion about what is the source of the problem and what is the solution we can offer in this situation. But for this problem, there was no solution offered. She just came over to find out whether she was to blame or not. If not, she would feel relieved.

Being Prepared

The extent to which the other party’s prepared by analyzing the situation and having the needed information before and during the conflict situation two participants regarded as one of the main criteria for being situationally appropriateness. Interviewee #3 noted that being prepared to him involved knowing his position in the conflict, understanding the conflict counterpart, and gathering relevant information and evidence.
#3 269-272: Well, I would see myself first. What kind of the information I have. Even if I know for sure that my map is correct, I need backup supports. I need to know who I am dealing with, who they are, what kind information they may have.

**Being Outcome-Focused**

When the participants focused on the objective end results of the conflict when evaluating another party’s behavior as situationally appropriate, their responses represented in the topic of “being outcome-focused.” Two Thais depended on the final outcomes of the conflict as a standard for their evaluation. Even when the other party simply gave him an order about which he disagreed, Interviewee #11 rated his counterpart as situationally appropriate. He felt that the other person was goal-oriented or aimed at reaching for productive outcome for the company. As Interviewee #11 stated:

#11 96-98: [I think he was appropriate] because it was objective oriented. The reasons I have to have conversation like that because I want him to really understand the market situation.

**Seeking Recommendations**

According to some Thai participants, consulting with or seeking recommendations from other people in the workplace led to a more positive judgment of appropriateness regarding to a situation. The information and suggestions gathered from other people may alleviate a conflict situation since it can provide better understanding and insights about conflict issues. Two Thai participants made comments along these lines. Interviewee #4, for example, felt his counterpart’s self-centered attitude and his unwillingness to consult others who had more experience at work could cause him more problems in the future.

#4 237-244: Whatever he thought it was correct, it was wrong. Even if the presentation he made was wrong, he did not try to consult Thai people or even American people who had been working here long before him.
Some people feel that he thinks he knows a lot, he knows something well, his knowledge or ability, that will trouble him for some times or may be forever if he doesn't change his attitude.

**Reaching a Mutually Satisfying Solution**

To be considered appropriate in a work-related situation, attaining one’s own goals is insufficient. In the perception of Interviewee #12, appropriate behavior is to be judged on the basis of mutual goal achievement. Both parties should reach some of their goals.

#12 199-203: For appropriateness, I think both sides should feel satisfied. You might not reach the highest goal, but the other party should also get something out of conflict as well. No one side gets all the benefit. But in the big picture, the company should benefit the most. That should be OK.

**Relational Topics**

The following topics reflect the rationales behind the judgment of situational appropriateness that were associated with personal connections and face issues.

**Displaying Emotion**

Among the five incidents of emotional expression reported, four were displayed by Americans and one by a Thai. There were two kinds of reaction to displays of emotion. Four Thai participants considered such behavior as inappropriate according to the situation, whereas one showed his understanding of the emotional expression displayed by an American (but not for a Thai).

Interviewee #3 indicated that his American counterpart’s display of anger by pounding his fist on the table was unprofessional in a work-related setting.

#3 242-244: He acted naturally. In fact, his action was fierce. He put his fist on the table. He only showed his map and ignored other evidence.
#3 247-251: But the way that we see from management point of view, he was not acting professionally.

Interviewee #14 expressed her disapproval of emotional displays in the workplace. She assessed her Thai colleague as inappropriate because her behavior created an unhealthy environment among co-workers.

#14 146-149: I don’t think it was appropriate because when you use emotion in the workplace, you make your co-worker feel uncomfortable with your reaction. This doesn’t help building good attitude toward you.

Interviewee #18 was the one participant who felt that his American colleague was behaving appropriately, even when he showed his anger. He expressed his understanding of the American colleague’s frustration. However, his acceptance of emotional displays was target-bound. He reported that the same behavior would not be appropriate if it was displayed by a Thai.

#18 155-159: I think it’s fine. No problem, I accept that. I know he was mad. He was not happy. I understand. So next time I have to understand or get what he wants. He didn’t tell me what he wanted. I didn’t know what he wanted at that time, so we [I] have to be careful on that.

#18 136: For American, I can understand, but for Thai, I cannot accept that.

Having a Personal Relationship

Even when a behavior is seen as inappropriate, a close interpersonal relationship between the conflict parties can reduce the intensity of a negative judgment. Interviewee #2, the one participant who mentioned this topic, presented an example of a conflict situation she experienced and involving an American in the United States. Her American colleague was very emotional and slammed the table in the meeting. She viewed that action as inappropriate, but because she knew the person, she did not take it seriously.

#2 138-142: Well (signing), I don't think it was appropriate. But (pause) to me, it is quite common, maybe because I know him. So I felt it is quite common for him (pause) because everyone in the company knows how he is. I just took it naturally that's how he is.
Being Concerned about Face

An emphasis on face issues surfaced during the portion of the interviews concerning situational appropriateness. Five Thais shared thoughts in line with this topic. Interviewee #16 suggested that one way of saving face was to talk about the conflict problem in a private setting.

#16 74-80: In front of the people in the meeting, when there are conflict you might not want to say something which make him lose face in the meeting. … If you were to do that, people in the whole room might think that he feel lose face to others in the whole room, and he might not like that. Maybe you might want to deal with him on the one-on-one.

Interviewee #4 recommended that being tactful in language usage was crucial in helping others save face.

#4 232-244: I think there is no need to talk about working with Thais or working with Americans. They should not say that other people's ideas are unwise or stupid or whatever. They should accept it and say that, “I would consider it” or “Maybe that is an alternative.” Not to say that, “That is not a good idea” and “The good one comes from me.” But somebody doesn't work to change people's attitude.

Being Respectful

Respecting other’s thoughts and ideas contributes to a positive evaluation of situational appropriateness according to four Thai participants. Interviewee #14, for instance, contended:

#14 202-210: Thai people still like those that are “Ar Loom Ar Loui” [flexible, easy going]. Sometimes working with Americans, you can be direct, but direct regarding to work. But what I am stressing here is that, for Thai people, we have the feelings of brotherhood/sisterhood. We should help each other (pause). So if you say something, if it is relating to work, I can take it, but it also come along with your behavior. If you express your behavior in the way that shows disrespect, or makes other people feel bad, that is not appropriate.

Interviewee #19 indicated that one of her standards for appropriateness behavior was being respectful.
Respectful to other people’s ideas and not to place your own (unclear) on others. Be reasonable and be tolerant.

Following the Chain of Command

High power-distance values affected Thais’ judgment of situational appropriateness. Four participants revealed that other parties’ positions or ranks influenced the way they evaluated others’ behavior.

Interviewee #15, for instance, was frustrated that his American superior did not give him explanations concerning why his ideas were not approved. He, however, felt that his American boss was appropriate because, holding a high management position, he had the right not to do so. In addition, the superior might have some confidential reasons why he could not be completely open.

Interviewee #15: First of all, his rank. He has the highest decision-making power. I look at him, (1) ranking, (2) experience. I see him as appropriate because of these two factors.

Interviewee #22 expressed her discontentment concerning the way her American colleague talked to her about the problem using sarcasm. She felt that he was not her supervisor so he should not have spoken to her that way.

Interviewee #22: Is it appropriate (pause)? I think it is not appropriate because I am not his subordinate. I don’t feel that (pause), at least he should have talked to me nicely. He shouldn’t be sarcastic in making me do what he wanted.

Learning the Language and the Culture

To act appropriately according to the situation, Interviewee #4 advised that foreigners working in MNCs in Thailand attempt to learn the language, as well as about the culture. Other than showing respect to the business partner and the host culture, they would have a better idea about what is appropriate behavior from the Thai perspective. For example, Interviewee #4 said:

#4 111-114: Is it appropriate (pause)? I think it is not appropriate because I am not his subordinate. I don’t feel that (pause), at least he should have talked to me nicely. He shouldn’t be sarcastic in making me do what he wanted.
#4 210-221: I think he should start speaking in Thai. If he thinks he should speak, it means that he cares about the partner he works with. When he starts studying Thai, he will learn some more culture. I don't think that sending him to a cross-cultural class will change his behavior. It is just a few-day class, … But when the person is willing to learn Thai, I think at least he gives respect to the host country. … But I don't think that is the only objective of learning Thai. The deeper parts may be learning the culture so he'd know how to act appropriately or communicate appropriately.

**Being Concerned about Group/Public Benefits**

This topic refers to the evaluation of appropriateness that emphasizes results that would benefit a large group of people. Two participants’ descriptions reflected the focus on public benefit. According to Interviewee #10:

#10 169-171: I focus on doing things that benefit a large group of people and society. And I hope that people do things for society’s benefit as well.

Interviewee #12 gave the highest priority to the company’s benefit. (The following statement also reflected the topic of “reaching a mutually satisfying solution” in the judgment of situational appropriateness.)

#12 199-203: For appropriateness, I think both sides should feel satisfied. … But in the big picture, the company should benefit the most. That should be OK.

**Expressing Understanding/Sympathy**

In conflict situations, the thoughtfulness of the conflict parties can improve the evaluation of the appropriateness of their behavior. Interviewee #11 indicated that if his conflict counterpart had expressed his sympathy and understanding of the situation, it would make the person more appropriate in his eyes than would be the case if he were just giving orders.

#11 109-113: If I were him, it would be a different style. I may say that, “I understand you, but that is the policy coming out from the top. And even when the market is like this, we have to do it no matter what.”
is more to just strictly go and give the order. There are some of the tricks that they can do.

Being Aware of Timing

To some, timing is a crucial factor in evaluation of the situational appropriateness of conflict behavior. Interviewee #12, for instance, stressed that the parties in conflict not discuss the problem when both sides are highly emotional.

#12 207-211: We have to consider (pause) appropriateness in timing. It’s not like if both sides are at the peak of their emotions, and you start the discussion. It might not be good. Appropriateness in terms of timing (pause), wait until both sides cool down a bit.

Achieving Positive Relational Outcomes

Another standard that some Thai participants took into account when evaluating the other party in terms of situational appropriateness was the relational outcome. Two participants volunteered that the effect of the behavior on a relationship following a conflict was one of the determinants of appropriateness. Interviewee #16, for instance, emphasized that the conflict parties should assure that there are no hard feelings between them.

#16 57-70: First of all, after you, when you are assuming that the conflict is over, one thing you have to keep in mind, is that you don’t want to create enemies or hard feelings with the other person. … The bottom line is that you don’t want to have a big fight. You want to have an understanding after it’s over. Don’t leave any hard feeling to either side. Even when you say “No hard feelings,” but deep inside, people always have a feeling. That is why [one should] try to rationalize things. Even though you have a conflict that you can’t agree up on, don’t try to create hard feelings in the other person’s mind.
Perceived Relational Appropriateness

When asked to evaluate the behavior of the counterpart in regard to relational appropriateness, Thai participants provided responses that can be classified on the basis of both task and relational topics. The topics and sub-topics were as follows:

Task-Related Topics

Many participants expressed their views concerning their evaluation of relational appropriateness in relation to task accomplishment.

Expressing Thoughts and Ideas Openly

Two Thai participants valued open and honest discussion in the conflict situation when assessing behavior in regard to relational appropriateness. However, both participants reportedly felt that they were more willing to be open and honest with peers than with their subordinates or superiors. The evaluation of appropriate behavior clearly depended on the relationship between the parties in terms of positions and seniority.

Interviewee #12 contended that straightforward discussion can help clarify the issues and facilitate the exploration of the cause of the problems.

#12 226-235: We should discuss. See what the other person doesn't like and what we are not satisfied with. See if there's something that we can adjust. … Identify the weak points and the cause of the conflict and deal with the conflict at the cause. It is easier to discuss with peers because conflict with peers, usually the conflict revolved around work aspects.

Interviewee #24 revealed his frustration concerning the inequality in expression of ideas and seniority values strongly held in Thai society.

#24 216-223: Well, I feel that everybody should have an equal opportunity to express their ideas. However, with friends I feel that when everybody discuss or disagree on something, I feel that it is OK to discuss it. I don’t have a conflicting feeling in my mind. But with someone in a higher position, I feel that my ideas and my boss’s ideas should have equal
weight. However, I feel that I have some conflicting ideas in my mind that I should feel “Kreng Jai” [reluctance to assert ideas because of the seniority issues] with my boss.

Relying on Linear Logic

Analyzing a situation using an inductive or deductive approach at least one respondent perceived as relationally appropriate conflict behavior. Interviewee #12 felt that her conflict counterpart should have relied on logical reasoning to identify the root of the conflict problem. (Part of the following statement reflected the topic “expressing thoughts and ideas openly” above.)

#12 231-235: Solve the problem by looking at the character of the work, and discuss it. Share a reasonable workload. Identify weak points, the cause of the conflict, and deal with the conflict at the cause.

Being Prepared

Interviewee #16 indicated that he usually dealt with people in different relationships in a similar manner. However, to deal with conflict appropriately, being prepared by assessing the conflict party’s ability to handle conflict rationally was crucial to him.

#16 234-242: I probably deal with all or most of the people in different relationship the same anyway, except the way you try to rational with them. This person can be rational, that person cannot be rational. Some people, no matter how much you explain, they won’t be rational anyway, they will always irrational, so you don’t want to do anything. We just ignore them. You don’t want to pay attention to the conflict at all because you know it doesn’t matter, you can explain all you want, but it doesn’t get anything achieved anyway.
Relational Topics

The assessment of relational appropriateness discussed by the participant inevitably entailed issues regarding interpersonal connections.

Displaying Emotion

Depending on the relationship of the conflict parties, emotional expression can be seen as more or less appropriate. When anger, frustration, or other extreme feelings are displayed by people in a close relationship, they may be viewed as acceptable. However, when conflicts involve colleagues in work setting, emotional displays can negatively affect the person’s self-image, as well as the entire working environment. Interviewee #14, the one Thai who expressed this topic, stated:

#14 161-169: I don’t think so [she was not appropriate] because, as I said earlier, in the workplace, you are not that close to the co-worker. There are different ways to behave when you are with your family and friends. Those people might be able to accept your behaviors because they know you. They might have the emotion up and down also. But when you deal with co-workers, you should be more neutral instead of showing your emotions. Because it doesn’t contribute to your image and it creates poisonous environment and makes your co-worker feel uncomfortable to discuss work with you in the future.

Following the Chain of Command

Following the chain of command was a common topic reflected in Thai participants’ responses about relational appropriateness. Four participants revealed their belief in different treatment of people on the basis of seniority, rank, position, and age. Interviewee #15, for example, asserted that other than the language used, to be viewed as appropriate, nonverbal behavior should also be different when dealing with people of different status.
The way people behave in the workplace, the interaction between superior and subordinate is one style. … How should I say this (pause), “Ka La Te Sa” [appropriateness in regard to time and situation]. The appropriate way you talk, the facial expression (pause), there are a lot of things (pause), body language and everything have to be more formal than a colleague who sits next to you. You will have a much closer relationship with your colleagues. Like if you have a subordinate, you should behave with him in a different way. You have to make the subordinate “Yum Kreng” [respect and be careful when dealing with you]. Like our boss should treat us, like we are his subordinate, in a similar way.

Being Respectful

Showing respect to the conflict party was one of the criteria some Thai participants addressed is discussing what it means to acting in relationally appropriate way. Being respectful encompasses the use of proper language and proper approach toward conflict parties. This topic also includes acceptance of other people’s ideas, behavior, and beliefs, as well as avoidance of possible offenses to others. Two Thai participants discussed this matter.

Interviewee #22, for example, suggested that the appropriate way to deal with conflict was to be respectful, tactful, and polite. She felt that, regardless of the positions or status of the conflict party, being nice and expressing one’s self in a request format would enhance the evaluation of relational appropriateness.

#22 225-231: Actually, no matter what level you are in, no matter if you are a direct subordinate, or boss, or counterpart or whatever, if there is a problem, you should ask nicely or make a request. Usually, Americans in a senior position or a boss, when they give me work, they do it in a very respectful way. When they ask for something, they usually make a request.

Perceived Effectiveness

Thai participants reported various standards on which they rely when judging whether their conflict counterparts are effective in conflict situations.
Task-Related Topics

Several topics that emerged regarding the extent to which the counterparts reach their goals related to task accomplishment.

*Expressing Thoughts and Ideas Openly*

One of the qualities that several Thai participants perceived as a factor leading to favorable evaluations of effectiveness is the willingness to discuss and explain the situation or problems in an open, honest, and straightforward manner. Seven Thai participants expressed ideas reflecting this topic.

As one illustration, Interviewee #15 felt that his American counterpart was somewhat, but not highly effective because he did not openly explain the reasons why he thought Interviewee #15’s ideas were incorrect.

#15 75-80: Because he sometimes “Tad Bod” [cut the conversation short] because he has some reasons that could not be revealed. So I kind of think that I have done my best, but when it is not correct, there is no explanation to why it is not right. Sometimes he has to cut the conversation short. If I have passed that point and becoming more mature, I might understand the game better.

Interviewee #18 explicitly stated that he evaluated straightforward behavior as more effective than implicit interaction, in which the underlying meaning had to be carefully interpreted.

#18: 170-174: The message he tried to deliver to me was straightforward. That is effective, sometimes I like it that way, instead of you don’t know the message he is trying to tell you. But he was straightforward, “I am not happy; you cannot do it again. You have to be more effective than that.” That’s it.

*Accepting Reasonable Ideas*

In conflict situations, some Thai participants also valued the ability to understand
and accept reasonable ideas. Five reported that when their conflict counterparts were listening, being open, and not holding on to their ideas, they felt them to be effective.

Interviewee #2 referred to a conflict she had with an American counterpart in the United States. She felt that being open to other’s ideas would lead to a better decision and facilitate goal achievement.

#2 222-230: Effective, I guess he should be more mature since he was supposed to be a leader in that position. He should have been more mature and more open. To me, reaching a goal means there's more than one way to skin the cat, right? So it doesn't mean that one alternative would be a definite goal or path to reach the goal. So I guess being effective means that if he were to listen to people, he may get a better choice or a better way to reach the goal or probably easier to accomplish the goal.

As another illustration, Interviewee #10 viewed his counterpart as effective even if the person did not reach the original goal set. The evaluation ostensibly stemmed from the counterpart’s acceptance and understanding of the reasons explained.

#10 98-101: In his part, I think he achieved his goal because, at least, he tried. He had an idea and he proposed it and tried to discuss it. Even though he did not get what he wanted, it’s OK. He understood the reasons why he didn't get it.

Relying on Linear Logic

A criterion for effectiveness some Thai participants mentioned was a reliance on point-by-point reasoning approach. Three participants showed such concern. For example, recalling the conflict she had with her Thai counterpart, Interviewee #12 said:

#12 353-357: I think the way to solve problem should start from the cause. We should start from figuring out why other units cannot deal with this problem. We should train and develop them to do the work instead of throwing the job to another department.
**Being Prepared**

This topic reflects a standard of effectiveness that involves the parties’ readiness to deal with the conflict situation. Being equipped with supporting evidence, planning strategies in advance, and analyzing a situation are some factors that lead to better goal achievement. Interviewee #3 gave an example of preparedness in regard to planning conflict strategies.

#3 162-167: So that's why I said, whatever negotiation or conflict tactics that you [use to] deal with the person, you need to plan ahead. You cannot just go in and experiment it one by one. You need to understand the person. You need to find out what kind of person s/he is before applying whatever tactics.

**Being Outcome-Focused**

When evaluating behavior in terms of effectiveness, several Thai participants insisted that they paid a lot of attention on final outcomes of the task. Four participants shared their thoughts on this issue.

For instance, Interviewee #12 contended that while people from Hong Kong tend to be more direct and active, which makes them look more effective, the end results are the same as those achieved by Thais. She focused attention on results more than on the behavior when judging others in terms of effectiveness.

#12 246-251: Yes, people from Hong Kong are much more aggressive and active. But when you look at their effectiveness, you cannot measure it by that. They might look more aggressive, but the end results seem to be similar. Thai seems to be slower, but if the results turn out to be similar in terms of effectiveness, then it is OK. Usually, I focus on results.

Interviewee #24 also emphasized the end results. There were many elements he reportedly considered when judging the effectiveness of the other conflict party.

#24 159-164: I look at end results. I would see how correct the job is. Also I am considering the resources: the time spent and other things used. Even though the results come out correctly, but too much time is spent on dealing with the issue, I wouldn’t think it was effective. Mainly, I look at the result and the resources, whether there are any resources wasted.
Reaching Intended Goals

Reaching set goals was one of the most common topics in judgments of effectiveness. Reaching goals involves getting the originally proposed alternative implemented or achieving a new objective emerging during a conflict. Seven Thais indicated using this as standard for assessing effectiveness. Most of the respondents were not quite pleased with the behavior the other party displayed, however, even when they rated the counterpart as effective in this sense.

For example, Interviewee #4 disclosed his discontent about the results of the conflict. Even though he felt that the other party was effective because the task ended successfully, he was not happy with the end results. (This example also reflected the respondent’s perception of the other party’s dominating style, as mentioned earlier.)

#4 81-88: In this case, the guy went ahead with the project. The project [was] finished in time, and everybody, including me got the bonus, or what we called a reward for the job well done. But to me, it was not a well done job. I did not agree with that procedure from the beginning. But since the majority of the team or the team leader decided to do it this way, and he got the support from the superior, I had no choice but to go along.

Interviewee #19 rated her counterpart as effective, but the approach used in reaching the goal was not as satisfying to her.

#19 99-100: Yes, it was effective on me. He usually wins over somebody by breaking that person’s patience.

Seeking Recommendations/Consultation

Two Thai participants believed that asking for additional information or clarification from other people is an effective way of dealing with conflict. Interviewee #10, for example, explained that his American conflict counterpart was new to the job. The person felt that he should have gotten a helicopter in his field, without knowing that there was supposed to be only one helicopter stationed in the Gulf of Thailand. If he had consulted someone about the situation, he would have gained more information, which could have helped him to be more effective in the conflict situation.
#10 104-106: If I were him, I would have asked for suggestions from people who were here longer. I would seek recommendations. I would have asked whether I should have received that helicopter.

*Emphasizing Factual Details*

Using facts and tangible evidence as bases for arguments can be effective in conflict situations. Three Thai participants highlighted this idea. Interviewee #15, for instance, noted:

#15 136-141: The way the person presents the reasons, the person should compromise, but not compromise too much that the person loses her/his confidence. I think a person should compromise to a certain extent, as well as have a good way in presenting the reasons, knowing a lot of facts and being able to back up or prove that facts.

Relational Topics

The following topics reflect the thoughts about effectiveness that primarily focus on the relationship between the conflict parties.

*Displaying Emotion*

Five Thai participants addressed the issue of emotional expression. The display of emotion they viewed as both effective and ineffective. Among the participants, four perceived emotional displays in a negative light. For these participants, emotional behavior was unprofessional and injurious to relationships.

Interviewees #22 and #14, for example, noted:

#22 165-176: First of all, you should control your emotion. The way you talk. When you begin to have a conflict, the first thing you should do is to control your emotion. When you are mad, before you say anything, you should count 1 to 10 to 20 whatever. Because when you are angry, you can’t really think. You don’t know what you are saying, you can say anything. After you have said it, the relationship (pause) the consequences
aren’t worth it. Like we used to be able to talk and joke around for years, but just that one incident, we don’t talk any more. We do talk when it comes to work, but no more joking around to foster good atmosphere at work.

#14 192-197: I look at the reaction, the opinion; if using me as a standard, I would look at people who deal with things in an effective way as people who can control their emotions, willing to be open to issues, ask when you don’t understand something or need answer to something (pause). But the main thing is the reaction and behaviors you express.

Interviewee #18 felt that the other party was effective. He expressed his understanding of the American nature and felt that the counterpart’s direct expression of emotion made him realize that he should not try very hard to cut through the process and achieve merely verbal agreement.

#18 131-132: He just showed up as angry. I think it is effective, so I know that I should not try hard.

Following the Chain of Command

Interviewee #11 held a strong belief in the chain of command. Even though he thought that his conflict counterpart should have used a softer approach than plainly giving him an order, he felt that the person was effective. The main reason was that the person acted according to his role as a vice president of the company.

#11 78-79: I think so [effective] because it was his mission to do so. And as I said, if we switch the role, I would do the same thing.

Achieving Positive Relational Outcomes

The achievement of concrete goals was not sufficient in the view of some to be effective. According to three Thai participants, the relational outcome following the conflict was one indicator influencing their judgments of effectiveness. Interviewee #16, for instance, pointed out:
#16 50-53: You don’t want to clear a conflict and leave a doubt in their minds when you work together; otherwise you don’t get any cooperation.

**Being Fair**

Three participants suggested that to enhance the evaluation of effectiveness, one should be fair. Interviewee #10 specifically mentioned fairness as one of the criteria of effectiveness on which he relied:

#10 168-169: I think that (pause) if we are being fair with the people, I expect that others would be fair with me too.

**The Effects of the Perception of Competence on Relationships**

This part of investigation explores the influence of judgments of appropriateness and effectiveness on relational outcomes following conflicts. The emergent topics were organized according to whether relationships were more positive, unchanged, or more negative in nature.

**More Positive Relationships**

None of the Thai participant reported that their relationship with the conflict parties improved following the conflict interaction.

**Unchanged Relationships**

There were many explanations for why the relationships of conflict parties did not change after the conflict.
Developing More Understanding about the Person and Issues

Conflict can lead to further exploration of issues, which, in turn, provides more insight into the problems, as well as the conflict parties, involved. Two Thai participants implied that their relationships with the counterparts did not change because of these understandings.

Interviewee #10 provided an example of this topic. He assessed the counterpart’s behavior as effective because the person had the opportunity to express his ideas and was willing to accept reasonable arguments. The interviewee felt that his counterpart behaved both in a situationally and relationally appropriate way because the two of them discussed issues on the basis of reasons, and there was no emotion involved. The conflict party showed concern about equal treatment while trying to defend his rights, which the respondent did not see as violating any rules of appropriateness. Interviewee #10 contended that part of the reason why the conflict did not negatively affect the relationship was that he felt the other person had gained some insights into the conflict issue, learned from it, and accepted reasonable ideas.

#10 88-89: Yes, I think he had learned. He was new, so he did not know.

#10 123-124: This didn't affect the relationship. The relationship did not change or have relationship problem.

Following the Chain of Command

Items in this category focused on the belief in and adherence to the hierarchical order, as well as the status and seniority of people in the organization. Interviewee #11 was the one respondent who expressed thoughts in accordance with this topic. He felt that his conflict counterpart was effective when he simply gave the order that he wanted 20% business growth. Even though the respondent felt that the number was unrealistic for the current economic situation and that the way the person who gave order should have been more tactful, he rated his counterpart as appropriate, both relationally and situationally. The basis for his judgment was that the person was goal-oriented, and he
did what he had to do as part of the higher-up management in the company. The interviewee felt that the relationship afterward remained the same and revealed his acceptance of high power distance:

#11 132: No, not at all, it is the same [the relationship following the conflict].

#11 35-37: I look at myself as a soldier. If you are a soldier you have to do what your general says. You are just a colonel; you just do what you are told.

#11 84-89: In this instance, not much he could have done better. When it comes to a manager, director, or middle management, the order is coming down with very brief conversation. The higher you go, the shorter [the conversation/the order] it is.

Separating Personal Issues from Work

Four Thai participants reported that the conflict situation did not affect their relationship because they did not take the matter related to work personally. Many of them also mentioned that their American counterparts did not take the issues personally, which affected the way they felt about the conflict. An example is reflected in Interviewee #15’s comments.

Interviewee #15 indicated that his conflict counterpart was somewhat effective even though he should have been more open and more willing to explain the situation. He was appropriate because his rank and experience in the company allowed him to refrain from any discussion in which he did not want to engage. The relationship between the two was the same after the conflict because both parties separated work from personal matters.

#15 126-132: The relationship remains the same because both of us looked at this in a professional way. This is work; it’s business. There can always be conflict. Just don’t take it personal. That’s all. And because I see him not taking things personal, I am happy. Because I think it is appropriate. He is someone who can give me a promotion, reward, or punishment. If he can be neutral, I am happy.
Interviewee #24 judged the counterpart to be effective because the end results were positive. On the other hand, he did not see his American superior as appropriate because the person should have listened and explained more about the situation to help him learn. Despite the low appropriateness ratings, the relationship did not change.

Interviewee #24 noted:

#24 141-145: No [relationship was not affected]. Because usually, even though there is a conflict about work, when you move on to other topics, the personal relationship remains the same. Usually, there is no problem. There is no connection between conflicts at work and personal relationship. I don’t feel different.

More Negative Relationships

Some of the conflict experienced by the Thai participants affected their relationships in a negative manner. Only one related topic emerged, however.

Avoiding Interaction

When the impact of conflict was negative, three Thai respondents reported that they often avoided interacting with the other party. Interviewee #4, for example, evaluated the other party as effective because the project was completed successfully, but nevertheless as inappropriate. He felt that the person was rude, disrespectful, and insensitive to Thai culture. The interviewee also revealed his strong feelings toward the counterpart, who was being very direct and made him and others lose face in the meeting. He reported being uncomfortable interacting with the person, so he avoided working on the same project, as well as encountering the person, whenever possible.

#4 247-261: You know, for Thai people, if we don't like anybody, we try not to get in touch with her/him, try to disband yourself away. Me, no exception. When I first experienced that [the aggressive and direct behavior], you don't have to ask me for another volunteer project. Because I don't think that I can work with him in that manner. … But in this case, it’s better not to see each other. Like what I said, we cannot change his attitude, his approach. I don't want to have any more trouble.
Even though I didn’t cause him any more trouble by reporting this behavior to the boss, I killed myself because … I feel really uncomfortable every time I have to attend the same meeting or every time I have to face him, to report something, or call him for a report. Feel uneasy.

For Interviewee #22, her American counterpart’s behavior was not effective. Using sarcasm prevented him from reaching his goal. The air-conditioner could not be fixed in time for the meeting. He was seen as inappropriate because the respondent viewed herself as a colleague, not a subordinate; hence, he should have talked to her in a more polite and respectful way. The conflict behavior and the perception of competence affected the relationship in a negative way. Interviewee #22 reported that the conflict stained the relationship; she and her conflict counterpart had less personal contact after the conflict occurred.

#22 154-156: I don’t feel good toward him. We used to chit chat like friends, or make jokes to tease each other, but after that we don’t talk much anymore. Each of us just does our work.

#22 158-159: He felt that too. He didn’t talk much and didn’t associate much. I didn’t want to associate with him much either.

The Effects of National and Organizational Culture on Conflict Behavior and Perceptions (RQ3)

This part of the investigation focused on the participants’ beliefs concerning how national culture and organizational culture affected their conflict behavior and perceptions as addressed in Research Question 3: “How do Thais and Americans working in multinational organizations describe the respects in which their cultural background influences their behavior and perceptions of effectiveness/ineffectiveness and appropriateness/inappropriateness in conflict interaction?”
National Culture

The emergent topics regarding national culture included ones related to the individualistic-collectivistic, and Face Negotiation Theory frameworks, as well as other prevalent ideas. The description begins with the behavior and attitudes of Americans that reflected different topics, followed by those of Thais.

The Effects of National Culture

Several Thai participants revealed that being brought up in Thai culture affected their conflict interactions and attitudes, whereas others showed they were not so convinced about the effects of national culture. For those who believed that other factors had more influence on the way they behaved and their thoughts in conflict situations, their ideas are presented elsewhere, for example, in the “other factors” section at the end of the chapter.

Believing in the Effects of Culture

Some examples of statements by Thais who noted in the effects of national culture include excerpts from Interviewees #2 and #11.

#2 237-245: Yes. I think in terms of appropriateness culture has [an influence] to a certain degree.

Researcher: Can you elaborate on that?

#2: Asian people and Thai culture more (pause). We were told not to raise voice, or ever since we were young, so we were listening more then voicing opinions. We tried to get along because of the culture. We most likely have to say “yes,” especially to the elders.

#11 145-152: A Thai way, they do really, most of the people Thai do not express themselves straightforward. Many times, working with my co-workers in Thailand, they should say the meaning. They would say it privately, or after, or come with criticism or conflict later on. And then to
me, that is harder to manage. But anyway the co-worker like that is given, it comes to the part that you cannot change them. Or it's difficult to change them. You have got to change your style to get the workflow.

Feeling Uncertain about the Effects of Culture

Interviewee #10 expressed a reluctance to identify which part of his multiple backgrounds affected his behavior and judgment of conflict behavior.

#10 160-164: I can't really separate or describe how I evaluate other people. What culture I was using. I'm not sure whether it was Western styles or other ways [Thai culture and religion]. But in general, it has some effects on the way I deal with people, the way I react to people, the way I evaluate others.

Individualistic-Collectivistic Orientation

The topics that emerged under the heading of the “effects of national culture” on conflict behavior and perceptions were organized according to those that revealed individualistic-collectivistic tendencies and those that deviated from them. Topics related to Face Negotiation Theory and other topics were also included. The behavior and attitudes displayed by Americans are discussed first.

Americans with an Individualistic Orientation

Thai participants reported many of the American counterparts’ characteristics that can be categorized as reflecting an individualistic orientation.

Being Outcome-Focused

When Thai participants described the behavior and attitudes displayed by Americans that were associated with an emphasis on an $I$-identity, tangible rewards,
substantive goals, and self-face concern, they were included in this category. Four Thai participants expressed pertinent comments.

Interviewee #4’s remarks reflected the American counterpart’s focus on I-identity. He indicated that his American counterpart placed his own goal over the group’s or the company’s goal.

#4 160-166: (laugh) I think it was goal oriented for him. But for the whole business unit, I think that might, also (pause), but it was a second objective for him. The first objective was he himself. Believing that objective or that goal can benefit the company, he also thinks about that too. But if he had to choose, he would probably choose his own goal first, and the company's benefit will come right after that.

Interviewee #16 revealed his thoughts about the Americans’ emphasis on substantive outcomes over relational and other issues. (This statement also reflected the use of a “combination of conflict management styles” presented earlier in conflict styles section.)

#16 209-217: In a conflict, American styles, people speak out what they feel. They don’t care about other people’s feelings. They just speak out and then try to (pause). Sometimes you are in the world of competition. They try to compete really hard. All they care about are the outcomes. They don’t care about how you get there, as long as “I can achieve my goal. I got the job done, no matter what happen along the way.” That is American style. You look at the bottom line as achievement. If you don’t achieve the bottom line, that’s it. Sometimes they may not care of anything.

Working at a Monochronic Pace

Working at a monochronic pace value shows to a tendency to work rapidly to reach substantive goals. There was one incident mentioned by a Thai participant in which the American counterpart acted in line with this value. Interviewee #18 referred to the situation in which his American counterpart wanted quick approval from the government to move on with a project.

#18 58-67: No, firstly, the American people needed the answer right away in a short period of time. Normally, we would like to get the permission from the [name of the governmental department] or the government. We
needed some times to get a black and white [absolute answer], maybe a month. We cannot get the answer within a week or two. But to fulfill his requirement at that time, we tried hard. That is why I called him [the government official in charge], which I wasn’t supposed to. We are supposed to send them a letter to get the response back. But to fulfill his [the counterpart] requirement, I called him [a government officer] personally to explain and try to get verbal agreement. That was why the problem occurred. I tried hard.

Emphasizing Factual Details

Individualists tend to value strong, tangible facts as support for their cases. One Thai participant gave an example of how her American counterpart asked her to go back and “rethink” or do some more research to be able to provide more convincing arguments.

#14 219-230: I think Americans are straightforward. They need information (pause). Before we go in and talk to them, we need to do some research. They are straightforward when listening to or accepting our opinions. … Once I explained my work to an American, he said, “It’s not true.” He didn’t believe in what I said. He asked me to go back and rethink about it. I wasn’t mad at the person. I went back and rethought, and it turned out that it was like what I explained to him before. He didn’t say directly that he didn’t believe me. He said he didn’t think it worked that way. He asked me to reconsider.

Using Confrontational/Direct Conflict Behavior

Thai participants reported that many Americans relied on confrontational, direct, and even aggressive conflict behavior as some were mentioned earlier in the “conflict styles” section. Two examples that reflected this topic were from interviewees #19 and #12, who noted that Americans prefer to engage in more aggressive behavior.

When asked about her ideas of an effective way to deal with conflict, Interviewee #19 responded:

#19 103-110: It wouldn’t be eye to eye teeth to teeth [confrontation]. It would be rational and he has to calm down a bit. Because when problem
arose, one would try to find (unclear), and the most effective way to clear the problem out, even by angrily pressing that out or sensationalize the issue. But you have to stay calm. And working with Americans, they will tend to very much psychologically influence you or win over what they want in an aggressive way.

Interviewee #12 compared Americans and Thais conflict styles as follows:

#12 37-39: I think I would look at them differently because Americans usually are more aggressive. Thais would not be as aggressive.

Relying on Low Power-Distance Values

People from a low power-distance culture tend to treat people equally and focus on their abilities, as opposed to position, rank, or social status. Two Thai participants referred to American’s symmetrical treatment of people in different status. Interviewee #11, for instance, compared American culture to Thai culture in regard to treatment of others with different status in the company. He felt that the chain of command applied to both cultures, but to different degrees.

#11 201-208: So basically if you talk with your boss, regardless of whether he is younger or older, the line command will affect. So you have to come in like (pause), in the Thai culture, when I work with them, in the end, in the American company, you have president or janitor, you know, there is a line of command, but the way to deal or talk with them are not that much different.

Relying on Low-Context Values

People who are from low-context cultures depend on verbal expression as their primary means of communication. They show much less attention to nonverbal cues or environmental context. Hence, upfront, straightforward, open, and honest conversation is highly valued. Six Thai participants made comments about this quality as displayed by Americans. The Thais’ perceptions of American’s directness were presented in both a positive and negative light. Four Thais view directness in a positive way. Some examples come from comments by Interviewees #3 and #24:
Interviewee #3 explained that he preferred the American straightforwardness:

#3 407-413: However, personally, I would prefer to deal, in a conflict situation, I would prefer to deal with Americans more than the Thais.

Researcher: Why is it so?

#3: Because Americans are more straightforward, really honest, especially in a conflict situation. Dealing with Thais you have to be much more careful. Because of the cultural different thoughts, Thais tend to hide something. They always have hidden agendas in their minds.

In addition to the honest way Americans present their ideas, Interviewee #24 also said that he appreciated their receptiveness to frank arguments.

#24 261-263: I feel that American can accept this [straightforwardness] better so I can be frank. But with Thais, I still feel that we still have to respect and “Kreng Jai” [be careful not to intrude or offend others].

Two Thai participants felt uncomfortable, hurt, and offended by their American counterparts’ direct remarks. Interviewee #4, for example, reported:

#4 27-37: Sometimes we had a project that we had to share in the meeting. When we proposed something, the reaction from that was “This is not the right idea.” “We have a better way of doing this.” “You had better keep your ideas.” So I think the American [person] thought it was better to do it this way. So everything we tried to propose, he always tended to say “That is too general,” “That is too easy,” or “It's not up to date,” or something like that. Even though it was a true story, it was not good in terms of psychology. There was so many ways to communicate the same meaning. I mean there was a better tone. Some of them did not like to do it that way. He was just using his own approach.

#4 126-128: I think it was rude because he got more from other people when he broke the line. His reaction was, “So what?” (laugh); that was the word.

Displaying Emotion

Three Thai participants depicted incidents in which their American counterparts showed their emotions. Two of them viewed such behavior as unprofessional and injurious to their relationships. One respondent, Interviewee #18, described the
emotional display, but he admitted that the problem emerged because of him, so he understood the American’s display of emotion on that particular matter.

#18 55-58: Oh yes, yes. He used emotion. He just yelled and said he couldn’t understand why it happened and bla bla bla. And we needed to explain to him that; frankly there was a mistake, and we didn’t know that [would happen].

Using Jokes and Sarcasm

Americans tend to use jokes and sarcasm in conflict situations either to lighten up the situation or cover up their anger (as American Interviewee #21 reported earlier under “using jokes and sarcasm” in the section of Americans’ responses). However, the one Thai participant who addressed the topic exemplified the American’s use of sarcasm and revealed her personal dislike of it.

#22 146-150: He didn’t yell or raise his voice, but I know he said it with a bit of anger. He was upset. Actually, I had some experiences that Americans like to talk in a sarcastic manner. They like to be jokingly sarcastic, even in a group of friends. They like to bluff each other anyway. But because I personally don’t like it so, I had a bad feeling toward it.

Separating Personal Issues from Work

The American characteristic of being able to separate work from personal issues was evident to Thai participants. Five respondents shared positive thoughts about this matter.

Interviewee #12, for instance, provided an insight into how this difference between Americans and Thais led to different ways of dealing with conflict. (Part of the following statement was used as an example earlier in the “using confrontational/direct conflict behavior” category.)

#12 37-48: I think I would look at them differently because Americans usually are more aggressive. Thai would not be as aggressive. But one good thing about Americans is that they can separate work from personal
matters. Thai usually do not separate work and personal issues. For example, Americans might disagree and argue, but they know they are dealing with or talk about work. But Thais might not be able to separate work and personal issues so they often compromise about work to prevent problems in the relationship. But Americans, they can separate it, so when they talk about work, they can do it to the full capacity. They can say whatever that is in their minds.

Because he felt that his American counterpart did not take conflict issues personally, Interviewee #24 emulated this behavior since he thought it was a good way to deal with work. (This excerpt was used previously to represent the ideas of how separation of task and personal issues led to the way Thai participants felt that their relationship did not change after the conflict.)

#24 147-155: I think partly it’s because the way he treats me. He can separate work and personal issues so that makes me feel that I don’t have to associate it with the past. Usually, when I was in school or work with Thais, there would be some spill-over of the conflict to other issues or whatever activities we are doing together later on. But when I work with Americans, they usually don’t mix that so it makes me convinced and go along the same line. So I don’t mix past conflict with what I am doing now.

Seeing Things in Black and White

Many Americans, as reported in the first section of the chapter, saw things in black and white or in an absolute right and wrong manner. One Thai participant observed such tendency in his American colleagues as well. Interviewee #3 contended:

#3 151-158: This happened to be an American person. One of the good things about Americans is that Americans see things black and white. They did not see things in gray, and once they see it in white, they strongly believe that it is white, or ignore if it was being black in their mind. So for example, particularly in this case, once he accepted that his map was wrong he totally turned it 180 degrees. So it was absolutely that his map was wrong. So he truly admitted that.
Being Ethnocentric

Ethnocentrism refers to the belief that one’s own cultural values, norms, or ways of thinking and behaving are the right ways or at least better ways than those of other cultures. Two Thai participants revealed how they felt Americans thought about of themselves and other nationalities.

#4 11-24: For most of the cases, the conflict will be like that. Americans tend to believe that they are superior. It may not be true but this is my own perception at the very beginning. First, is the English, while my mother tongue is not. So they think that we are not getting understood [don’t understand them?] in all cases. And the second one is that when you cannot speak the same language as they do, how can you perform the same thing based on the language that you cannot clearly understand. So this is for most of the cases that they look at me or other nationalities like a lower class in some cases. But it doesn't mean that every American will do it that way or think about it that way. Some of them may not physically show it, but deep inside, I don't know either. But a lot of people show that off physically and mentally, and even verbally. You can feel it.

#4 225-228: However they used to act at home in America, they think that all over the world should do the same thing. I think this is a narrow-minded thought. Some people, about all (pause) [think that way].

#16 331-335: They might be open, but they might not agree with Thai people. Back in their minds, they might think they are smarter than Thai people. So once you have a conflict with them, they might not accept your ideas or whatever you try to explain to them.

American Deviations from an Individualistic Orientation

Not all Americans’ behavior described by Thai participants reflected individualistic tendencies. Some Americans reportedly displayed behavior that deviated from general expectations.
Relying on High-Context Values

This category encompassed American’s attempts to refrain from direct verbal expression that might jeopardize a relationship, hurt the other party’s feelings, or cause a loss of face. Observed sensitivity or ability to notice nonverbal cues also fits this category. Three Thai participants recalled situations in which Americans interacted in such manner.

Interviewee #22, for example, mentioned how her boss communicated when he disagreed with or criticized her ideas.

#22 296-304: From my direct experience, when my boss [an American] wants to critique me, well, he doesn’t really critique, he usually doesn’t disagree frankly like Americans do in the movie, they use harsh words to critique each other. My boss is not like that. He is like Thai already. He is frank, well, maybe not frank, more of indirect. He would say “I want you to do it this way. What you suggested is good, but it would be better if you do that.” This is the way he talks. I am not sure if you call that direct or frank.

In the next example, Interviewee #22 indicated how her American counterpart detected from her nonverbal cues that she was upset.

#22 57-59: He knew right away that I was upset because normally, I don’t speak in this manner. He just walked away. He just avoided it.

Thais with a Collectivistic Orientation

Being Process-Focused

As mentioned earlier in the first section of this chapter relating to the American participants’ perspective, being process-focused emphasizes a we-identity, intangible resources, relational goals, and mutual-face concern. This was the most prevalent idea among Thai participants. Nine of them shared attitudes along this line.

Other than reflecting the thought about American directness, the following remark by Interviewee #15 revealed Thai concerns about relationship between conflict parties.
They [Americans] are strong in terms of emotion. They usually don’t really care about the feeling. If they are harsh, they can be very harsh. They don’t worry about hurting the feelings of the other party when arguing or debating. They are much more direct. Thais are softer in this aspect. When Thai people discuss or argue, they try not to hurt the feelings and try to show that they care. Sometimes Americans are very strong.

Interviewee #12 also showed her concern about relationships. Even though she had a lot of work to finish, she would not refuse her boss’s request for help.

I will say yes to the work, but explain the reason. I would tell my boss directly that actually I have a lot of work already.

Researcher: So you would tell the boss directly?

Yes, tell the boss directly because if I hide it, it is not good. There will be negative feelings. I would use reasons to explain to the boss. But I would help if I have time.

What did the boss do when you told her/him that?

If I have said this, usually the boss would not expect me to put 100% into the work, but is not like I refuse it. This is my style.

The following comment by Interviewee #3 indicated that face issues are very important to Thai people. Face loss can negatively affect the work environment and even performance of a task itself.

Now my answer is, if it is a typical Thai (pause). … Whatever I do I have to keep in mind that if I do it too harsh, the person may lose his face. For example, in particular (at work?, unclear), that will put a lot of bad feelings, and he might get things done at the end, but he might lose his positions in the society.

Emphasis on Holistic Pictures

Collectivistic cultures are known for their focus on the big picture more than on small details. Interviewee #10, one of the three participants who responded along these lines, reported how he considered the effect of the conflict.

The way he approached it was mainly concerned about his own groups, team, or field. But I look at the whole picture. He was
responsible for one field, and I was responsible for another field. So conflict emerged because of the fight over the resources, or sometimes there is different approach to a problem, but it affects all fields.

Using Nonconfrontational/Indirect Conflict Behavior

In addition to the illustration of harmony-enhancing styles (e.g., avoiding and obliging) at the beginning in the “conflict styles” section, there was some evidence (at least eight instances) that revealed Thais’ reliance on nonconfrontational and indirect styles.

Interviewees #2 and #16, respectively, explained:

#2 210-214: I guess it really affected from the cultural background. Thai and Asian people are more compromising, I guess. And not (pause), and try to avoid confrontation, we not yelling at each other, I guess, especially in the workplace. It’s very hard to find that in Thai culture.

#16 306-313: Thais normally very shy and don’t want to talk too much in the conflict. You don’t really have a lot of conflict with the Thai people. All you do (pause), I think the Thai people don’t want to explain anything. The American is more outspoken. The quiet part is the weak point. You don’t know that’s there are the conflict because they don’t tell you. I think it is very difficult to see how they think. Sometimes they have a conflict, but they don’t want to explain their opinions.

Interviewee #15 noted that nonconfrontational styles stemmed partially from the fact that Thais are taught to listen more than to argue to avoid possible damage to their relationships.

#15 146-159: Thai culture has some weaknesses because it stresses being a listener than arguer. This is different from American culture. American culture, when they disagree, they will discuss it. They will argue, but argue with reasons, not emotion. But for Thai people, after you have been arguing for a while, there can be some emotion involved. Then they will be some feeling of “Bad Mang” [stain in the relationship].
Relying on High Power-Distance Values

This topic captures the way people value position, status, seniority, and age. People from high power-distance cultures often treat people differently according to their social characteristics, as opposed to their ability. Special treatment usually goes to those who hold high power and status in the society. Eight participants reported beliefs reflecting this topic.

Among the eight, Interviewee #14 conveyed that people in senior positions had the freedom to act the way they wanted, without having to worry about their behavior.

#14 250-254: Thais are relying on sister/brotherhood system. We pay attention to seniority, age (pause), for example; if I share the information with someone who is more senior, s/he is older and work at the company longer than me, s/he doesn’t have to monitor the way s/he talk or her/his behavior much.

Interviewee #15 asserted that, in Thai culture, the way people interact in the workplace depends on the relationship along the hierarchical order. People of higher rank have power, and those of lower rank usually follow their directives. (The first quotation was also used to described the “following the chain of command” in relational appropriateness section.)

#15 192-202: The way people behave in the workplace, the interaction between superior and subordinate is one style. ... The appropriateness, the way you talk, the facial expression, (pause) there are a lot of things (pause), body language and everything have to be more formal than the colleague who sit next to you. ...You have to make the subordinate respect and be careful when dealing with you (Yum Kreng). Like your boss should treat us like we are his subordinate, in a similar way.

#15 153-159: In Thai culture, when a person with higher rank says something, everyone [subordinates] has to listen and comply. Even though we disagree, we can’t say it. Thais are like that. But the good thing about Thai culture is that it makes Thais more compromising, though sometimes too much. This is good in the case when the issue is not severe. If there is a serious debate, this part of Thai culture can soften the situation.

One participant, Interviewee #24, admitted being frustrated about the conflicting ideas between the high power-distance nature of Thai culture and the low power-distance nature of his organizational culture:
Personally, I feel that everyone should have the equal opportunity to express their ideas or argue regardless of the position of the other party. However, on the other side of the coin, maybe this is from Thai culture, I still feel “Kreng Jai” [reluctance to assert ideas because of the seniority issues] people in a senior level.

Relying on High-Context Values

High-context values refer to the way people convey meaning through context and nonverbal channels, as well as verbal cues. Three participants mentioned that nonverbal cues are important in conveying meaning in Thai culture. For example, as shown earlier in respect to the above topic, “relying on high power-distance values,” Interviewee #15 stated:

#15 192-202: The way people behave in the workplace, the interaction between superior and subordinate is one style. … How should I say this “Ka La Te Sa” [appropriateness according to time and situation]. The appropriateness, the way you talk, the facial expression, (pause) there are a lot of things (pause), body language and everything have to be more formal than the colleague who sits next to you.

Restraining Emotion

In Thai culture, the ability to control emotion indicates maturity, professionalism, and sophistication. People who express their anger or excess emotion, especially in the workplace, are usually frowned upon. Six participants revealed their disapproval of such behavior.

Interviewee #4 expressed his thoughts as follows:

#4169-174: It [emotional expression] might be appropriate in an American way because American comes to the table if he really is a genius or if he has power, or if he knows something about that. But this is unacceptable for Thai culture. And when he proposes something that is not really correct, he cannot smack the table like he can do at home in America because that is not our culture.
Interviewee #22 noted that one should restrain her/his emotions because an outburst of emotion could harm a long-standing relationship and destroy a healthy working environment. (This statement reflected “displaying emotion” criteria mentioned in the perceived effectiveness section.)

#22 166-176: When you begin to have a conflict the first thing you should do is to control your emotion. … Because when you are angry, you can’t really think. You don’t know what you are saying, you can say anything. After you have said it, the relationship (pause) the consequences aren’t worth it. Like we used to be able to talk and joke around for years, but just that one incident, we don’t talk any more. We do talk when it comes to work, but no more joking around to foster good atmosphere at work.

Not Having Personal Accountability for Conflict Problems and Mistakes

Some Americans, as noted in the first section of this chapter, claimed that Thais usually have low personal accountability for conflict problems and mistakes. Three Thai participants provided consistent accounts. Two Thai participants pointed out that when they followed the orders of people above them, they would not have to be responsible for the consequences.

For example, Interviewee #14 mentioned that avoiding responsibility was characteristic of her Thai counterpart as follows:

#14 88-93: I just calmly say to her that, “I am not sure what is going on, but this is the problem that the foreign branch has raised.” Well (pause), one thing (pause), honestly, I feel that a lot of times, Thais, not every Thais, but many of those I deal with at work, are usually pushing away the responsibility, not open-minded, nor open to the problems.

Interviewee #18 responded:

#18 105-109: He was still upset. At least it will be a lesson learned for both of us. Next time if he comes to me, I will say, “Four weeks” period. I won’t try hard. I’ll let him decide whether he wants to wait. If he doesn’t want to wait, let him (pause), he made his own decision
Not Separating Personal Issues from Work

Unlike Americans, Thai people often take a disagreement or conflict about work personally. Seven Thais mentioned this idea.

Interviewee #4’s remarks revealed that he evidently felt this way.

#4 39-42: He did not use the proper language, and he also showed in the meeting that he did not respect your opinions at all. So beside the opinion, it means that he himself did not respect you yourself personally.

Interviewee #22 elaborated her feelings toward her American counterpart following a conflict in a way that is further reflective of the topic.

#22 190-200: I think so. I think when having a conflict, Americans usually like to just talk things out right away. If they don’t understand something, they just discuss it. And the way he scolded or was being sarcastic at me, or wanted to critique on what I did, after he said it, he was happy. But since I am Thai, and I am an employee in the company, though he was not my direct boss, he was in a different department, but after he said that to me, I felt uncomfortable. I felt (pause), at least, because of the position, I think he should respect me more. According to Thai personality, I feel that it would not be the same anymore. I can’t just fight with someone and then when I am done just became friend again like nothing happened.

Discussing Congenially with Other Thais

The responses fitting this category emphasize the way Thais avoid dealing with conflict with their conflict counterparts directly. They, instead, often discuss the matter with other Thai colleagues.

Interviewee #4 described how he criticized his counterpart with other Thais:

#4 45-51: For most of the time, the Thai way is not just to do it the same way like the Americans. We criticized them a lot. We said that they did not use the art of communication. They attacked us in the meeting like this made us feel really bad about it. But we are not going to use the same approach as they did. We are not going to fight back in the meeting, but we are going to discuss it later.
Discussion outside the conflict scene reportedly did not only occur when Thais were having conflict with Americans; it also occurred when Thais were in conflict with Thais, as Interviewee #18 pointed out:

#18 203-206: For Thais, I think normally if they are not happy with you, if you are more senior than them, it is difficult to read whether they are upset or not. If you are in the same level he [sic] may act or not, but you will learn from somebody else, not directly from him [sic].

Collective Opinions or Ideas

Collective opinions or ideas encompass Thais’ preferences for discussion among their groups to reach a decision or conclusion. Three participants articulated this topic. Interviewee #12, for instance, addressed the way Thais seek other’s opinions and suggestions in dealing with issues. (This statement appeared earlier as an example of reliance on the compromising conflict style.)

#12 125-130: Americans solve problems, American style usually deals with the problem in the way that makes only oneself look good. But Thai people like to discuss with people. They would ask people about what they should do and analyze it and then solve it. They usually do not deal with the problem on their own. Americans would make decision right then.

Being Tolerant

A belief in Buddhism, along with many other factors, contributes to Thais’ nature of being tolerant. One participant specifically referred to this value:

#19 185-189: Thai is very tolerance. We try to learn to be forgiving and forgetting. I think that is very important.
Thai Deviations from a Collectivistic Orientation

Being Outcome-Focused

People from collectivistic cultures tend to pay attention to relationships among the conflict parties, face issues, and intangible goals more than substantive goals. However, four Thai participants considered achieving substantive goals to be among their primary concerns.

Interviewee #14, for example, provided an account of her Thai counterpart, who, she felt, was aggressive when dealing with work and was not sensitive to personal relationship.

#14 173-178: In fact, I wasn’t that close to her to begin with. I know her personality, so I tried to avoid (pause), personally, she is OK, but when it comes to work, she is quite aggressive and is not sensitive to the relationship issue. It makes me feel uncomfortable (pause). When problem emerges, sometimes I have to think twice before I share the information with her. I shouldn’t have to be in a situation like this.

Interviewee #24 valued effectiveness over appropriateness. He focused on the correctness of the substantive task and did not mention the relational or face concerns when responding to the question about standards for judgments of appropriateness.

#24 182-188: I look at the method people use in dealing with work whether the results fit the standard that I use to determine of whether the job is effective. Like I said, effectiveness is whether the work is done correctly. What I look at appropriate way, it is to see if the way a person deals with the work lead to effective results, which is the correctness and working in timely manner.

Relying on Linear Logic

The way Interviewee #12 reportedly analyzed the conflict situation, trying to find the cause of the problem and move on to other steps, implied the focus on linear reasoning approach. (This statement was cited earlier to reflect the topics “expressing
thoughts and ideas openly” and “relying on linear logic” in “relational appropriateness” section.)

#12 226-235: We should discuss. See what the other person doesn't like and what we are not satisfied with. See if there's something that we can adjust. … Solve the problem by looking at the character of the work, and discuss it. Share a reasonable workload. Identify the weak point, the cause of the conflict and deal with the conflict at the cause. It is easier to discuss with peers because conflict with peers, usually the conflict revolved around work aspects.

Emphasizing Factual Details

The way four Thai participants reported dealing with conflict reflected their focus on factual evidence. Interviewee #15, for instance, allegedly relied on factually based reasons and theory as basis for his arguments.

#15 30-34: Usually there is no emotion involved. We would discuss the issue base on reasons. We would explain why we did this, and what theory we based our work on. We are trying to explain the probability, and the hypotheses we relied on for the job. But we have to listen to their opinions as well.

Relying on Low-Context Values

Although Thai culture tends to value indirect modes of communication to preserve harmonious relationships, six Thai participants reportedly preferred direct, straightforward, and upfront modes. Some indicated displaying directness, and some suggested that they preferred those that were open and honest. Interviewee #19, for example, stated that she herself was straightforward and liked to deal with open and honest people.

#19 210-218: I don’t mind [people] being straightforward, I am a straightforward person. Oh yeah, I love that, I love people being straightforward. I love people being (pause), of course, just telling the truth, not playing games. Not politicizing everything. I think
straightforward is a good character qualification. I prefer to have other people doing that. If you want to say basting, just say it straightforwardly, without bias, with reasoning, with evidence, with respect. I think that is important if a Thai person had that qualification.

Emotional Expression

One Thai participant, Interviewee #18, did not view emotional expression displayed by his American counterpart in as negative a way as other Thais did, partly because of the situation. The participant felt he was at fault, and he understood the general tendency in American style. Interviewee #18 further contended that his acceptance of emotional expressiveness was attributable to his exposure and experiences at the company in which he was working. (This statement was also used in explaining “displaying emotion” in the section dealing with situational appropriateness.)

#18 155-156: I think it is fine. No problem. I accept that. I know he is mad. He is not happy. I understand.

Separating Personal Issues from Work

Despite the fact that several Thai participants tended not to separate task and personal issues, there were some who reported that they did not take task-related conflicts personally, or at least tried not to do so. Six participants mentioned on this. Interviewee #24, for example, disclosed that he did not take the conflict at work personally, partly because he saw the Americans with whom he worked acting that way. (The first statement was mentioned earlier in the “unchanged relationship” category in the effects of perceived competence on relationships, and the second statement was shown in the section concerning the American individualistic values of “separating personal issues from work.”)

#24 141-145: Because usually, even though there is a conflict about work, but when you move on to other topics, the personal relationship remains
the same. Usually there is no problem. There is no connection between conflicts at work and personal relationship. I don’t feel different.

#24 147-149: I think partly it’s because the way he [the American counterpart] treats me. He can separate work and personal issues so that makes me feel that I don’t have to associate it with the past.

**Organizational Culture**

Several Thai participants mentioned that working in an American organizational culture had some influence on their conflict behavior, as well as their attitudes. Some examples of the testimonials are as follows:

Interviewee #3 noted that the way he viewed conflict was the result of the corporate culture. (This statement was used as an example to illustrate the topics “conflict is pervasive” and “conflict can be functional or dysfunctional” in the “attitude about conflict” section.)

#3 14-17: There are many conflicts. In fact, there are a lot of conflicts that we can find in the daily life. That is part of the work. But in [name of the company], we have a unique corporate culture. We don't see conflict in a negative way. We see conflict as challenges.

Interviewee #24 stated that the standards he used when judging effectiveness and appropriateness of conflict behavior were the correctness of and time spent in reaching the final outcomes. When asked what influenced the way he set the standards, he responded:

#24 193-196: Researcher: What do you think affects the way you set the standards for appropriateness? Do you think it was Thai culture, your corporate culture, or anything else?

#24: More of the organizational culture.

Not all participants agreed that corporate culture affected the way they behaved or their thought process as in conflict interactions in the workplace. These matters are discussed further in the section concerning other factors that affected the way people noted dealing with conflict.
The topics that emerged for “the effects of organizational culture” were classified according to the Cultural Dominance Model and the Cultural Compromise/Synergy Model, which I discussed in detail in a previous section regarding the effects of organization culture on American participants’ conflict behavior and attitudes.

The Cultural Dominance Model

The Cultural Dominance Model is characteristic of corporations that primarily employ the styles of those in the administrative structure to guide the behavior of the employees. Because the organizations of interest were American-owned or co-owned, when Thai participants described their organization culture as relying mainly on American general tendencies or individualistic orientations, the emergent topics were appropriate to this category.

Being Outcome-Focused

Two Thai participants asserted that their organization paid considerable attention to the final outcomes of the task. Interviewee #4, for example, talked about the way his organization evaluated employees on the basis of results. He reported that his American colleague was aggressive in dealing with conflict and did not listen to others’ ideas, but in the end, that person was promoted on the basis of task accomplishment.

#4 272-276: American companies evaluate people based on the results, so no matter how bad his behavior was, as long as he can produce some fruitful solutions, that can count as a benefit to the company. He will get that promotion.

Relying on Linear Logic

The training that companies provide reflects the values they espouse and encourage the employees to adopt. Interviewee #10, the one participant who mentioned
this topic, described training in creative thinking program he attended that focused on the analytical skills in dealing with conflict.

#10 223-229: Part of it, we have learned the way to solve problems from training. For example, they have a course in creative problem solving. If you have different opinions, you should come up with options, discuss the options, and look at the pros and cons of each option, then decide on which one to choose. This is the way to rule out personality from conflict. So what is left is the conflict about the task, technical matters, and opinions.

Emphasizing Factual Details

One respondent reflected on the way his organization focused on factual details. Interviewee #3 provided an example of how his company used a systematic approach to gauge the performance of the employees. The instrument it employed highlighted Americans’ emphasis on tangible, concrete, factual evidence.

#3 180-201: There are two things we do here at [name of the company]. … One is the performance appraisal system here. So once a year, supervisors will call in supervisees and go through this performance including behaviors as well. And one of the criteria matrixes within this performance appraisal/performance evaluation is the peer feedback. We used a 360 degrees feedback. … That's one of the processes. So he got the feedback that he was too stubborn (pause). He was unfriendly. The other thing is in [name of the company], we have so many social activities. … And for this particular case, this particular person, his supervisor even sets a target goal for him to improve his behavior in dealing with people.

Researcher: So do you know exactly what the goal was?

#3: Yeah. We are an engineering company so we always loved numbers. So we set the relationship with peers as one to five. And he was ranked as 2. The goal was up to 3.

Relying on Low-Context Values

Being in an organization that encourages or relies mainly on verbal cues and forthright behavior can affect the interaction and attitudes of organizational members.
Five Thai respondents reported that they had become more direct and straightforward. They also felt that they were more willing to express their thoughts and ideas in the meetings and were more accepting or had more favorable views toward others who were direct.

Interviewee #24, for example, noted:

#24 250-258: Let me think (long pause), I think there are some changes. Well, because I see that when there are problems or conflict, Americans usually talk about it directly. So when there is a conflict, or a problem, or an argument, I am more brave and willing to be frank. After working here for a while, even though the other person is more senior, when we have a conflict or an argument, I can do a direct talk more comfortably. However, when I talk to seniors who are Americans, I can be frank and direct, but when the senior person is a Thai, I still feel “Yum Kreng” [intimidated and respect].

Some participants viewed forthright behavior very favorably and felt uncomfortable when they had to deal with people who harbored high-context values.

#18 177-183: I think my experiences, I have been working here long enough. I think that is a good system. Sometimes we came back and work between Thais, sometimes I could not read their minds. But here, just straightforward, and then if we are not happy, we solve the problem, and we forget about that. Sometimes he may refer to it, that’s fine, but not use it as a (unclear) case.

Relying on Low Power-Distance Values

Individualists tend to treat people in a similar manner, whereas Thais treat people according to their positions in the hierarchical order or in the society. Three Thai participants discussed their corporate culture as having low power-distance values.

For example, Interviewee #10 depicted the symmetrical treatment of employees in his company and revealed his frustration when he interacted with people from a high power-distance organization.

#10 236- 242: Of course, it affects the attitude. For example, if I go out and deal with people outside of [name of the company], like the government, I feel really frustrated because there is a lot of process [bureaucracy]. I have to ask for signature from this person, but if he is not
there, we have to see the other person (pause), and so on. I feel frustrated because, here, we sit with the president to have lunch or do things together. There is no segregation.

Interviewee #22 commented on the way superiors in the company were open to subordinates’ ideas and treated them with respect.

#22 342-355: Umm (pause), I think it has changed [working in MNC has changed her]. You focus on conflict, right? Well, I personally have a good feeling. Working with Americans makes me feel good. They show respect and ask for your opinions and listen to it. Thai bosses behave differently. I feel good that they [Americans] behave like that.

Researcher: So when you work with Thais, do you feel different after you have been exposing to this American culture?

#22: Yes I feel different. I feel that why they [Thais] just giving order without listening to reasons, I have to say. Sometimes I feel that whatever they ordered, it is impossible to do. But American bosses will listen and accept it. If you can’t do it and the reason does make sense, they will believe it and listen to your reasons.

Displaying Emotion

One participant referred to the way the organizational culture affected his view of emotional displays. After working in his company for a long time, Interviewee #18 reportedly became more understanding when people expressed their emotions.

#18 249-254: Before, I could not accept it when people were aggressive. I got angry. I didn’t understand. But now this is the way they act, the message they try to give to somebody else, so I have to understand what is behind that behavior. I have to understand that people are emotional. If people are really emotional and uncontrolled, then I’ll be mad at them.

Separating Personal Issues from Work

One of the two respondents discussed their organizational culture in terms of separating personal issues from work. Interviewee #18, for instance, observed that he focused on relational outcomes following the conflict as standard in evaluating
appropriateness, which was the influence from his corporate culture. He expressed his admiration for the way Americans did not take things personally and indicated that he himself also did not take conflict about work personally as well. (This statement was quoted earlier in “relying on low-context values” in this section.)

#18 177-185: I think my experience, I have been working here long enough. I think that is a good system. … But here, just straightforward and then if we are not happy, we solved the problem and we forget about that. Sometimes he may refer to it, that’s fine, but not use it as a (unclear) case.

Researcher: So you don’t take it personally.

18: No.

Relying on Uncertainty-Avoidance Values

Uncertainty avoidance refers to a tendency to take risks and be comfortable with changes in the environment. Those from American culture tend to exhibit a lower level of uncertainty avoidance than those from Thai culture. Americans tend to be open and encourage changes and innovations. The Thais’ high uncertainly-avoidance value was evident in the organizational culture about which three Thai participants reported. Interviewee #4, for instance, conveyed his negative attitude toward his company’s encouragement of innovation, which suggested to him change and risks involved with it.

#4 193-206: [Name of the company] has a culture that rewards people with something special, something unique. People just jumped into that kind of project, anytime a special project (pause). But they forgot to do their normal duty. Their normal duty has less worth at that period of time because the company just pushes too much for employees to create something, to do something special, renovation, and intervention. Working for 10 years, 15 years, every year they still say that you need to prove that, prove this. No end, no ending points, so how can we stop this cycle. We have to do something special or invent something special. A lot of inventions created disaster later on, and the company has to move or has to say goodbye to the project, but the reward given before (pause), that never been recalled.
The Cultural Compromise/Synergy Model

The narratives that reflected the Cultural Compromise/Synergy Model involved an organization’s implementation of aspects of American and Thai cultural in developing the company’s policies and practices. Although most of the organizational values the participants reported fit the Cultural Dominance Model (none reflected Thai cultural values exclusively), three participants reported that their organizations were not purely American in their organizational culture.

#3 349-356: Yes, but before I answer that maybe I should give you a little bit of background about [name of the company]. In [name of the company], because we have been here 40 years, and there are so many Thais that graduated overseas, especially the United States, and there are many Americans that have been working overseas for two to three decades, so this is not a truly American culture. It is a combination of cultures.

#4 360-364: He will get the same reaction, and you get the same response form me too, no matter if it’s expats or national. Because it's a Thai-American working environment here, they do not tend to create dual culture in the workplace. They try to create corporate culture that half American or half Thai.

#10 209-219: Since we are in a company that has a culture like this, it is a [name of the company] culture. It is not completely American culture.

The Effects of the Culture of the Counterpart (RQ4)

The culture of the conflict counterpart may affect the way Thais and Americans interact in a conflict situation. To understand the intercultural nature of conflict interaction Research Question 4: “How do Thais and Americans working in multinational organizations describe the respects in which the cultural background of the conflict counterpart influences their perceptions of effectiveness/ineffectiveness and appropriateness/inappropriateness in conflict interaction?,” was addressed.

The investigation in this part has two main sections: the effects of the culture of the target on reactions to and judgments concerning conflict.
Reaction

Most of the Thai participants responded that they react differently when Thai and American conflict counterparts display the same behavior. Only a minority of them reported reacting similarly to representatives of both cultures.

Same Reaction

Focusing on Outcomes

One Thai participant, Interviewee #4, indicated that he would not respond differently to his conflict counterpart because of culture. He mentioned the corporate culture and a focus on the behavior as the main reasons. (Part of this statement appeared earlier in the section concerning the “Cultural Compromise/Synergy Model”).

#4 360-371: He will get the same reaction, and you will get the same response form me too, no matter its expats or nationals. Because it's a Thai-American working environment here, they do not tend to create dual culture in the workplace. They try to create corporate culture that half American or half Thai. So you don't have to act with Americans in one manner and working or reacting with the group of Thai people in another manner. I think it is unnecessary to react differently. I think it is a natural reaction that he's American or Thai; if you cause trouble, no matter what culture you are from, it all ends up with the same trouble. I do not see any reason to hate this person twice than an American.

Different Reaction

When Thais and Americans display the same behavior, they might not elicit the same responses. Many Thai respondents admitted that they react differently to Thais and Americans, mainly because they understand the nature of the two cultures.
*Being Softer with Thais and Being more Direct with Americans*

Five participants reported that they would react in a more gentle and sensitive manner when interacting with Thais, while being more direct and straightforward with Americans.

Interviewees #2 and #16 provided examples of how they would be more sensitive, less confrontational, and less direct with Thais than they would with Americans.

#2 297-303: Thai man, older, they probably have their own way of doing that [being aggressive]. To me, because I know the culture, I understand where he came from. But reaction (pause), I would react in a different manner as well. Because I know in the Thai culture, we can’t confront. We probably have to hold it back and talk to him afterwards. Handle things differently (pause). If I had to handle American people, I will handle them different from Thai.

#16 272-280: No I don’t think…. If they are American they are outspoken so you can tell them, be frank with them. To a certain degree, I think they will accept that, appreciate that. By telling them, sometimes (pause), you might not be able to tell them the whole story, they might not like it. But at least you can be more open to American than a Thai. Sometimes the Thai you cannot (pause), even when the person is outspoken, but you cannot tell them everything because they cannot accept or appreciate that much. A bit different.

*Judgment*

When discussing the effects of the culture of the counterpart on respondents’ attitudes, they varied in their responses.

*Hesitance*

Similar to the American participants, some Thai participants expressed hesitance when responding about their judgments of their conflict counterparts’ behavior according to the targets’ cultural backgrounds. Two participants said that they had to think about
their answers longer because they had not been in a situation in which Thais displayed the aggressive, straightforward behavior Americans do.

Interviewee #4’s responses are illustrative.

#4 341-346: Researcher: What if a person in the conflict was in the same level as you, and he attacked you in that same way. Would you feel the same way if an American does it or if a Thai does it?

#4: (Long pause) I have to think about it.

#4: It is very hard because, first, it never happened. I have to think about it longer because (pause), how should I react to it if it really happens.

Similarly, Interviewee #16 stated:

#16 284-285: I am not sure. Frankly speaking, I have never been in that situation or try to give them any grade if they react the same way.

Researcher: If you have to imagine being in such situation, how would you feel toward the two of them?

#16 288-289: I think it will be very difficult to give any evaluation between the two anyway.

Same Judgment

When the Thai participants conveyed that they judged the conflict counterpart without being affected by the other party’s cultural background, they offered various reasons.

Focusing on Outcomes

Four participants reported that they would not judge Thai and American counterparts differently because their main concern was the outcome following the conflict.
Interviewee #12 maintained that she would base her judgment on relational, as well as task-related, outcomes. She felt that being aggressive and direct had both positive and negative consequences.

#12 56-68: [If both Thais and Americans are aggressive and holding on to their ideas,] I would evaluate them the same way.

Researcher: Is it a good evaluation or a bad evaluation?

No. 12: Equally bad. On one hand, it might be good for work because you don't have to "Kreng Jai" [hesitant to bother, intrude, or cause discomfort] anyone if you think what you are doing is right. But in another aspect, it might not be good. Work might be good, but the working environment might be bad. You are in the society (pause) together. You might not be able to get along with anyone in the workplace. There might not be anyone [who] want[s] to cooperate or help you with the work. But your work might go well.

Interviewee #14, on the other hand, focused exclusively on the effect of the behavior on the feelings of the person involved in the conflict.

#14 267-277: No. I won’t evaluate them differently.

Researcher: Why not?

#14: Because whatever behavior we have received causes the same feeling. Nationality doesn’t make a difference. According to my standard, everything I have received from the action and whatever it makes me feel, I would feel that way. It’s not like if the person is a foreigner, I will give them 8 out of 10 for appropriate situation, and Thai I will only give 5. It’s not like if a Thai reaches level of 5, and I can’t take that, but for foreigners, I have to wait until they reach 8, and I would not bear with it or something. It’s not like that. I evaluate them the same way.

_Focusing on Behavior_

Some participants revealed that they focus on the behavior itself. They professed a positive attitude toward frankness and directness whether displayed by Thais or Americans. The emphasis is on how frankness was expressed. They reportedly liked people who are straightforward, but the behavior must be displayed in a polite, respectful manner. Four participants shared this view. Interviewee #19, for example, noted:
#19 235-240: Uh (pause). I wouldn’t say that quiet is so American or so Thai. It’s individual. I would see them the same. If they are quiet, I would rate them just 4 or 5 because I like to deal with people who speak out rather than being quiet, and being pressured, and being like an uptight time-bomb waiting for the time to explode. That would be very disastrous.

Appreciating Individual Differences

Five Thai participants indicated that they would refuse to judge people differently because of their nationality. These respondents insisted that there are different personalities within each culture that are the determining factor. For instance, Interviewee #10 indicated:

#10 184-190: In my own opinion, I don't see the difference. If a Thai solves problems in a frank or direct manner, I think it is a good thing. Both Thai and Western ways of dealing with conflict have their benefits and weaknesses. There are Americans who are very sensitive and kind of “Kid Lek Kid Noi” [being worried or sensitive about little thing]. It’s not that all Americans forget everything that had been said once they leave the meeting room.

Being Exposed to Other Cultures

Two Thai participants suggested that they would evaluate people in a similar manner, regardless of their culture, because they had been exposed to other cultures and were used to the ways people in different cultures behaved. Interviewee #15, for instance, said:

#15 206-209: I don’t really feel much different because I have been living in their countries before. I think these things [discussion based on reasons and directness] is good and I feel that dealing with conflict this way work the best. If Thais can work this way, I would be happy.
Different Judgment

*Being More Understanding with Americans*

Thai participants reported that they would be more understanding, forgiving, and patient with Americans and be more upset with Thais when they display certain types of behavior, such as aggressiveness. Five Thais mentioned this topic, and most of them cited their understanding of each culture as a reason.

Interviewee #2 admitted that she judged Thais and Americans differently because she understood American culture. She would be more upset, if Thais were aggressive because she considered that as inappropriate for Thai culture.

#2 263-272: React probably differently, but evaluate (pause), I guess evaluate as well (pause) because we know how American culture is, how they behave. And because (pause), most likely, and the way they think, their thought process is different, so whatever they present to you, it came from their background. That is, if the same thing happens to Thai people, you evaluate that Thai people differently.

Researcher: How so? If in the meeting, a Thai person did the same thing as that American co-worker (pause)?

#2: I will be really mad.

Researcher: Even if you know the person?

#2: Well (pause) probably not. But it's really inappropriate for Thai people to do that.

In a similar vein, Interviewee #24, showed his understanding of American culture and claimed to feel more neutral when representatives display aggressive behavior.

#24 229-233: Honestly, I don’t feel the same way toward both of them. For Americans, I feel that this is their personality, their culture. But for Thais, when they do that, I feel that they are aggressive. But for American, I feel more neutral. I don’t feel anything because that is the way they behave.
**Having Different Explanations for the Same Behavior**

Two Thai participants who reported that they would evaluate the same behavior of the conflict party differently in relation to their original cultures noted that the same behavior may result from different rationales or motivations.

For example, when Americans are more aggressive, Interviewee #2 would be more forgiving because Americans usually do not take things personally, whereas aggressive Thais might have some personal animosity feelings behind the action.

#2 279-283: Let me put it this way, if it's an American, most likely I don't think they take things personality, but for Thai people, usually a Thai person focuses on personal relationship. If they've done that [aggressive or face threatening behavior] to me, they probably have something in mind that they really hate me, so they can do that to me.

When asked how she would feel if Thais and Americans displayed obliging types of behavior, she answered:

#2 288-290: For an American, I would think that he'd probably have something behind. I find it very easy for me to get my way. But for Thais, I think it's is very common.

Interviewee #24 also ostensibly viewed quiescence and avoidance behavior differently when Thais and Americans display it.

#24 237-242: I don’t feel the same way. For Americans, I feel that he doesn’t want to share his ideas or doesn’t give the importance to my thoughts. Like he doesn’t care about what I am saying. It’s like he pretends not to hear it and just stay quiet. But for Thais, if they are quiet or avoiding the conflict, I would feel that they don’t have the ability. They don’t have any opinion or anything.

**Feeling More Positive when Americans are Sensitive to Thai Culture**

One Thai respondent claiming that she would not feel the same way if a Thai and American behaved in the same manner reportedly would rate the American more positively if the person displayed behavior that deviated from their general tendencies by being adaptive to Thai culture.
The Effects of Exposure to Other Cultures (RQ5)

Whether or how exposure to other cultures affects conflict styles and perceptions is the focus of this section. The exploration related to part of Research Question 5: “How do the gender of the person and exposure to other cultures affect preferences for and perceptions of the styles of conflict management that Thais and Americans working in multinational organizations report?” The effect of gender was not investigated because it was not examined for the American participants due to the small number of females. Hence, the data that follow pertain only to exposure to other cultures.

Unlike American participants who were living in Thailand during the interview, not all Thai participants had lived in other cultures. During the interviews, the participants indicated whether they had lived in other cultures. If they had, they were to indicate whether they thought the experience abroad affected their behavior and perceptions of conflict. Exposure to other cultures, then, was examined in terms of the effect on behavior and the effect on perceptions regarding conflict interactions.

Behavior

Some Thai participants who had been exposed to other cultures believed that their behavior had changed, whereas others felt that the exposure did not affect their behavior or perceptions of conflict.
Changes in Behavior

Those who reported that exposure to other cultures affected their behavior provided many insights into the ways they changed and the reasons for the changes. Their accounts included a variety of topics.

Using More/Less Direct/Confrontational Conflict Behavior

Four participants mentioned how exposure to other cultures affected their conflict styles. Three participants reported that they became more confrontational in conflict situations after living in the United States; one reported being less aggressive.

Interviewee #12 indicated that she was more confrontational once she was back, but after living in Thailand for a while, her behavior reverted to being more “compromising.” (The “compromising” style, for her, referred to give-and-take approach, and the focus was on preserving relationships, is described in respect to “compromising” in the “conflict styles” section.)

#12 144-149: Before, I think that we should compromise because of the way Thai society is. But after I came back [from the United States], I felt that, for some situations, you need to use “eyes to eyes fist to fist” approach. But after I have been back for a while, I felt that compromise is good too. Thai culture slowly absorbed back into me. Yeah, something like that.

Interviewee #5 reported that he used to be more obliging, but he became more argumentative after spending 3 years in the United States.

#15 286-290: I have changed. For me, I started to look at people who argue with me differently. When people argued with me (pause), before, I might just give in (pause), whether it’s because of seniority or whatever. I started to change. I might argue sometimes. Just want to argue a bit.

One participant, on the other hand, claimed that his experience living and working in the United States made him less aggressive and tended not to involve in a conflict. Interviewee #4 suggested that the more homogeneous environment in terms of racial composition, as well as the American personality in the workplace in the United States,
contributed to fewer incidences of conflict, so he felt that he came back being less aggressive than before.

#4 407-437: Less aggressive. I don't know what happened, but I didn't see strong conflicts over there. People just debated, or in a technical sense, in a normal term. … But there, people talked loud and laughed louder in the meeting room, it was very relaxed. … They could manage to have the project done with less conflict, or because there was no conflict between cross-cultural because they all were the same race. … These minorities always behaved like me, they knew themselves well. You were not going to cause them trouble. That might be the reason why I tended to have less trouble when I worked over there. But back home here (pause) … They [management] think that senior [employees] should create something or should invent something. Even though he [the senior] cannot do it [come up with new ideas] all the time, but at least expressing our concern in the meeting (pause). And this may be the reason why we tend to have more issues. Sometimes it causes conflict because we try to raise an issue. We try not to sit back and relax or keep quiet because it is American working culture. … Somehow, I think that when you have cross-cultural working environment, equally in terms of number in the business unit, you tend to have some debates. But if you are in other business units that the majority is one-sided, we tend to have less conflict. That is what I think of my short experience overseas.

Another reason for him to be less aggressive or tried to have less conflict was that he understood how expatriates felt when they were away from home, so he was being more sensitive.

#4 440-446: Absolutely, now I have less conflict because I know that most of them [expatriates] feel desperate in some senses when they are away from home. So I have to look into their intention, whether it is really his behavior, or it is the working environment that leaves him to show off the strange behavior. I believe that most people tend to work their best

Relying More on Low-Context Values

Some respondents revealed that exposure to other cultures led them to become more direct, assertive, and more willing to express their ideas in conflict situations after the exposure to American culture.
Interviewee #2, one of the two participants who claimed to be more assertive and direct, stated:

#2 318-325: I was more (pause), I was working in Thailand before I went to the U.S. I was more of a “yes” person. Sometimes I watched my opinion, but I know that it's not working. But anyway, I was more of a listening [sic] and following directions. Whatever it is, I didn't analyze the ideas. But when I was working in the U.S., I was pushed to think it through. If I disagreed, I should have said it upfront, or otherwise I would miss that's chance. You never have a chance to correct it. It will be too late.

#2 333-336: Well (pause), let me put it back. I think working in the U.S. was (pause), I learned that I have to be more assertive and more (pause), I won't say it affects the way I judge people, but it affects myself. In terms of (pause), I should be more assertive.

Combining Aspects from Different Cultures

Having seen people from different cultures interact, Interviewee #15 realized that there were both strengths and weaknesses of each style. He felt that the exposure to different cultures helped him learn to adopt and combine advantages of different styles selectively.

#15 263-271: My behavior has changed somewhat. I think I manage conflict better because I combined aspects of both cultures. When I first graduated and started working, I usually gave in to the people with a higher rank. I might express my thought a bit, but not really argued much. When I have [been] exposed to the new culture and gained additional knowledge, I am more willing to insist on the personal ideas and strong beliefs I have. If I think I am right, I will try to prove it, fight for it with reasons. At least I have proved myself no matter what the result turns out to be.

No Change in Behavior

Some Thai participants felt that exposure to other cultures did not affect their behavior. They offered different reasons as to why.
**Being Outcome-Focused/Relying on Linear Logic**

Interviewee #12 reported that her behavior did not change because of exposure to other cultures. The response she provided reflected her reliance on linear logic in analyzing conflict situations.

#12 267-274: No. I don't think I have changed.

Researcher: How are you usually? How do you deal with conflict?

#12: I usually compromise. I usually listen to reasons from both sides. Other people have their own reasons. But in conclusion, what is the best reason? We can decide on that. Each person has her/his own reasons, but what is the most beneficial outcome, you can decide on that.

**Combining Aspects from Different Cultures**

Interviewee #16 did not think that exposure to other cultures affected the way he behaved. He implied that it affected his perception because it made him understand people from different cultures. The understanding enhanced his ability to deal with conflict by selecting and combining the strong points of each culture.

#16 299-304: I don’t think it [my behavior] changed, but it made me deal with conflict better. Because I understand how the Americans think, what are their rationales, and why they do what they do. The same as Thai people, I can understand them more, and I can see the differences between the two cultures, and I try to blend the good points on both sides, and try to deal with the conflict.

**Perception**

In regard to perception, some Thai participants showed their hesitance in responding to whether their exposure to other cultures affected their judgments of conflict behavior. While some felt that experiences abroad shaped their perceptions of conflict, others reported that their experiences had no effect on their point of view.
Uncertainty of Effects

There was some hesitancy concerning the influence of exposure to other cultures on perceptions of the conflict counterparts. Interviewee #2, for example, noted that she was not certain whether her experience abroad or age affected her understanding of the ways people behave in conflict situations.

#2 339-345: I think it also depends on who the other person is (pause), usually I try to learn about that person first. Try to understand where he [sic] comes from before I judge [him]. I don't think it changed the way I judge people, but it affects in the fact that I know that if I deal with this person, how I should react. Each person is different. I am not sure it's because I was working in the U.S. I think I just learn more (pause), being old.

Change in Perception

When Thai participants felt that living in other cultures affected their judgment, they alluded to several common topics.

Being More Understanding of Other Cultures

Three participants contended that they gained more knowledge about their own, as well as others’ cultures, because of their experiences abroad. For example, Interviewee #19, who had been in the United States, as well as the United Kingdom, suggested that the knowledge of other cultures (not only Thais and Americans) she experienced while living abroad and through her work made her understand about what to expect in a conflict situation.

#19 262-276: Yes, sometimes it raised my expectations, and sometimes it lowered my expectations when I had to deal with different nationalities. For example, I was working with a lot of professional journalists, and probably, I was expecting them to have such and such special qualifications. I would say that they should behave in a way that is justifiable. Or maybe working with Chinese, I would, I ended up lowering
my expectations on the way they would express their opinions. The way they kept their emotion suppressed under the closed culture. I would lower my expectation that they would be cooperative or consistence. Consistency, is again, is individual. … Working with Norwegians, they are very straightforward, humble, friendly, outgoing, extroverted, and very polite.

In addition, as quoted earlier in the “no change of behavior” section, Interviewee #16 stated that he gained more understanding of both Thais and Americans, which helped him deal with conflict better.

#16 299-304: I don’t think it [my behavior] changed, but it makes me deal with conflict better. … I can understand them more, and I can see the differences between the two cultures, and I try to blend the good points on both sides and try to deal with the conflict.

_Relying More on Low-Context Values_

Interviewee #16 indicated that exposure to other cultures affected his perceptions concerning being open and expression of one’s ideas in conflict situations.

#16 352-356: The exposure definitely changed me. If you have a conflict, if you have a chance to explain both ways is better than being shy and not saying anything, and you don’t cooperate with the other person, and keep it to yourself, and let the other person make a mistake in the conflict.

_Withholding Judgment_

This category focuses on attempts to identify reasons behind others’ actions before forming a positive or negative impression of them. Two participants shared that they were not as quick in assuming or making judgments of others’ behavior. Interviewee #15, for example, mentioned how he viewed people who avoided arguments and those who were argumentative after the exposure to other cultures.

#15 293-307: I have changed. I will look at the reason why the person doesn’t argue. Does he have any personal reasons for not discussing or arguing? I started to change.
Researcher: How about people who argue a lot?

#15: First, I have to see if the person is someone who argues as their professions. If they are, I’ll look at them in the same way. I have to look at the way they argue, whether the content is relevant and informative.

Researcher: Were you like this before?

#15: Not really. Before, I didn’t pay much attention. I didn’t analyze things too much. It might be because I was young. … Before, I didn’t give much reason to others’ behavior. I would only give reasons to my own behavior. Now, I try to rationalize others’ behaviors. I would think about why they say this or that.

#15 321-325: I am (pause), my judgment is more fair. I am more respectful to others’ reasons. I am more respectful to their reasons or information behind the behaviors. I am trying to leave some room for something that might be confidential or something I don’t know.

*Widening Perspective*

Seeing or experiencing new things in other cultures can open one’s eyes and mind to different perspectives. Two participants mentioned this topic. An example of the belief appears in the statement below by Interviewee#15.

#15 228-234: The way I behave is a lot different. I feel that I am more mature and my perspective is widened. My thinking style has changed. I used to see things this way; my culture is one way, so I see thing a certain way. But when I was exposed to a new culture, I absorbed some of it. I feel that I selectively choose what is good, but if something is too strong, I would understand that it is too strong.

*Being Open-Minded*

One of the participants admitted that the exposure to other cultures helped her to become more open-minded. She was more accepting and understanding of how people from different cultures behave and view things in a different way.

#19 152-259: Living and working in other country make you more open-minded. It make you come up with easy conclusion that they come from
different cultures so they behave in different ways, so why don’t open your mind and listen more to what they are saying and trying to (pause). I am not changing myself to be more aggressive or to be more straightforward. I am just being myself but trying to be more (up tuned to deal with other cultures? unclear).

#19 288-294: If they break it [my expectation] (pause), my expectation come to low. … It’s just my expectation. They have different backgrounds, study from different text books. What else can you expect? You have to be open-minded when you are working in multinational corporations, in the atmosphere where you have to deal with people from 100,000 cultures and backgrounds.

No Change in Perception

*Having Same Judgment with Different Reaction*

Two Thai participants revealed that the exposure to other cultures did not affect their perceptions of others in conflict situations, but did affect their behavior. For example, as noted earlier for the topic “relying more on low-context values,” Interviewee #2 stated:

#2 333-336: I think working in the U.S. was (pause), I learned that I have to be more assertive and more (pause), I won't say it affects the way I judge people, but it affects myself. In terms of (pause), I should be more assertive.

*Spending only a Short Period of Time*

Two participants declared that the exposure to other cultures did not have an effect on them because they only spent a short period of time (about 1 month each) in the culture.

Interviewee #22, for instance, stated:

#22 332-334: You mean after I have been there and come back here, have I changed? For me it’s not different. One month is too short. I am still myself.
Spending only a short period of time in the United States, Interviewee #24 reported that his experiences abroad did not provide him with new experiences or anything different from what he encountered at his company.

#24 270-275: I think I didn’t see anything that much new. What I experienced there was similar to what I have seen in the company. If I have never worked with Americans here, I might feel that I have seen something new. Or the interaction might have been something new. But interacting with people here and there is not much different.

**American Exposure to Thai Culture and Behavior Change**

Thai respondents also provided accounts of Americans exposed to Thai culture and who had absorbed or were more sensitive to Thai styles of conflict interaction as a result.

**Using Indirect/Nonconfrontational Conflict Behavior**

Interviewee #2 said that after being exposed to Thai culture, Americans tended to take a less aggressive approach in conflict situations.

#2 40-47: Well, I usually, I think I watch my opinion every time I think I disagree with the ideas. But I never really have a conflict in Thailand. This is just my opinion, and I think mainly because they [Americans] are always keeping themselves not too aggressive with Asian people. Because they are aware of the culture, I think. So most likely Americans in Thailand (pause) are less aggressive. Let me put it this way, less aggressive than in the U.S.

**Relying on High-Context Values**

Because her superior had been living in Thailand for a long time, Interviewee #22 alleged, he became more like Thai people. She illustrated how her boss relied on less
direct communication approach. (The statement below was used as an example of “American deviations from an individualistic orientation” as well.)

#22 296-304: From my direct experience, … [m]y boss is not like that. He is like Thai already. He is frank, well, maybe not frank, more of indirect. He would say “I want you to do it this way. What you suggested is good, but it would be better if you do that.” This is the way he talks. I am not sure if you call that direct or frank.

Other Factors

There were many other factors that Thai participants believed to influence the way people deal with conflict in multinational corporation settings.

_Age/Experience/Maturity_

Four Thai participants regarded experiences and the maturity they had gained as they grew older as among the important factors that helped them to understand and learn how to manage conflict more effectively.

Interviewee #14, for example, commented:

#14 283-288: Let me think. I don’t think it is because I work for [name of the company], where there are foreigners. I think the behavior changed more because of experiences and age. When you are younger, the way you express yourself might be one way. When you are more mature, have more experiences, have learned about things, you know how to behave, how to deal with people and all.

Interviewee #10 felt that his experiences made him more willing to speak out and express his ideas.

#10 263-266: There is definitely a change. The change is because I am more experienced, not only the culture here, but more of the experience. I have a broader vision. I am more willing to talk and express ideas in meetings.
Nature of Occupation

Each type of occupation has different characteristics that can affect the way people deal with conflict. Two respondents raised concerns involving this topic.

Interviewee #19 provided an example of her publishing organization, which required employees to deal with conflict at a monochronic pace to get the work done in time.

#19 160-165: Just as this news organization is, if the conflict occurs, I think you should tackle it very quickly and make it finish, make it complete, make it understood; otherwise, the news organization would break apart. The teamwork is very important to me. I hope it is very important to other news bureau in other companies that have to work together as a team.

Interviewee #24 contended that the nature of his work involved a lot of technical data; therefore, discussion usually required linear logic and strong evidence.

#24 35-36: I explain it. Since this is a technical problem so we can base the explanation on theory.

Education

The effect of the education of the conflict counterpart on the way people handle conflict was another one of the topics that emerged. Interviewee #16 indicated that many factors should be taken into consideration when involving in a conflict. He mentioned level of educational specifically.

#16 163-175: I don’t know if culture have something to do with it, but I think the way you understand people that all people are different in education and so on, and even Thais or Americans or whatever. Sometimes they are different (pause). If you deal with people who have lower education, you do it one way. The ways you deal with different groups of people are different. That is why you have to understand who you are dealing with in a particular situation and what is the best way to handle that situation. Sometimes you try to explain the rationale to a person with low education; they may not understand because they may not be used to that kind of explanation. They might not be accustomed to
what you tell them to do. That is why there are no set rules applied to every situation.

**Language**

Language surfaced as a concern for a Thai participant when interacting in conflict situations with Americans. Interviewee #4 felt that because English was not his mother tongue, Americans might question his ability to understand and perform a task. (This statement was quoted as an example of “being ethnocentric” in Americans with individualistic orientation section.)

#4 11-204: Americans tend to believe that they are superior. … First, is the English, while my mother tongue is not. So they think that we are not getting understood in all cases. And the second one is that when you cannot speak the same language as they do, how can you perform the same thing based on the language that you cannot clearly understand. So this is for most of the cases that they look at me or another nationality like a lower class in some cases.

Interviewee #4 also reported that language obstacles prevented him from articulating or proposing ideas he had in mind.

#4 175-180: I know because I worked here long before him. And the reason that this [project] did not happen before was simply because we could not speak the same language. We could not propose that, “Hey boss we messed up your files now. It's time that we should reorganize it. We should set it up and call it a [name of the project]."

**Individual Differences**

Three interviewees felt that when dealing with conflict, it is important for one to recognize individual differences. Interviewee #16, for example, observed that learning about the other parties, listening to what they say, and analyzing conflict situations help facilitate the conflict situation.

#16 179-190: To me, I do not really have a standard. I will look at the person. I will try to understand her/his backgrounds first and then when I talk to them, try to (pause). One way to do this is to hear them out and see
what they want and where they are coming from, and what they are trying
to achieve. Once you try to understand, you will be able to handle the
situation better than first try to draw a conclusion that this is the way I
should deal with this person. People are all different anyway, so if you let
them explain and give them some chances to show it to you, maybe they
will appreciate you giving them the chance or something. One, that will
give you a chance to understand that person, and you can deal with the
situation easier.

#16 224-247: There is no a set rule for a conflict, case by case, person by
person, and situation by situation. Sometimes the same person, but in
different situations, you may have to deal with conflict different.

**Personal Relationships**

Personal relationships affect the way people handle conflict. Two people acting
in the same manner may not be evaluated similarly because of the different levels of
intimacy. Interviewee #2 provided an illustration that supports this idea.

#2 215-219: I know that Americans are more aggressive, but I didn't
expect him to be that emotional. Usually aggressive and emotional are
different, but this guy, since I know him, it's OK. If other person does this
to me, I would be mad (pause) and tell them to back off (laugh).

**Religion**

Interviewee #10 stated that his strong belief that his religion influenced almost
every aspect of his life. It guided his judgment, as well as the way he dealt with work
and conflict at work.

#10 140-149: Being in such [religious] society affect the way I accept
something and affect the way I work. [Name of the religion] society put
an emphasis on consultation. Before we do anything we should consult
each other. Consult here is not something like negotiation. You should not
demand nor consult for the best of your own benefit. You should focus on
public benefits. When giving opinion, it doesn't mean that you have to
only insist on to your own ideas. Like other methods, you have to listen to
other people.
Multiple Backgrounds

It is not surprising that many factors can simultaneously influence the way a person interacts and judges others in a conflict situation. Interviewee #10 described several variables, namely national culture, organizational culture, and religion, that he felt simultaneously affected his conflict interaction. (The second comment also appears in the earlier section pertaining to “feeling uncertainty” about the effects of national culture.)

#10 131-136: My culture (pause), in me there are many cultures. It’s a combination of cultures. Part of it is from the Thai culture and the other part is that I have been in this company for a long time. Of course, I have learned and absorbed some Western culture. And the other thing is that I believe in a religion called [name of the religion].

#10 160-164: I can't really separate or describe how I evaluate other people. What culture I was using. I'm not sure whether it was Western styles or other ways. But in general, it has some effects on the way I deal with people, the way I react to people, the way I evaluate others.

Recommendations

Thai participants provided suggestions and some insights into how they believe people should manage conflict in multinational corporations.

Resisting the Tendency to Overgeneralize

When dealing with people from different cultures about whose personality and background one knows little, it is common for a person to rely on cultural stereotypes in her/his interactions. Operating on the basis of general tendencies can be beneficial when no other information is available; however, overgeneralization can have a negative impact as well. Two participants provided their concerns along this line. Interviewee #14, one of the two, recommended that attempts be made to learn about the other person on a more personal level and deal with her/him accordingly.
Mainly, we should separate culture into Western and Asian. The way each culture deals with conflict is different. We should know how to deal with people from each culture, how to handle conflict with others. When we deal with Thais, if we are too direct, they might not be able to take it. They might be angry. When dealing with people from different cultures, you cannot apply the assumptions or stereotypes to everyone in the multinational corporations. You should learn about the person. Other than nationality, you should look at the personality. Working in the same company, you will know each person’s personality. Roughly, you have to consider nationality and personality. Like they said (pause), each person is different, so interacting with each person should also be different.

**Listening**

Listening was another attribute some respondents emphasized. One Thai participant, Interviewee #10, elaborated on the art of attentive listening. He felt that attentive listening could lead to better resolution of conflicts.

Another thing is listening; people usually hear but not listen. You should listen and understand what others are saying, and understand the background of others’ ideas. Don’t insist on your own opinions. If you don't listen to them, when people are saying something, you will always find a counterattack. That way, you cannot find the resolution that benefit to all parties involved. That is not beneficial to anyone. Of course, don’t mix personality with the issue. Don't focus on the fact that you like the person or not.

**Withholding Judgment**

Interviewee #3 raised an issue about withholding judgment. He implied that there are not always right and wrong sides in a conflict, nor is there a solution to every conflict situation. In his view, it is important to realize that some deeply rooted beliefs can not be changed. The ability to withholding judgment, as well as accepting others’ ideas were necessary in managing conflict.

Firstly, one of the first few things is don't judge. You have to understand and accept. If you go to a real high level of conflict like
international conflict, you cannot put the judgment to it. You have to only understand and accept the facts. That might be the way they really strongly believe. You cannot change them. The point is that, once you understand what they strongly believe, not evidence, the beliefs, the deeply rooted in their culture you cannot change it, for example religion. … You cannot go through and finalize all the conflicts.

**Being Prepared**

This category refers to the ability to plan ahead and an attempt to equip oneself with information and strategies needed before entering and while in a conflict situation. For Interviewee #11, the ability to analyze the situation and the conflict counterpart are of a great importance.

#11 346-352: If you focus on the results, you have to read your audiences. Everyone is an actor or actress. You have to play your role. When you communicate something, do not blame it on the receivers. You blame it on the sender. If you have to read (pause), how do you think you should send it [information] across, what you have to say so they perceive it exactly as what you want to say, and accomplished what you want.

**Being Sensitive and Learning about Other Cultures**

Being sensitive and learning about other cultures was the most prevalent recommendation Thai participants provided. Seven Thai respondents felt that this is one of the most important concerns when working in multicultural workplaces. Interviewee #15, for example, discussed the benefit of learning about, as well as adapting to the culture of other people in the workplace, as follows:

#15 328-345: When having a conflict with people from different cultures (pause), if we know about their cultures, not just copying, but we should adapt part of the culture and apply it to our culture. Because if we work with them, and adapt or use some of their cultural aspects, they will feel more convenience and feel that we are more professional in working with them. If you still hold on to the old ways (pause), if you have to deal with people from different cultures, you should understand their cultures and what they are like. It’s not like you are trying to act in such manner with the boss to gain favors. It facilitates the way they work with us. They are
managers, and we work under them. If we facilitate their work processes, it will help them be more successful in working with us. The company will survive. If they survive, we survive. It benefits both sides, win-win situation. It is much better than being stubborn and thinking or doing the same thing over and over, no improvement. If anything, at least you develop yourself. You will gain knowledge from people from different cultures and provide yourself with new experiences.

Interviewee #4 observed that the matter is not one-sided. Members of all cultures should learn about each other’s culture and bend toward each other.

#4 300-307: Because I'm Thai, I tend to think that Americans should work toward our culture. That is true, but not all. I always regard that Americans, British, and Australians have their own cultures, and I am not going to pull them in 100% that you have to bend yourself down toward our culture 100% or completely. I have never thought [of] it that way. Working in the American and Thai company here, I would like to see both sides bend toward each other. Not toward the Thai 100% or American culture completely. Both have to sacrifice like give-and-take.

Separating Personal Issues from Work

Interviewee #10 suggested that when dealing with conflict, it is essential that one separate the other person in the conflict with from the task. He insisted that if one mixes personal issues with work, conflict will be very difficult to manage, let alone resolve.

#10 305-313: Personality involves people in every nationality. It is the main factor in the conflict that cannot be solved. For example, if someone you don't like her/his personality or the way s/he does things, you don’t want to work with her/him. If you have a conflict and you don't like the person, conflict will be hard to solve. If you combine the conflict issues with your dislike of the person, if you cannot separate ideas and the person (pause). If you can separate that you do not agree with the idea or the approach to work, but not disagreeing with the other person.

Focusing on Public Benefits

The final suggestion focused on the benefits to the public or to the society as a whole. Interviewee #10 made this observation:
In general, no matter who you have a conflict with. If you have a problem and deal with it using discussion, the discussion should not be based on your own benefit alone. Do things for the good of the society. If you work in a company you should consider the benefit for the company. We should present the ideas, and do it in a way that focuses on sharing. Not just saying that we are right and others are wrong. That is not the right attitude.

This chapter has presented the results of an investigation of the interviews involving selected samples of the participants in the larger study. Chapter 6 presents a discussion of the findings in this chapter, along with those in Chapter 4, the conclusions the data support, and suggestions for future research.
Chapter 6

Discussion, Conclusions, and Suggestions for Further Research

Conflict is an inevitable phenomenon in organizations that may contribute to personal frustrations, but that can also benefit organizations (Rahim, 2002). Conflict with people from different cultures, however, may add complexity to conflict in organizations since the representatives of each culture may have different assumptions, values, and styles of managing it. Often, intercultural conflict emerges because of misunderstanding and the misinterpretation of related issues. Ting-Toomey (2003) calls this *pseudoconflict*. Pseudoconflict may become actual conflict if the parties fail to manage or clarify the issues. Usually, conflict is more intense when persons from different cultures involved are distinctive than when they are similar (Triandis, 2003). Differences in perception of competence can greatly influence the outcome of such conflicts. To reap the full benefits of organizational conflict that involves people from different cultures, an understanding of the way members of each culture handle conflict, as well as evaluate others in conflict situations, is essential.

The purpose of this study was to explore the ways Thais and Americans in multinational corporations in Thailand manage conflict, as well as how they evaluate conflict behavior displayed by their counterparts. Beyond the culture of the participants, this study also took into consideration other factors that can affect conflict management behavior and related perceptions of it. These factors included, but were not limited to, culture of the conflict counterpart, gender, and length of exposure to other cultures. In addition, I checked the individualistic-collectivistic orientation of American and Thai participants to test my assumptions concerning cultural differences between the Thai and United States participants. Finally, I employed both quantitative and qualitative methods in the hope of providing a more complete understanding of conflict issues and how the two types of participants deal with them.
This chapter provides a summary of the results and interpretation of the data organized according to the research questions and hypotheses. The first part is summary of the quantitative results, followed by the summary of the qualitative data, and the comparison of the two methods. Following the discussion of the two sets of findings, I explore implications of the research for scholars and practitioners, the strengths and limitations of the study, and possibilities for future research.

Conclusions and Discussion of the Quantitative Analyses

The quantitative data showed mixed results. Some findings were consistent with previous research; however, many of them did not support expectations derived from previous scholarly literature.

Individualistic-Collectivistic Orientation

Even though Americans are widely assumed to be individualistic and Thais are presumably collectivistic, INDCOL scores indicated that Thai participants were higher on individualism scale than the American participants. Even when separating Thai participants into those who had been exposed to (lived in) other cultures and those who had not, the results remained similar. Thai participants, regardless of their exposure to other cultures, reported being more individualistic than did the American participants.

These results contradicted prominent work on individualistic-collectivistic value orientations. Hofstede’s (1980, 2001) study of work-related values in 50 countries showed that people from Thai culture were low in their individualistic orientation, whereas those from American culture tended to be much higher in individualistic orientation. In fact, Hofstede’s more recent study revealed that among 50 countries in the study, people from the United States ranked first in individualism, whereas people from Thailand ranked 44th. In addition, when exploring the influence of national culture and organizational culture on managerial values, attitudes, and performance, using 12 Thai-
owned and 13 American-owned companies in Thailand, Sorod (1991) reported that, in line with Hofstede’s assumptions, those from Thai culture were low in individualism, low in masculinity, high in power distance, and high in uncertainty avoidance.

Previous studies primarily have involved the participants in their own culture, whereas the present study included American expatriates in Thailand and Thais working in MNCs. These characteristics of the participants might have affected the findings. One study involving participants of a similar nature yield the same sort of contradictory results. Boonsathorn (1999) determined that Asian students in the United States had a higher individualistic orientation, whereas American students were more collectivistic in nature. Sriussadaporn-Charoenngam and Jablin (1999) suggest that contemporary Thai organizations might have gone through some changes, such as the higher level of emphasis on individualism and lower level of emphasis on power distance. These changes, they argue, could be a result of the fact that many Thai managers have been educated in the United States or been involved in some Western types of business training.

As mentioned earlier, the present study focused on participants who experienced living in a culture other than their own. Even though the analysis did not show a statistically significant association between the length of exposure to other cultures and one’s individualistic-collectivistic orientation for the Thai participants, the qualitative data indicated that Thais and Americans exhibited some deviation from their general cultural tendencies. They also felt that exposure to other cultures affected their conflict behavior, as well as their perceptions of conflict. For the most part, Americans and Thais espoused stereotypical individualistic-collectivistic tendencies, some of the comments reflected deviations. For example, Interviewee #2 offered interesting comments about American expatriates in Thailand that indicated an orientation toward collectivistic styles. She believed that Americans in Thailand often took a less aggressive approach in conflict situations:

#2 42-47: But I never really have a conflict in Thailand. … I think mainly because they [Americans] are always keeping themselves not too aggressive with Asian people. Because they are aware of the culture, I
think. So most likely Americans in Thailand (pause) are less aggressive. Let me put it this way, less aggressive than in the U.S.

Further, Interviewee #22 indicated that her American boss did not behave in a typically American manner. He reflected high-context values in communicating with her. He was not overly straightforward and communicated in a way that was sensitive to face and relationship issues:

#22 296-304: From my direct experience, … [m]y boss is not like that. He is like Thai already. He is frank, well, maybe not frank, more of indirect. He would say “I want you to do it this way. What you suggested is good, but it would be better if you do that.” This is the way he talks. I am not sure if you call that direct or frank.

The divergence in findings from those in prior research may also have stemmed from the unique characteristics of expatriates who have been sent to work in Thailand or Thais who work in American companies in Thailand. The American expatriates who were working in MNCs in Thailand could have had different characteristics than Americans who live in their home country. For example, even though not discussing individualistic-collectivistic orientations per se, Interviewee #8 revealed his belief in a unique characteristic of people choosing to be expatriates:

#8 363-369: I didn't mean to say that expats are going to be, you know, more resilient, but you would think that a person who is chosen to become an expat overseas is going to be used to (pause), is going to have a certain toughness to them, you would hope. And they are not going to get overly emotional to the point of crying and so forth.

In a similar vein, Thai participants who were working in MNCs in Thailand might not represent typical Thais in regard to the individualistic-collectivistic orientation. Other than their atypical tendencies, organizational culture might also have contributed to the deviation.

Another explanation for these findings is that individualism-collectivism, perhaps, is not bipolar in nature. Depending on the situation or relationship, a person might be high on measures of both individualism and collectivism. As the findings further suggested, although paying more attention to relational and face concern, Thais expressed their preferences for individualistic styles and evaluated low-context communication
favorably. In light of data for Mexican participants, Grabrielidis et al. (1997) proposed that interdependence (which characterizes collectivism) and independence (which characterizes individualism) might be separate dimensions, not different ends of the same continuum.

Even though there were significant differences in statistical analysis, the mean INDCOL scores between Thais and Americans were not radically different. For Americans, the mean was 3.50, and for Thais, it was 3.27. The reliability of the instrument might have contributed to the absence of more striking differences. Cronbach’s alpha for the entire scale was .61, with the reliability values of the subscales ranging from .22-.66. Although such values were generally in the acceptable range, they were not as high as those for other measures. Because of the strong evidence for Americans’ and Thais’ individualistic-collectivistic orientations in other research, the small differences in mean scores, and the possible limitation relating to the reliability of the instrument, the present findings do not provide completely suitable grounds for rejecting the assumption that the Thais are generally collectivistic and that representatives of the United States are generally individualistic.

**Preference for Styles of Conflict Management**

*H1: In multinational organizations, Thais prefer using avoiding and obliging conflict management styles more than do Americans.*

The findings from the current study provided support for Hypothesis 1. Thai participants reported a greater preference for avoiding and obliging styles of conflict management than American participants did. The results were consistent with the part of Face Negotiation Theory (Ting-Toomey, 1988; Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998) that posits that people from a collectivistic culture, such as Thailand, would prefer harmony-enhancing, nonconfrontational styles more than people from an individualistic culture would.

Myriad studies exploring the influence of the individualistic-collectivistic value dimension on preferences for conflict styles have shown similar results. For example,
Leung (1988) reported that the Hong Kong Chinese preferred avoiding conflict style more than Americans did. Chiu and Kosinski (1994) found that Hong Kong participants were less direct, less assertive, and less confrontational than American students were. Focusing on the task-related conflicts, Trubisky, Ting-Toomey, and Lin (1991) determined that Taiwanese students tended to prefer an avoiding and obliging styles more than American participants did. Gabrielidis et al. (1997) observed that Mexicans preferred the accommodation (obliging) style more than American participants did.

Even though most of the previous scholarly literature demonstrates that collectivists prefer avoiding and obliging styles, the results of Gire and Carment’s (1993) study indicated that Canadians (high in individualism) reportedly preferred harmony-enhancing styles more than did Nigerians (high in collectivism). The researchers attributed the deviation of their findings to the different characteristics of the Asian and African collectivism, as well as to the role the participants assumed in the study (accused and accuser). Boonsathorn (1999) determined that Asian and American students did not show different preferences for avoiding and obliging styles.

Work specifically investigating Thais’ conflict management highlights a conflict avoidance tendency. Comparing Thais to Australians (high in individualism), Chau (as cited in Komin, 1995) reported that Thais preferred avoiding and compromising styles more than did Australians. In addition, Thais ranked obliging highest and compromising lowest in respect to prominence of styles of conflict management. Laurent (1983) also noted that Thais tend to withhold criticism and negative comments concerning the workplace, which suggests conflict avoidance and harmony-enhancing tendencies. Komin (1995) produced somewhat different results. She discovered that Thai participants reported integrating, compromising, avoiding, and dominating as their preferred styles. None of the participants preferred an obliging style.

**H2: In multinational organizations, Americans prefer using integrating, dominating, and compromising conflict management styles more than do Thais.**

Contrary to expectations, Hypothesis 2 was not confirmed. No significant differences in the preferences for integrating, compromising, and domination styles between Thai and American participants emerged. The results were counter to the part of
Face Negotiation Theory suggesting that high self-face concern and task-orientedness incline individualists to engage in more direct, confrontational conflict behavior and that Thais’ mutual-face and relational concerns make them less likely to use direct conflict styles.

Several other studies also fail to support this part of Face Negotiation Theory. For instance, American participants in Trubisky, Ting-Toomey, and Lin’s (1991) study reportedly preferred integrating and compromising less than did Taiwanese participants. Gire and Carment (1993) reported that their Canadian participants preferred nonconfrontational styles more than Nigerian participants. Gabrieldis et al. (1997) noted that American participants used integrating styles less than did their Mexican counterparts. In comparing Thais to Australians, Chau (as cited in Komin, 1995) observed that, similar to Thai participants, Australians ranked obliging as their most prominent style and compromising as their least prominent style. In addition, Australians scored lower in their preferences for compromising than did Thais. Integrating, compromising, avoiding, and dominating were their preferred styles. Similar to previous studies, in this study, Thai participants preferred direct confrontational styles of conflict, but not more than Americans did. Both Thais and Americans reported using such styles to a similar extent.

Not all previous research has revealed inconsistent results; some support the aspect of Face Negotiation Theory in question. For example, Barnlund (1989) observed that Americans preferred to express more aggressive behavior in conflict situations. Chiu and Kosinski (1994) showed that Americans were more direct, assertive, and confrontational than Hong Kong Chinese. Boonsathorn (1999) also discovered that American students preferred dominating and compromising styles more than did Asian participants.

Overall, the current study confirmed collectivists’ preference for harmony-enhancing, nonconfrontational styles. However, the assumed individualists’ greater preference for direct confrontational styles did not receive support. The unexpected results might be attributable to the context of the study. One of Face Negotiation Theory’s assumptions is that, other than culture, interpersonal relationships and
situational issues influence facework behavior and styles of handling conflict. This argument is in line with that of Gabrielidis et al. (1997), who reported that the American participants were less competitive because of the interpersonal nature of the conflict. In organizational settings in which personal and organizational interests involve higher stakes, different conflict styles might prevail.

Whereas previous researchers primarily depended on students, those in the present study consisted of Thais and Americans working in MNCs in Thailand. The reliance on business people (as opposed to students) might have affected the results. People in actual business settings might be more task-oriented and have more concern about self-face than do students. Another explanation for the findings is that in MNC settings, even though Thais still showed high concerns for harmonious relationship in the workplace, both Thais and Americans might have been equally task-oriented. A focus on task and goal achievement in MNCs might have encouraged or led Thais, like Americans, to exhibit conflict styles that were more solution-oriented. In addition, the intercultural interaction (instead of interaction with people from the same culture in cross-cultural study) might have had an impact on the participants’ behavior as well. When dealing with Americans who mainly take a direct active approach toward conflict, Thais might have felt obliged to use similar styles or be more competitive to reach their goals.

**Perceived Competence of Styles of Conflict Management**

*H3: In multinational organizations, Thais perceive those using avoiding and obliging styles of conflict management to be more communicatively competent than do Americans.*

Hypotheses 3 and 4 focused on perceptions of conflict styles. For Hypothesis 3, the results of this study provided only partial support. Contrary to expectations, Thai participants did not perceive avoiding and obliging as the most competent styles in dealing with conflict in the MNC context. The only prediction supported was that they saw obliging as more appropriate than dominating. Thai participants rated integrating and compromising most favorably in terms of competence (both appropriateness and effectiveness). They viewed obliging as more appropriate than dominating, but rated the
two at similarly low levels of effectiveness. Avoiding, on the other hand, they rated as low in appropriateness as they did dominating and the two as the least effective styles.

The data were not consistent with past evidence. Scholars investigating Thai culture and Thai values (e.g., Fieg, 1989; Holms & Tangtongtavy, 2000; Komin, 1995) describe Thais as valuing smooth interpersonal relationships, having negative attitudes toward conflict phenomena, and trying their best to avoid conflict. For example, studying Thais working in various organizations, Sriussadaporn-Charoenngam and Jablin (1999) determined that one of the characteristics viewed as reflective of communicative competence was “knowing how to avoid conflict.”

Even though giving in to other parties and avoiding conflict to preserve relationships are a matter of emphasis among Thais in general, as well as Thais working in Thai organizations, these styles might not be as highly appreciated or encouraged in American MNCs, where task accomplishment and assertiveness are of great importance, as the qualitative investigation suggested. In such organizational settings, avoiding discussion about conflicting ideas can obstruct task accomplishment. As such, Thais might not view these styles as indicative of competence. Obliging encourages more exhaustive investigation of the conflict issue to reach task goals, and Thais viewed it as more appropriate than dominating, but not as more effective. Obliging encourages smooth interpersonal relationships in which conflict can be discussed and conclusions reached. Dominating is reflective of self-face concerns, and was regarded as low in competence possibly because, from Thai perspective, it tends to be disruptive of relationships among co-workers.

H4: In multinational organizations, Americans perceive those using integrating, dominating, and compromising styles of conflict management to be more communicatively competent than do Thais.

Because of the small number of American participants, those who agreed to participate in the study rated only Thai counterparts’ conflict behavior. For these data, Hypothesis 4, for the most part, received support. Americans rated integrating and compromising styles of conflict management as more appropriate, as well as more effective, than avoiding and obliging styles. However, they evaluated dominating styles
as low in appropriateness as they did avoiding and obliging. For effectiveness, they rated dominating and obliging in a similar manner and saw both as more effective than avoiding.

These results were compatible with previous findings. Canary and Spitzberg (1987, 1989) noted that American participants in two of their studies rated integrative strategies as the most competent and avoidant and distributive strategies as lower in competence ratings. Moreover, Gross and Guerrero’s (2000) participants evaluated integrating as the most competent style and dominating as effective only when used in combination with integrating. They saw obliging and compromising as neutral and avoiding as indicative of incompetence. Olson and Singsuwan (1997) also reported that whereas Thais rated persuasive styles more favorably, Americans revealed a more positive attitude toward argumentative styles.

As expected, Americans in MNCs in Thailand viewed direct, confrontational styles of conflict management displayed by Thais, such as integrating and compromising, as more competent than the indirect styles, such as avoiding and obliging. Dominating was not positively related to the perceived competence despite recognition that it can enhance a person’s goal achievement. The reason might be that being aggressive or relying on power, with little concern for other parties, can disrupt the relationship of co-workers and create obstacles to task accomplishment. American participants especially might have been aware of the harm dominating can cause when displayed in MNCs that involve people from collectivistic cultures who highly value harmonious relationships.

Culture of the Conflict Counterpart

*H5: In multinational organizations, Thais perceive Thais to be more communicatively competent than they perceive Americans using the same conflict management styles.*

The ANOVA results did not support Hypotheses 5. Contrary to expectations, Thais did not consistently evaluate Thais as more competent than Americans when displaying the same conflict styles for all of the five categories. For appropriateness, Thais rated the conflict styles displayed by two target cultures in a similar manner. There
was a significant interaction for target culture and conflict management styles for effectiveness. Thais saw American as more effective when displaying integrating and compromising, whereas they saw Thais as more effective when displaying dominating and obliging styles.

Previous scholars have suggested that collectivists clearly tend to separate and treat people that they consider to be part of in-groups and out-groups differently (Triandis, 2003). In terms of conflict behavior, many studies suggest that collectivists adopt more indirect styles that aim at preserving relationships with those in in-groups and use more confrontational styles in dealing with those in out-groups (e.g., Leung, 1988; Oetzel, 1995; Ting-Toomey, 1999). For example, Leung’s (1988) study revealed that Hong Kong Chinese were more likely than Americans to choose hostile strategies when dealing with strangers than with friends. Other than in respect to action, Gudykunst and Kim (1997) note that collectivists tend to evaluate in-groups in a more positive and friendly manner than they do out-groups. On the other hand, Oetzel et al. (2001) reported that relational closeness did not have much effect on face concerns nor facework behavior of people from individualistic and collectivistic cultures. Neither individualists nor collectivists in their study differed in their preference for given styles on basis of relational closeness. The investigation suggested that situational factors (in this case relational closeness) might not play as large a role in conflict behavior as the person’s culture of origin and self-construal.

At least two factors might account for the findings in the present study. First, what the participants considered as in-groups and out-groups might have differed from how we ordinarily view the two types. Unlike previous work, which operationalized in-group/out-group membership on the basis of the closeness of the relationship, this study defined in-groups/out-groups on the basis of culture of the conflict counterpart. Some intercultural communication scholars (e.g., Chen & Starosta, 1998; Triandis, 1988) maintain that, for collectivists, in-groups are those whose members have close or familial relationships, whose well-being they are concerned about, and who are mutually dependent. As such, Thais working in MNCs might have considered Americans working in the same team or the same department as in-groups and Thais working in other
departments as out-groups. Second, the divergence from expectations might have occurred because the in-group/out-group nature of the conflict counterparts may not have had a significant effect on face concerns and facework behavior, as Oetzel et al. (2001) suggested. If the in-group/out-group nature of the target did not influence facework behavior, it might not have played a significant role in the evaluation of styles of conflict management either.

**H6: In multinational organizations, differences in perceptions by Americans of communicative competence of conflict management styles based on the culture of the conflict counterpart are less pronounced than in the case of Thais.**

In view of the small number of Americans samples, American respondents only evaluated behavior displayed by Thais. Therefore, Hypothesis 6 could not be tested. The influence of culture of the counterpart on the behavior and the perceptions of conflict styles were explored, however, in detail in the qualitative investigation.

**Gender of the Participants**

**H7: In multinational organizations, gender relates differently to preferences for particular styles of conflict management among Thais and Americans.**

This part of the exploration focused on whether males and females prefer different styles of conflict management when dealing with conflict in MNCs. ANOVA indicated that males and females did not exhibit significantly different preferences for particular conflict styles. Hence, Hypothesis 7 was not confirmed. The small number of females in the American sample should be taken into consideration when interpreting the results, however.

Findings regarding to gender and preferences for conflict behavior, to date, have been inconsistent. Some studies have produced evidence supporting such gender stereotypes as that men rely more on competitive styles, whereas females rely more on harmony-enhancing styles (e.g., Coccroft & Ting-Toomey, 1994; Yelsma & Brown, 1985). However, there is other evidence showing no significant differences attributable to gender in preferences for particular conflict styles (e.g., Ting-Toomey, Oetzel, & Yee-
Jung, 2001) and some revealing that males and females prefer conflict styles that oppose gender stereotypes (e.g., Ohbuchi & Yamamoto, 1990).

The current study revealed no significant differences between males and females in preferences for conflict styles. This was consistent with what Cupach and Canary (1997) concluded in their extensive review of the literature concerning close relationships. They noted that males and females display more similar than different preferences and that when differences do exist, behavior that deviates from gender stereotypes is more prevalent.

**H8: In multinational organizations, gender relates differently to perceptions of the communicative competence of the conflict counterpart among Thais and Americans as a function of style.**

Because of the insufficient number of females in American participants, only the perceptions of Thais were included in this investigation. The data partially supported Hypothesis 8. There was no significant difference in evaluations of styles in regard to perceived appropriateness among males and females. However, Thai females rated integrating, avoiding, dominating, and compromising as more effective than did Thai males. On the other hand, Thai males rated obliging as more effective than did Thai females.

Gender-related perceptions of competence of different styles of conflict management have not received as much attention as the relationship between gender and preferences for given styles. However, studies of preferences for styles shed some light on the differences in perceived effectiveness reported here. Similar to previous research on male and female preferences for given conflict styles (e.g., Cupach & Canary, 1997), males and females showed no difference in their perceptions of the appropriateness of different styles of conflict management. On the other hand, for effectiveness, females assessed direct and confrontational styles more favorably than males did. Males, in contrast, viewed obliging as more effective than females did. These findings, in large part, were contrary to gender stereotypes. Since gender-linked preferences were not in line with stereotypes, it makes sense that perceptions of effectiveness would also not be.
Length of Exposure to Other Cultures

H9: The time Thais and Americans spend in other cultures relates to their preferences for and perceptions of conflict management styles.

Hypothesis 9, which concerned the preferences for and the perception of conflict management styles, was partially confirmed. The results indicated that exposure to other cultures related to conflict behavior more than attitudes concerning each conflict style did. In respect to preference for styles, the data revealed significant relationships between the length of exposure to other cultures and Thai participants’ preference for avoiding, obliging, and dominating styles in the expected direction. That is, the longer the time Thais spent in other cultures, the more they reported using a dominating style and the less they reported relying on avoiding and obliging styles. However, for American participants, exposure to other cultures was not associated with the conflict styles they reported exhibiting.

For the most part, length of exposure to other cultures did not relate to how either Thais or Americans in MNCs evaluated the competence (both appropriateness and effectiveness) of different conflict management styles. The only significant relationship was the Thais’ exposure to other cultures and their ratings of the appropriateness of avoiding styles, but it ran counter expectations. That is, the longer the time Thai participants spent in other cultures, the more they reported positive judgments of the appropriateness of avoiding styles.

Prior scholarly literature suggests that the time one spends in another culture can affect cultural adaptation in many ways. For example, knowing that one has to be in a new culture for an extended period of time can be a source of motivation for her/him to adjust to the new culture to be able to survive (Alkhazraji et al. 1997; Begley, 2003). In contrast, when a person expects a temporary stay, s/he may feel little or no need for adjustment. In addition to their own need for survival, long-term sojourners are sometimes under pressure to act in accordance with new cultural norms because of the expectations of the members of the host culture. Exploring the relationship between degrees of acculturation and preferences for different conflict management styles,
Boonsathorn (1999) determined that the longer the time Asian participants spent in the United States, the more they reported exhibiting dominating conflict management styles. In addition to the time spent, degree of acculturation of Asian participants related to integrating, dominating styles, and obliging styles. Specifically, the higher the reported degree of acculturation, the more the more expressed preferences for integrating and dominating styles, and the less they reported enactment of obliging styles of conflict management.

The statistical data in the present study did not provide strong support for previous assessments of the influence of length of stay in other cultures on conflict behavior and related perceptions. Only Thais who were exposed to other cultures reported using more direct and confrontational conflict styles. Americans’ exposure to other cultures did not, however, foster the use of indirect conflict styles. Much less influence of exposure was evident in their perceptions of how they behave in conflict situations.

Beyond the length of exposure, there are other possible factors that can affect the degree of cultural adaptation. One reason for the nonsignificant findings might be the relatively high status positions American expatriates assumed in their organizations. As a result of occupying such positions, they might not need to have adapted to the Thai culture by using less direct styles to deal with conflicts. Because of the authority and power they had, people in the company, including the Thai employees, might have adjusted their behavior toward the American expatriates. Furthermore, since both Thai and American participants were working in American MNCs, the organizational culture might have encouraged only Thais to adapt their styles according to American culture. In addition, cultural adaptation occurs more easily at a behavior level. Perceptions or deeper attitudes, values, and beliefs are much harder to change (Kim, 2001). This study supported this idea, in that there were more significant relationships between exposure to other cultures and preferences for given styles than between exposure and attitudes concerning each style.

Several statistical analyses failed to reveal significant results for the two groups of the participants. This may be partly attributable to the sensitive nature of intercultural
and conflict issues within organizational context. Moreover, other limitations accompanied survey methods, such as a fatigue effect relating to the length of the survey or understanding of the language used, might have contributed to such findings. To offset some of the limitations of the survey method, I acquired additional data amenable to qualitative investigation. In addition to its value in triangulation, the qualitative analyses served as a tool for developing a more complete and detailed picture of the intercultural conflict phenomenon in MNCs in Thailand. The next section provides a summary of the pertinent findings.

Conclusions and Discussion of the Qualitative Investigation

The interviewing method aligned well with the purpose of this study. As Maxwell (1996) indicates qualitative investigations are suitable when researchers’ goals are to understand the meaning of the participants’ experiences, understand the role of context on the action, focus on process, and develop causal explanations for how particular factors play given roles in eliciting certain types of behavior. Culture is one of the areas in which qualitative examinations are considered ideal in light of the complex and sensitive nature of certain matters. In fact, some scholars (e.g., Cronbeck, 1984; Eysenck, 1983) even question the validity of quantitative approaches when used in cross-cultural or intercultural studies. In any event, a reliance on qualitative approaches for studying cultural issues has become more and more frequent in recent years. Nonetheless, in this study, the qualitative approach complemented the quantitative part of the study, and was used to generate additional information about conflict management.

Specifically, the present study relied on the qualitative topic coding approach. Morse and Richards (2002) explain that topic coding is used when an investigator seeks to “identify all material on a topic for later retrieval and description, categorization, or reflection” (p.117). Using this technique, researchers read through the interview data, code each topic or meaningful unit, and then categorize it. This technique can serve descriptive or interpretive purposes. For the present study, topic coding was served as a tool to help explore “what’s here” (p. 118) in the interview data.
The conclusions and discussion of the data in this section correspond to the research questions addressed. Other interesting matters that emerged in the interviews are also discussed.

**Attitudes toward Conflict**

Although not considered in any of the research questions, the participants’ narrations reflected their attitudes toward conflict, which provided a better understanding of their perspectives. Interestingly, both Thais and Americans mentioned the same three topics relating to conflict: conflict is pervasive, conflict can be functional or dysfunctional, and simple disagreement is not conflict. In the Thais’ perception of conflict, it also has positive outcomes, as well as negative ones, that are quite unexpected.

Traditionally, conflict is often thought of as having mostly negative consequences, such as discomfort, the breakdown of relationships, and damaging an organization. However, some scholars (e.g., Nicotera, 1997; Rahim, 2002) contend that a proper amount of conflict is healthy, necessary, and to be encouraged in organizations.

Attitudes toward conflict have changed over the years. The changes, however, tend to relate primarily to individualists. Cross-cultural researchers have produced evidence that individualists and collectivists view conflict in a different light. Because conflict can disrupt harmonious relationship among group members, collectivists usually view it as a negative force and tend to avoid direct confrontational situations. For example, Barnlund (1989) has noted that Japanese typically have little conflict in their everyday interaction because of their concern about the relationships of the members of in-groups, their emphasis on “obligations” over “rights,” and their encouragement of communication skills that promote harmony, such as the use of ambiguity. Similarly, Ting-Toomey (1999) suggests that collectivists prioritize relational issues over task accomplishment when dealing with conflict. For collectivists, face and relational issues take precedence over task goals. On the other hand, individualists presumably are not hesitant to elicit conflict by being direct and confrontational in order to accomplish tasks with the best results.
The pessimistic view of conflict is evident in Thai culture in particular. Countless studies, as well as guide books to Thailand, place considerable emphasis on conflict avoidance. Fieg (1989) has pointed out that because of the focus on the smooth interpersonal relationships and mutual-face concerns, Thais see conflict in a negative light. Many scholars have shown that Thais try to avoid conflict at all costs and consider knowing how to avoid it as evidence of communication competence among the employees in various types of Thai organizations (Holms & Tangtongtavy, 2000; Sriussadaporn-Charoenngam & Jablin, 1999). Holms and Tangtongtavy (2000), for instance, noted that Westerners view conflict as constructive when it leads to task accomplishment. Thais, of course, have concern about reaching their task-related goals, but the process must, first, foster good relationships among the parties involved. They are even willing to sacrifice or compromise on a task to assure that all parties satisfied with the outcome.

**Conflict Issues**

The conflict issues that both Americans and Thais reportedly encountered in their work settings were similar. For task-related issues, differences in opinions concerning a task, differences in approaches to a given task, and miscommunication about tasks were common for both Americans and Thais. Face threats were a major source of conflict, as personal/relational issues emerged for both Americans and Thais. For all the face threat incidents, the parties who most strongly felt that the threats represented conflict issues were Thais. In addition to face threats, differences in opinions were a source of conflict for Americans. The dislike of particular communication styles was an additional source of conflict to Thais.
Conflict Styles

**RQ1:** What styles of the conflict management do Thais and Americans working in multinational organizations prefer?

Among the scenarios the American and Thai participants discussed, dominating behavior was predominantly associated with Americans. Integrating reportedly was displayed by both Americans and Thais. However, the Americans felt that they initiated the integrating behavior more than did Thais.

Two Americans and one Thai indicated engaging compromising behavior. Similar to the integrating style, compromising also requires both parties to work together. In general, Americans and Thais tend to prefer this style to a similar degree. One Thai participant, however, in referring to a general conflict scenario, asserted that Americans are more apt to focus on making themselves look good, whereas Thais usually are more compromising.

Obliging was reportedly characteristic only of Thais. Americans described their Thai counterparts as displaying such behavior, and Thais acknowledged their own obliging behavior. For avoiding, Americans mentioned scenarios in which Thais displayed it. Thai participants did not mention any conflict behavior that fit this category. Similar to obliging, Thais appeared to rely on avoidance to a greater extent than Americans did.

In respect to intercultural conflict behavior, Rahim’s (1983) five conflict management styles do not sufficiently account for the variety that the participants described; therefore, three additional styles proposed by Ting-Toomey et al. (2000) were included.

Emotional expression was reportedly displayed by two Thais person and four Americans. Even though Thais and Americans admitted to showing emotions, Thais allegedly displayed distress (crying) and defensiveness (upset and trying to deny responsibility), whereas Americans mainly displayed anger.

Four American participants and one Thai participant reported using third-party intervention. This style, then, was more in evident among Americans. Most of the
instances allegedly were to help them gather information and elicit recommendations concerning how to deal with their Thai counterparts in light of perceived cultural differences in styles. Ting-Toomey (1999) notes that both individualists and collectivists rely on the third-party help technique, but in different ways. Whereas individualists tend to rely on formal third-parties (e.g., lawyers or arbitrators), collectivists rely on informal third-parties (e.g., friends or family members who know about the conflict or someone trusted by the parties). However, in this study, three Americans indicated using informal third parties (their co-workers) to help them understand and handle conflict with Thais. One Thai and one American mentioned calling on formal third-parties to deal with conflict at a more serious organizational level.

Neglect, for the most part, was an approach Thais reported. Two Americans and three Thais indicated Thais’ display of this style. The Thais’ preference for neglect might have stemmed from their focus on in-group harmony. Thais tend to avoid direct confrontation, but they sometimes need to elicit certain responses or reactions from the other conflict party. Using a passive-aggressive style can elicit such responses but also be seen as less confrontational. This style might lead to less damage in relationships.

Finally, two of the Thai participants reported using combinations of styles. One participant indicated how he analyzed conflict situations to come up with proper strategies. He asserted that, depending on the situation, each style was suitable for dealing with conflict. For some situations, a combination of styles would work best. It is also important to note that this Thai participant had extensive knowledge about conflict management and negotiation strategies. Another Thai that reported using a combination of styles and recommended the blending of Thai and American styles for optimum results.

In sum, from the perspectives of Thai and American participants, Thais tended to display more avoiding and obliging styles, whereas dominating allegedly was much more common among Americans, as Face Negotiation Theory and the majority of the existing research has posited. However, both Thais and Americans ostensibly displayed integrating and compromising to a similar extent. This challenges Face Negotiation Theory’s assumptions. On the other hand, since the Thais were working in MNCs owned
or co-owned by Americans, as I mentioned earlier, the organizational culture might have had an influence on their styles. Emotional expression and third-party help were reportedly displayed more by Americans, and neglect and a combination of styles were reportedly displayed only by Thais.

One prevalent idea was that even when Americans and Thais reported using similar styles, different concerns and different mannerisms surfaced. For example, when Thais indicated exhibiting direct confrontational styles, a concern for face and relationship prevailed. Interviewee #12 expressed a preference for the compromising style, but her concern was more about the relational outcome than the task outcome. In addition, the degree of directness and the manner in which Thais and American ostensibly expressed themselves also seems to vary. Interviewee #15, for instance, noted that even when Thais use dominating or direct confrontational styles, they usually do so in a more polite, delicate, and sensitive manner.

#15 213-216: I think if Thais actually do that [using dominating style], I would favor them. Thai culture is more “Oon Norm” [humble and polite to others, especially to those who are older or in higher status]. If Thais and Americans act in the same way, I think Thai can do it softer. On the scale of 1-10, if I rate American 8, I will rate Thai 9 because of that quality.

Finally, and as noted earlier, when Americans and Thais engaged in emotional expression, Americans tended to display anger and express their upset in an offensive manner (to blame or yell at the other person). On the other hand, the two Thais who reportedly displayed emotion sought to reveal their resentments in a defensive manner. For example, Interviewee #8’s counterpart showed her emotion by crying because she felt that her face was threatened by the promotion of someone younger. And Interviewee #14’s counterpart was emotional because she felt that she was being held accountable for some errors that were not hers.
Perceived Competence

RQ2: What types of communicative behavior do Thais and Americans working in multinational organizations perceive as effective/ineffective and appropriate/inappropriate in conflict situations?

Differences in perceptions of competence can influence the outcomes of conflict. Ting-Toomey (1999) contends that a majority of “[I]ntercultural conflict often starts off with different expectations concerning appropriate or inappropriate behavior in an interaction episode. Expectation violations, in turn, often influence the effectiveness of how two cultural members negotiate their goals in the conflict process” (p. 194). If inappropriate and ineffective negotiation continues, conflict can develop into a severely complicated and problematic situation. Because of the importance of how different cultures evaluate conflict behavior, not only conflict styles were discussed in the interviews. Perceived competence was also a matter of concern.

Communicative competence encompasses perceived situational appropriateness, perceived relational appropriateness, and perceived effectiveness. Americans and Thais manifested both task-related and relational topics when reflecting on what they considered as competent behavior.

Perceived Situational Appropriateness

For appropriateness as related to a conflict situation in a workplace, many common and diverse ideas emerged when Americans and Thais discussed their evaluations in respect to task and relational issues. There were, however, many more common topics related to task than to relational issues. The topics Americans and Thais mentioned were in line with individualistic values, such as expressing thoughts and ideas openly, accepting reasonable ideas, and being outcome-focused. Among these topics, expressing thoughts and ideas received considerable attention from both American and Thai participants. However, Americans emphasized direct explicit verbal communication more than Thais did. As mentioned earlier, for Thais, directness must be accompanied
with soft, tactful, and emotionally controlled actions in order to be considered appropriate.

An additional topic that American participants brought up was “separating personal issues from work,” which is considered one of the important values individualists hold and collectivists tend to lack. When discussing situational appropriateness, Thais also felt that seeking recommendations and reaching a mutually satisfying solution would make behavior of the conflict parties more appropriate. These two topics reflect the Thais’ collectivistic orientation. Seeking recommendations from other people when dealing with conflict suggested a we-identity and collectivistic ideas (Ting-Toomey, 1999). Thais also indicated that reaching a mutually satisfying solution, instead of just satisfying one party, would be indicative of situational appropriateness.

Some of the relational factors that seemingly influenced judgments of situational appropriateness were also shared by Americans and Thais. Some examples of the common topics were displaying emotion, having good personal relationships, and being concerned about face. Americans and Thais revealed different ideas about each topic, however. For instance, five Americans and five Thais mentioned displays of emotion. However, three Americans, but only one Thai indicated approval of such behavior. Most Thais viewed expressions of anger or extreme emotional displays as unprofessional and inappropriate. One Thai participant who did not evaluate emotional displays negatively stated that he understood the situation and frustration his American counterpart experienced. Nonetheless, if a Thai person behaved in such an emotional way, he would not accept it. Americans who found emotional expression to be appropriate saw it as a natural response to stress. Another topic was “being concerned about face.” Other than the different number of Thais and Americans addressing the issue (1 American and 5 Thais), the focus was completely different. The American reported that too much concern about face led to inappropriateness ratings; Thais talked about how tactfulness and sensitivity to face issues would make conflict parties’ behavior more situationally appropriate.

While five relational topics came from American interviewees, an additional five topics were from Thais. The factors that Thais felt were important to increase the level of
situational appropriateness were learning the language and culture, being concerned about group/public benefit, expressing understanding and sympathy, being aware of timing, and achieving positive relational outcomes.

Overall, Americans tended to pay slightly more attention to task-related topics (6) in evaluating the conflict counterparts’ situational appropriateness than they did to relational topics (5). Whereas Thais raised similar number of task-related topics (7) as Americans, they brought up many more relational topics (10). In addition, when considering number of comments involving all the topics, Americans made 16 about task-related topics and 10 about relational topics. Thais, on the other hand, offered 19 comments about task-related topics and 26 about relational topics. This suggested that Thais had greater concern for harmony and positive relationships when evaluating situational appropriateness than did Americans.

**Perceived Relational Appropriateness**

American participants introduced more topics (10) in their evaluations of relational appropriateness than Thais (6) did. For task-related topics, only one topic was common to Americans and Thais, “expressing thoughts and ideas openly.” Most Americans felt that being open and honest was appropriate behavior for people in all relationships; in contrast, Thais felt that, as much as they valued straightforwardness, such behavior was more suitable for peers. Additionally, Americans stressed directness (6 comments) when assessing relational appropriateness more than Thais did (2 comments).

Other task-related concerns in assessments of relational appropriateness from Americans’ perspectives were accepting reasonable ideas and separating personal issues from work. For Thais, relying on linear logic and being prepared were important in their judgments of relational appropriateness. Unlike “expressing thoughts and ideas openly,” they saw these topics as indicative of appropriateness when displayed by the parties to a relationship.
Relational topics that Americans and Thais shared when evaluating relational appropriateness included displaying emotion and following the chain of command. Three American participants who mentioned the “displaying emotion” topic viewed such behavior as inappropriate when exhibited by people in work-related relationships. Similarly, the one Thai who mentioned this topic believed that emotional expression can be appropriate when displayed by people in a close relationship, such as friends and family, but is inappropriate when displayed in the presence of co-workers.

Comments concerning “following the chain of command” revealed both Americans’ and Thais’ high power-distance values, but to a different degree. Americans suggested that, in general, people at a lower level should listen and not argue or be direct in responding to their superiors. However, these participants identified exceptions involving when subordinates should assert their ideas and argue with their bosses. Thais tended to focus on how the chain of command should not be broken, as well as how subordinates should listen and strictly follow the order or respect their superiors.

Other topics expressed by Americans included having close personal relationships, listening, and being sensitive. For Thais, being respectful was the additional relational topic that emerged.

In general, when discussing relational appropriateness, Americans tended to feel that certain standards of evaluation applied to all types of relationships. Thais, in contrast, tended to feel that some behavior was appropriate for certain relationships, but not for others.

**Perceived Effectiveness**

What American and Thai participants perceived as effective also revolved around task and relational topics. Representatives of both cultures tended to agree about many of the factors that lead one to see conflict interaction as effective. Task-related topics that both American and Thai participants had in mind included expressing thoughts and ideas openly, accepting reasonable ideas, and reaching intended goals. It is reasonable that both Americans and Thais strongly emphasized “expressing thoughts and ideas openly”
in their judgments of effectiveness (8 Americans and 7 Thais) because to reach a certain goal in a conflict, one at least has to express her/his concerns. Without being direct, open, or assertive about what one wants, the other party might not realize her/his goals. Also, it would be easier for other parties to ignore one’s goals and pursue only their own. Both Thai and American participants agreed that even when the ultimate goal pursued was not accomplished, being able to express one’s ideas was effective to a certain extent. In regard to “reaching intended goals,” most of the Thai participants expressed their disapproval of the goals their conflict party reached, but still rated the other party as being effective.

Some of the additional task-related matters Americans took into account were reaching mutually satisfactory solutions, having the ability to make decisions, and managing conflict in timely manner. Two other factors that Thais introduced were seeking recommendations/consultations and emphasizing factual details.

The factors influencing evaluations of effectiveness that were relational in nature and that Americans and Thais shared were displaying emotion and achieving positive relational outcomes. Both Americans and Thais also viewed emotional displays as obstacles to reaching intended goals.

Surprisingly, for this category, Americans expressed greater concern about relational outcomes than did Thais. The factors included being concerned about face, being respectful, and meeting the other party’s expectations. Although it seemed unusual that the Americans should mention concerns about face, and Thais did not, the Americans referred to the issue in such a way as to suggest that a preoccupation with face negatively affects perceptions of effectiveness. Thais discussed the concern for face in greater detail when referring to situational appropriateness, so they might not have wanted to repeat themselves.

Even though, by definition, appropriateness tends to be associated more with relational factors, and effectiveness tends to be associated more with task outcomes of conflicts, the two were not mutually exclusive to the respondents. Both task and relational factors in their minds contribute to how suitable one’s behavior is, especially in the work setting. In a similar vein, goals in conflict situations can be either task-or
relationship-oriented. Thais and Americans mentioned task and relational goals when evaluating appropriateness and effectiveness in dealing with conflict in MNC settings.

The Effects of Perception of Competence on Relationships

In addition to investigating how Americans and Thais evaluated different conflict behavior in terms of appropriateness and effectiveness, I also explored the impact of their evaluations on relationships. Nicotera (1997) has observed that conflict in and of itself is neutral; the way people manage it is a better indication of the probable outcomes. Canary, Cupach, and Messman (1995) also feel that the perception, not conflict behavior itself, is the determinant of the relationship of the parties following a conflict. Similar behavior might lead to different outcomes when it is filtered through the perceiver’s judgment.

The exploration of the interview data showed that the perceptions of appropriateness and effectiveness did not sufficiently explain the relational outcomes the informants mentioned. The culture of the participants tended to have considerable impact. At least seven Americans reported that their relationships with the conflict counterparts were more positive following conflict. In contrast, none of the Thais reported a positive relationship after a conflict had occurred. For them, a positive evaluation of appropriateness and effectiveness, at best, left relationships unchanged. Although some Thais reported that they had attitudes toward conflict similar to those of Americans, as discussed earlier, the idea that conflict can be functional might not have applied to most of the Thai participants. Previous literature suggesting that Thais see conflict as a negative force provides evidence consistent with the present study’s findings in this regard.

Perceptions of competence were predictive of relational outcomes to a certain extent. For Americans, when respondents perceived the behavior of the conflict parties as appropriate and effective, the relational outcome following the conflict usually turned out to be positive (five out of seven) or unchanged (two out of three). For Thais, the positive evaluation of appropriateness and effectiveness more often than not led them to feel that their relationships remained unchanged.
For Americans, all the negative relationship outcomes involved counterparts whom they perceived as ineffective. For the Thais, all the negative relationship included those whose behavior they considered to be inappropriate. This supports existing research indicating that individualists prioritize effectiveness over appropriateness and collectivists prioritize appropriateness over effectiveness when viewing relational outcomes in conflict situation (Ting-Toomey, 1999).

For Americans, evaluations of competence did not perfectly predict relational outcomes. Other factors they mentioned entered the picture. For example, even though Interviewees #23 and #27 rated the counterpart as ineffective and inappropriate, they reported that their relationships following their conflicts were more positive because the conflicts helped them understand the counterparts, as well as the issues. Interviewee #21 felt that the relationship did not change, even in light of his negative evaluation of the counterpart (both appropriateness and effectiveness), because he learned from the conflict and knew that he should have exerted more effort to be constructive in dealing with the person. For Thais, negative evaluations of both appropriateness and effectiveness led to negative outcomes. Assessing others as effective, but inappropriate was predictive of mixed results (see Table 6.1). Other factors they saw as affecting their evaluations were the relationship between the parties, their belief in the chain of command, and the belief that a person can separate work from personal issues.
Findings from the exploration of perceived competence and the effects of such perceptions on relationships were largely supportive of previous scholarship. Ting-Toomey (1999), for example, determined that beyond their different assumptions about conflict and different preferences for conflict styles, individualists and collectivists have different perspectives on what they view as effective and appropriate conflict. To individualists, effective conflict management occurs when a person voices her/his opinions, her/his ideas are acknowledged, interests are defined and clarified, each side’s goals are reached or compromised, and plans are made to prevent future problems. Appropriateness of conflict management for individualists reflects sensitivity to the background and causes of conflict. Collectivists, on the other hand, consider conflict management as effective when mutual face saving occurs as a result of the effort both parties exert and the substantive goals reached are based on consensus.

This study revealed that Americans highly valued direct, open, and honest expressions of thoughts and ideas. Although Thais also felt that open and honest expression of one’s thoughts contribute to positive evaluations of competence, Americans mentioned this topic to a much greater extent (23 comments from Americans and 13 comments from Thais).

Table 6.1: The Effects of Perception of Competence on Relationships

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<th></th>
<th>Americans</th>
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<th>Thais</th>
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<td></td>
<td>More Positive Relations</td>
<td>Unchanged Relations</td>
<td>More Negative Relations</td>
<td>More Positive Relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#1</td>
<td>Eff +</td>
<td>App +</td>
<td>#8</td>
<td>Eff +</td>
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<tr>
<td>#5</td>
<td>Eff +</td>
<td>App +</td>
<td>#17</td>
<td>Eff +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#6</td>
<td>Eff +</td>
<td>App +</td>
<td>#21</td>
<td>Eff -</td>
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<tr>
<td>#7</td>
<td>Eff +</td>
<td>App +</td>
<td>#26</td>
<td>Eff -</td>
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<tr>
<td>#9</td>
<td>Eff +</td>
<td>App +</td>
<td>#17</td>
<td>Eff +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#23</td>
<td>Eff -</td>
<td>App -</td>
<td>#21</td>
<td>Eff -</td>
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<tr>
<td>#27</td>
<td>Eff -</td>
<td>App -</td>
<td>#26</td>
<td>Eff -</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note. # represents number of Interviewee; Eff represents effectiveness evaluation of the conflict counterpart; App represents appropriateness evaluation of the conflict counterpart; + represents positive evaluation of the conflict counterpart; - represents negative evaluation of the conflict counterpart.
Thai participants in this study generally showed a greater concern about relational and face issues than did the American participants. Thais made 45 comments about this; Americans made 35 comments. On the other hand, Thais made 55 comments and Americans made 62 comments about tasks when discussing perceived competence. This further supports the view collectivists focus more on relational and face issues when evaluating others in conflict situations and less than individualists do in respect to task-related issues.

**The Effects of National and Organizational Culture of Conflict Behavior and Perceptions**

*RQ3: How do Thais and Americans working in multinational organizations describe the respects in which their cultural background influences their behavior and perceptions of effectiveness/ineffectiveness and appropriateness/inappropriateness in conflict interaction?*

**National Culture**

American and Thai participants’ responses in the interviews provided some insights into how they perceived their national cultures influencing their own behavior and perceptions of conflict. Although some were hesitant about whether and/or how culture affected them in that regard, most participants believed that culture had an effect.

Both Thais and Americans described cultural effects in their conflict experiences that were consistent with Ting-Toomey’s (1999) views concerning individualistic-collectivistic conflict. Americans most frequently mentioned a reliance on low-context values and emphasized on straightforward verbal expression in order to convey meanings. Both Americans and Thais discussed the direct verbally expressive nature of Americans. In conflict situations, this reportedly led Americans to deal with conflict in a direct manner, which sometimes their Thai counterparts viewed as aggressive. Some
Thais felt positively toward the Americans’ directness and straightforwardness; others reported feeling uncomfortable because such behavior was face-threatening.

Being outcome-focused and relying on low power-distance values were other prevalent topics Americans mentioned when dealing with conflict. Because of their outcome-oriented nature, Americans reportedly took a more directly confrontational approach in dealing with conflict to achieve substantive goals. Being low on the power-distance dimension, Americans indicated that they respected and dealt with people in different positions in the conflict situation in a similar manner. Although following the hierarchical chain of command exists in American culture, the degree to which subordinates strictly follow it was not as evident as it was in the responses of those representing Thai culture.

Being process-focused, or the emphasis on we-identity relationships among in-groups, and face concerns, were the most distinguishing characteristics of Thais. The Thais’ subscription to high power-distance values and the way they indicated they tend to take task conflict personally also seemed to affect how they allegedly dealt with conflicts that both Americans and Thais reported.

In addition to those associated with individualism-collectivism, as discussed by Ting-Toomey, other topics emerged. For example, Americans’ reported use of jokes and sarcasm in the conflict situations was mentioned by one Thai and one American. This was consistent with Barnlund’s (1989) description of American conflict behavior. The American participant admitted using jokes and sarcasm as a way to control his anger. The Thai, who was aware of the tendency, expressed her dislike of such behavior although she understood that it was in the American nature.

It also appeared that Americans and Thais felt that they engaged in behavior and harbored thoughts that deviated from their national cultural tendencies. Some Americans, for example, who reported trying not to threaten the face of their Thai counterparts, showed concern about the relational outcomes of conflict (process-focused) and claimed to rely on indirect conflict behavior. Thais who deviated from normal cultural tendencies reported being direct and straightforward in their verbal expression and trying to separate personal issues from work-related ones. Six Thais either expressed
a preference for or a display of such behavior in each category. One American perceived Thais relying on direct verbal communication. There were nine remarks about Americans’ deviation from their typical individualistic tendencies and twenty-four remarks about Thais’ deviations. This suggests that Thais saw themselves as being more adaptive to American culture than Americans were adaptive to Thai culture, even though the study was conducted in Thailand.

**Organizational Culture**

National culture alone may not sufficiently account for conflict behavior. Different organizations have different rules and norms that guide the behavior and affect perceptions of their employees. Originally, organizational culture was not directly a part of the research questions. However, this topic emerged frequently, so organizational influence was added to the questions as the interviews progressed. Although there were not as many comments concerning this matter as there were about national culture, the investigation revealed that almost all narratives concerning conflict behavior that the participants linked to the influence of organizational culture (nine of ten topics) reflected the Cultural Dominance Model, in which particular styles of the management are evident and encouraged in the organization. Among the organizations involved, conflict norms heavily reflected individualistic values, such as the emphasis on open and honest discussion and low power-distance. Interestingly, among the ten topics that surfaced, Americans brought up five, and Thais mentioned eight. This suggests the possibility that since most organizations relied on American cultural values, and national and organizational values were synchronized, American participants might not have been as aware of organizational influence as Thai participants working in unfamiliar organizational culture were.

Four participants indicated that their organizations reflected the Cultural Compromise/Synergy Model. However, only one American specifically identified the values on which the organization relied, which was reflected a combination of low and high-context communication. Three Thais who mentioned this topic indicated the
mixture of styles without offering precise examples of values the Americans and Thais in the organization shared.

**The Effects of the Culture of the Counterpart**

*RQ4: How do Thais and Americans working in multinational organizations describe the respects in which the cultural background of the conflict counterpart influences their perceptions of effectiveness/ineffectiveness and appropriateness/inappropriateness in conflict interaction?*

When asked about how they felt the cultural background of the conflict counterpart affected their reactions in conflict situations, three Americans and one Thai reported that they would act differently toward people from different cultures when they display the same behavior. Both Americans and Thais agreed that they would take a softer and more sensitive approach when dealing with Thais since they understand the Thai nature of relational and face concerns. This was most frequently mentioned topic. There was one Thai who noted that his reaction toward Thais and Americans would be the same when they display similar behavior. He claimed that the reason for similar reactions was a result of the focus on the outcome of a conflict, not the person in conflict. None of the Americans indicated having the same reaction toward those from different target cultures.

Both Americans and Thais tended to be relatively certain about whether the culture of the counterpart affected their behavior. When the questions involved judgments of the conflict counterpart, both Thais and Americans were a little hesitant in their responses. The results, however, indicated that both Americans and Thais tended to judge their counterparts in a similar manner, regardless of their culture backgrounds (16 comments from Americans and 15 comments from Thais) rather than in different manner (8 comments from Americans and 8 comments from Thais). The topic cited most often as the reason for making similar judgments was the appreciation of individual differences that exist in every culture. The participants allegedly resisted depending on cultural stereotypes and reportedly preferred to deal with people on a case by case basis.
noting differences in judgments, the participants tended to base their responses on their understanding of each culture. For example, Americans reported that they would be more understanding and would not judge Thais as negatively when they displayed passive behavior, whereas Thais reported being more understanding when Americans were aggressive or being too direct.

Previous scholarly literature suggests that collectivists tend to have a clearer standard for distinguishing in-group and out-group members and evaluate in-groups more favorably than they do out-groups. In contrast, individualists tend not to have a clear boundary in separating people in that respect and, therefore, do not vary their judgment of others based on the in-group/out-group nature to the same degree.

Working in MNCs, where interaction with people from different cultures at a personal level was common, may have contributed to the participants’ judging their conflict counterparts in an unbiased manner. When previous scholars have suggested that collectivists judge out-groups in a less friendly or hostile manner, they may only have reference to out-groups as strangers (whether from the same or a different culture), whom they do not know on a personal level. In the present case, however, collectivists may have considered co-workers from different cultures as parts of their in-groups. In addition, working with people from a different culture might have helped the participants understand different cultures which, in turn, could help them form judgments about each person’s behavior in terms of her/his own cultural frame of reference. A self-presentational bias might have affected responses as well. This issue will be discussed further in the limitations section of this chapter.

The Effects of Exposure to Other Cultures

RQ5: How do the gender of the person and exposure to other cultures affect preferences for and perceptions of the styles of conflict management that Thais and Americans working in multinational organizations report?

In general, the investigation of the interview data suggested that both Americans and Thais’ exposure to other cultures had changed their behavior, as well as their
perceptions. Americans tended to realize the change more than Thai participants did. There were a total of 21 statements about changes in behavior and 24 comments concerning changes in perception reported by Americans, whereas Thais made only 7 comments about changes in behavior and 9 comments about changes in perception.

Most of the reported behavioral change involved greater synchronization with the host cultural norms, which suggests some degree of acculturation or cultural adaptation. Americans felt they were much more patient when dealing with conflict, used softer approaches, and were more in control of their emotions. For Thais, exposure to other cultures mainly made them rely on more direct conflict styles. In regard to perception, withholding judgment was the major change noticed by Americans, whereas being more understanding of other cultures was the most frequent topic Thais reported.

Only one American felt that his behavior did not change as a result of exposure to other cultures; none reported an absence of change in perception. Three Thais felt that the exposure to other cultures had no impact on their behavior, and four saw no change in their perceptions.

The results overall suggest that spending times in other culture did affect the ways Americans and Thais behaved, as well as their thought processes. That Americans reported a greater tendency to change (as implicit in the number of comments) than Thais might be the reflective of the fact that, on average, American interviewees spent more time exposed to other cultures than Thais (9 years and 1 month for Americans and 5 years 4 months for Thais). As previous scholarly literature concerning adaptation and acculturation has suggested, time spent in a host culture influences the degree of acculturation. In addition, all 14 Americans, but only 10 Thai interviewees, reported living in other cultures.

Although reporting changes in both behavior and perceptions, some Americans and Thais showed hesitancy in answering questions about changes in perception. As Kim (2001) explained, cultural adaptation usually occurs more easily at surface levels; deeper beliefs, values, and attitudes are more difficult to detect and to change.
Other Factors

During the interviews, the participants expressed their thoughts about other factors that they felt affect the way people deal with conflict and their perceptions of conflict behavior. Americans and Thais offered similar comments about these factors, which included, but were not limited to, age/experience/maturity, nature of occupation, individual differences, and language.

Recommendations

At the end of their interviews, the participants provided some insightful recommendations concerning how to interact with people from different cultural backgrounds in conflict situations. The factors that the participants felt would lead to successful intercultural working relationships that received the most attention were the ability to be sensitive and the willingness to learn about other cultures. Many other factors, such as resisting the tendency to overgeneralize about cultural tendencies and listening to other people, were mentioned as well.

Synthesis and Discussion of Quantitative and Qualitative Investigations

The purpose of using both quantitative and qualitative methods was to triangulate the results, as well as to obtain different types of data for a richer and more complete picture of conflict interaction in MNCs in Thailand. The issues addressed for each method were similar, but not identical. Table 6.2 shows a summary and comparison of the quantitative and qualitative findings organized by hypothesis and research questions. Note that not all the information is included in the table. More detailed information can be found in Chapters 4 and 5.
### Table 6.2 Summary and Comparisons of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions/ Hypotheses</th>
<th>Summary from Quantitative Data</th>
<th>Summary from Qualitative Data</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Similarities</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Preference for Conflict Styles</td>
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<tr>
<td>RQ1: What styles of the conflict management do Thais and Americans working in multinational organizations prefer?</td>
<td>H1: a.) Thais preferred avoiding and obliging styles more than Americans</td>
<td>RQ1: a) Avoiding and obliging were displayed only by Thais.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>H2: In multinational organizations, Thais prefer using avoiding and obliging conflict management styles more than do Americans.</td>
<td>b.) Integrating and compromising were displayed by both Thais and Americans to a similar extent.</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>c.) Dominating was predominantly displayed by Americans.</td>
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<td>d.) Third-party help and emotional expression were mainly displayed by Americans.</td>
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<td>e.) Neglect and a combination of styles were displayed only by Thais.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Differences and Similarities</strong></td>
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<td>RQ2: What types of communicative behavior do Thais and Americans working in multinational organizations perceive as effective/ineffective and appropriate/inappropriate in conflict situation?</td>
<td>H3: Thais rated Americans and Thais a.) Thais did not perceive avoiding and obliging as the most competent styles.</td>
<td>RQ2: a.) Thais focused on relational and face issues more than Americans.</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>b.) Thais rated integrating and compromising as the two most competent styles.</td>
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<td>c.) Thais rated avoiding as the least effective styles and as low in appropriateness as dominating.</td>
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<td>d.) Thais rated obliging as more appropriate than dominating.</td>
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<td>H4: Americans rated Thais only.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>a.) Americans rated integrating and compromising styles as more competent than avoiding and obliging styles.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>b.) American rated dominating as low in appropriateness as avoiding and obliging.</td>
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<td>c.) Americans rated dominating in a similar manner as obliging, and both were seen as more effective than avoiding</td>
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<td><strong>No Comparison</strong></td>
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<td>RQ3: How do Thais and Americans working in</td>
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<td>multinational organizations describe the respects in which their cultural background influences their behavior and perceptions of effectiveness/ineffectiveness and appropriateness/inappropriateness in conflict interaction?</td>
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<td>Similarities</td>
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<tr>
<td>RQ4: How do Thais and Americans working in multinational organizations describe the respects in which cultural background of the conflict counterpart influences their perceptions of effectiveness/ineffectiveness and appropriateness/inappropriateness in conflict interaction?</td>
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<td>H5: a.) Thais did not evaluate Thais as more competent than Americans when they displaying the same conflict styles across all five behavior. b.) Thais rated conflict styles displayed by Americans and Thais in a similar manner in terms of appropriateness. c.) Thais did not rate other Thais as more effective than American across all five styles (only some).</td>
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<td>H6: a.) Americans’ perceived competence of different target cultures was not able to be conducted.</td>
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<tr>
<td>RQ5: How do the gender of the person and exposure to other cultures affect preferences for and perceptions of the styles of conflict management that Thais and Americans working in multinational organizations report?</td>
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<tr>
<td>H7: a.) Males and females did not exhibit different preference for conflict styles. H8: a.) Thai males and females did not report different appropriateness rating according to conflict styles.</td>
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<tr>
<td>b.) Thai females rated integrating, avoiding, dominating, and compromising as more effective than did Thai males. Thai males rated obliging as more effective than did Thai females.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thais conflict behavior and perceptions.  b.) Some deviation of the cultural tendencies that occurred applied to Thais more than Americans. c.) Most organizations relied on Cultural Dominance Model (individualistic values). d.) Organizational culture had great influence on conflict behavior and perceptions.</td>
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H5: a.) Thais did not evaluate Thais as more competent than Americans when they displaying the same conflict styles across all five behavior. b.) Thais rated conflict styles displayed by Americans and Thais in a similar manner in terms of appropriateness. c.) Thais did not rate other Thais as more effective than American across all five styles (only some). H6: a.) Americans’ perceived competence of different target cultures was not able to be conducted.

RQ4: a.) Americans and Thais reported more similar judgment of the counterpart than different judgment. When different judgments were reported, they based the judgment on the cultural understanding. b.) In general, Americans and Thais reacted differently toward American and Thai counterparts. The difference in reaction reflected the understanding of the culture of the counterparts.

H7: a.) Males and females did not exhibit different preference for conflict styles. H8: a.) Thai males and females did not report different appropriateness rating according to conflict styles. b.) Thai females rated integrating, avoiding, dominating, and compromising as more effective than did Thai males. Thai males rated obliging as more effective than did Thai females.
H8: In multinational organizations, gender relates differently to perceptions of the communicative competence of the conflict counterpart among Thais and Americans as a function of style.

Similarities and Differences

H9: The time Thais and Americans spend in other cultures relates to their preferences for and perceptions of conflict management styles.

Differences

a.) Specifically, for Americans, preference for and perception of competence in respect to avoiding and obliging styles of conflict management are positively related to the length of exposure to other cultures.

Similarities

b.) For Thais, preference for and perception of competence in respect to integrating, dominating, and compromising styles of conflict management are positively related to the length of exposure to other cultures.

RQ5:

a.) Americans and Thais reported that exposure to other cultures, in general, affected both their behavior and perceptions.
b.) Americans reported that exposure to other cultures made them more patient, being less emotional, use softer approach with Thais, and use less direct conflict styles.
c.) Thais reported using more direct conflict behavior, more willing to express their ideas, and combining the aspects of both cultures.
d.) American reported being more affected than Thais.
e.) American spent significant time in other cultures more than Thais.
f.) The exposure affected a wide range of conflict behavior and perceptions. The conflict styles and perceptions for each style were not mentioned as much.

Research Question 1 and Hypotheses 1 and 2 concerned preferences for conflict management styles by Americans and Thais. The statistical analysis supported Hypothesis 1, which posited that Thais prefer avoiding and dominating styles more than Americans. The examination of interviews yielded results consistent with the statistical data. When Americans and Thai participants described conflict behavior that reflected avoiding and obliging styles, only Thais reported displaying it. Hypothesis 2 was not supported. Thais and Americans showed preferences for integrating, compromising, and dominating to a similar extent. The interviews revealed similar results, in that Thais and Americans reported displaying integrating and compromising styles to a similar degree.
However, the qualitative data suggested that dominating was predominantly displayed by Americans. Additionally, Americans reported greater use of third-party help and emotional expression; Thais tended to have a greater preference for neglect and a combination of styles.

To work successfully in American organizations, Thais need to be more assertive and adaptive to American values. There were some adaptive tendencies among Americans in this context, but they were not as dramatic as those for Thais. As mentioned earlier, Americans working in MNCs usually assume high status positions, so others might have to adapt more toward them than the reverse. Also, most accounts showed that the MNCs participating reflected mainly the Cultural Dominance Model, in which American styles are more strongly emphasized.

Another point concerning Thais’ flexible nature can be raised. “Flexibility and adjustment orientation” was one of the nine value orientations Komin (1995) found in her nationwide study. Thai culture, in general, is very open and adaptive, so it might be easier for Thais to move toward individualistic styles than those in other collectivistic cultures. These reasons, as well as those mentioned earlier in the quantitative summary section, might have influenced Thais to adopt more direct and task-oriented styles in addition to their typical harmony-enhancing styles of conflict management.

Research Question 2 and Hypotheses 3 and 4 concerned Thais’ and Americans’ evaluations of conflict behavior in terms of competence. Hypotheses 3 received only minimal support. Thais rated obliging as more appropriate than dominating styles but did not, as anticipated, view avoiding and obliging as the most competent styles. They instead rated integrating and compromising highest in competence. Hypothesis 4, on the other hand, received reasonably strong support. Americans rated integrating and compromising as the two most competent styles, but dominating at a lower level and similar to that for avoiding and obliging. In addition, the interview data indicated that both Americans and Thais rated direct, open, and honest discussion highly in terms of competence. However, Americans tended to emphasize such behavior to a greater extent. Although Hypothesis 3 was not confirmed in the quantitative analysis, the
interviews showed different results. While cherishing open and direct expression of ideas, Thais also focused on relational and face issues more than did Americans.

The results of the present study regarding Thai perceptions of competence were similar to what Sriussadaporn-Charoenngam and Jablin (1999) uncovered in their study. They suggested that knowing how to avoid conflict with others, control of emotions, display respect, being tactful, being modest and polite, and using appropriate pronouns in addressing others were what Thais viewed as competent behavior in organizational settings. In addition, the present study also revealed that understanding the chain of command and knowing how to behave, both verbally and nonverbally, according to one’s position, is also important for Thais, as well as Americans, but more so for Thais.

Since this study explored the effects of culture on conflict behavior and perceptions, and the hypotheses did not directly concern whether the culture or other factors actually exert influence on the conflict interaction, Research Question 3 was generated in the interest of eliciting the participants’ views about the issue in the interview portion of the study. Of interest was that participants tended to believe in the effects of culture on their display of conflict styles and their evaluation of others’ conflict behavior. Individualistic tendencies were prevalent in the Americans’ responses, and collectivistic tendencies in the Thais’ accounts. Specifically, Americans reportedly were highly outcome-focused, whereas Thais had a high concern for face issues and relationships. Beyond national culture, the participants identified other factors that ostensibly affected their conflict behavior, such as organizational culture, age, and education.

Interestingly, while evaluating direct and straightforward communication as competent, Thais also appeared to value behavior addressing face concerns and indirect harmony-enhancing conflict styles. Sriussadaporn-Charoenngam and Jablin (1999) reported similar results. They noted that keeping a balance can be complicated and recommended using third parties to help mediate in managing complex conflict situations. Using third-party help was prevalent in both Thais and Americans’ responses in this study as well. In addition, as the interview data suggested, when Thai participants showed approval of or preference for a dominating style, they offered additional
comments indicating that the American person in the cases of interest should have been
more tactful or used softer approach in communication. To the Thais, no matter what
style of conflict one adopts, it should be enacted tactfully in order to maintain face and
positive relationships.

To determine the effects of the culture of the counterpart on behavior and
perceptions of competence was the concern of Research Question 4 and Hypotheses 5
and 6. Since American participants only evaluated conflict styles of Thais, Hypothesis 6
could not be tested. The data for the Thai participants indicated that they did not
consistently evaluate Thais as higher in competence than Americans when displaying the
same conflict styles. Therefore, Hypothesis 5 was not confirmed. The qualitative
investigation played a substantial role in answering Research Question 4 and shed some
light on Hypothesis 6 as well. The interview data were consistent with the statistical
analysis, in that Thais, for the most part, tended to judge their conflict counterparts
similarly, regardless of culture. The interviews helped illuminate American perceptions
that a test of Hypothesis 6 was originally designed to capture. Similar to the Thais,
Americans indicated judging Thais and Americans in a similar manner.

The qualitative examination further illuminated what seems to have been
obscured or otherwise inaccessible by quantitative analysis. Although the Americans and
Thais generally reported evaluating the behavior of their conflict counterparts in a similar
manner, some indicated judging on the basis of different criteria. Contrary to
expectations, when different judgments were evident, Thais did not evaluate Americans
as less competent, as suggested by previous research revealing that collectivists are
unfriendly and hostile to out-groups members and evaluate in-groups more positively
(Gudykunst & Kim, 1997; Triandis, 2003). Both Americans and Thais took into account
the cultural background of the conflict counterpart and evaluated her/him in light of their
understanding of the person’s culture. Both even reported evaluating people from their
own culture less favorably when displaying similar behavior as people from different
cultures if the behavior violated their respective cultural norms. They reasoned that a
person should know better what is expected in her/his own culture, so they could not as
easily forgive violations.
Beyond the perceptions, the interviews further revealed how the participants reported reacting to targets from different cultures. Although Americans and Thais felt that they, in a large part, judged their counterparts similarly, they noted acting differently toward the counterpart from a different culture. Again, the difference in behavior was tailored to suit the culture of the counterpart, such as being more sensitive, less aggressive, and more relaxed with Thais. However, these responses might have been, in part, the result of a self-presentation bias. “Political correctness” concerns might have affected answers to some extent.

How gender and exposure to other cultures relate to conflict behavior and perception was the central concern in Research Question 5 and Hypotheses 7, 8, and 9. As there were only a small number of female participants in the American sample, the interpretation of the results is limited. In respect to Hypothesis 7, ANOVA revealed that male and female participants from both cultures did not show different preferences for any conflict management styles. Only the data for Thai participants entered into perceived competence analysis relating to Hypothesis 8. Thai males and females did not assess each style of conflict management differently in terms of appropriateness. For effectiveness, however, males rated obliging as more effective than did Thai females; Thai females rated other styles as more effective. Gender was not included in the qualitative investigation since there was imbalance in the number of people representing each gender; only three females Americans participated in the interviews.

The second half of Research Question 5 and Hypothesis 9 concerned the respects in which exposure to other cultures allegedly played a role in Americans’ and Thais’ conflict behavior and perceptions of different conflict styles. Correlation analysis revealed that, for behavior, only Thais’ exposure to other cultures related to their preferences for dominating, avoiding, and obliging styles. As anticipated from cultural adaptation literature, the longer Thais were exposed to other cultures, the more they reported using dominating, and the less they relied on avoiding and obliging. There were no statistically significant correlations between Americans’ exposure to other cultures and their preference for particular styles of conflict management. Contrary to expectations, exposure to other cultures, in large part, did not significantly correlate to
Thais’ and Americans’ perception of competence. The only significant finding ran counter the hypothesis. The analysis indicated that longer the time Thais spent in other cultures, the more they positively evaluated avoiding in terms of appropriateness.

For Research Question 5, in comparison to the quantitative data, the qualitative findings showed some consistent and some divergent tendencies. A majority of American and Thai participants reported that exposure to other cultures affected their behavior, as well as their perceptions. Only a few reported no change in behavior or perceptions. In regard to conflict behavior, consistent with expectations, Thais indicated that they were more prone to use direct conflict styles and more willing to express their ideas directly and openly. This was consistent with the statistical findings showing that Thais were less given to avoiding; however, their reported openness might not necessarily mean that they were dominating in the conflict situations of interest. Unlike the statistical results, which showed no relationship between the length of exposure and the conflict styles, Americans reported that exposure to other cultures led them to take a softer approach with Thais and to use less direct/confrontational conflict styles.

The qualitative results revealed changes in perceptions for both Thais and Americans. However, for Americans, the changes in perception did not directly relate to specific types of styles. The participants reported changes in attitude that reflected their understanding of and being adaptive to cultural differences, such as learning to withhold judgment and developing broader perspectives on how others behave. For Thais, the topics that emerged for changes in perception were similar to those of Americans. However, one Thai reported having a more positive view toward direct expression of one’s ideas. The data concerning the changes in perception, in general, were at odds with the quantitative findings.

The differences in the findings between the quantitative and qualitative analyses in this respect might have stemmed from the different emphasis for each method. The quantitative part of the study focused on length of exposure to other cultures in relation to conflict styles and perceptions of styles, whereas the qualitative investigation focused on changes in a more general sense, not so much on their relationship to the length of exposure in particular. Although exposure to other cultures may have influenced change,
factors other than the time spent in another culture might have more impact. These factors include attitude toward the new culture, commitment to the new culture, and the environment of the new culture.

Exposure to other cultures for the survey data also included many different countries. However, in general, the cultures to which Americans reported being exposed were mainly Asian and other collectivistic cultures; the cultures to which Thais reported being exposed were American or European. These other cultures were not exclusively collectivistic cultures for Americans or individualistic cultures for Thais. Therefore, in specific cases, the conflict styles to which the participants adapted might not have been the harmony-enhancing styles or direct/confrontational styles expected. On the other hand, in the interviews, the cultures of interest were less variable, since there were fewer participants. One-on-one interviews, moreover, facilitated in-depth questions and probes that helped focus attention on particular types of cultures. Americans were asked mainly about exposure to collectivistic cultures. Thais were asked specifically about individualistic cultures.

Although exposure to other cultures appeared to affect conflict behavior in expected direction, the majority of the changes in behavior reported related to conflict phenomena, in general, not conflict styles per se. For example, most Americans reported being more patient, more apt to hold back their emotions, and leaning more toward high-context values (e.g., being less aggressive and more attentive to nonverbal and environmental clues). Because the survey was limited to preferences for and perceptions of conflict styles, the data necessarily could reveal only a small number of statistically significant relationships. On the other hand, the interview data captured a wide range of topics concerning conflict interactions and entail a broader set of changes. Changes that occurred from exposure to other cultures might not be specifically manifested in conflict styles or perceptions of styles, but more evident in the sensitivity to other cultures or changes in conflict interaction along other dimensions.
Implications

Implications for Scholars

The purpose of this study was to test certain aspects of Face Negotiation Theory, as well as to add different perspectives to the existing body of knowledge regarding to conflict interaction in the field of intercultural and organizational communication.

Ting-Toomey and Oetzel (2002) recommended that Face Negotiation Theory be further investigated in the context of different situational factors. Face Negotiation Theory has been applied in many contexts, including the organizational context; however, attempts to apply the theory to multinational corporations have been practically nonexistent. This type of organization is particularly interesting because other than having to balance the task and relational issues as in other organizations, members of MNCs also have to interact with people from different cultures who may have different assumptions, values, goals, and styles of communication. As a result, managing conflict in this context can be even more complicated than usual. This present study generated data that partially support Face Negotiation Theory, in that Thais (collectivists) in MNCs in Thailand tended to rely on avoiding and obliging styles. However, Thais and Americans in such a context preferred integrating and compromising to a similar extent. For dominating styles, quantitative analysis revealed similar preferences for Americans and Thais, whereas the qualitative findings indicated that Americans used dominating more than Thais did.

While previous studies have operationalized in-groups/out-groups on the basis of relational closeness, this study relied on culture of the conflict counterpart as indicator of such concept. Overall, the findings revealed that both American and Thai participants reported reacting to people from different cultures differently, but also judging Americans and Thais on the basis of similar criteria. Different reactions and perceptions they mentioned were usually based on an understanding of the other culture. Neither Thais nor Americans appeared to be biased toward the other culture in this context.
This study provides support for Face Negotiation Theory in another relational context, as well as data pertaining to common assumptions about in-groups and out-groups. Scholars have identified many countries as representative of collectivistic cultures in testing Face Negotiation Theory; however, Thailand has not received much attention. According to Oetzel et al. (2001), each culture under individualistic-collectivistic labels has its own unique characteristics. The fact that Thais did not appear to view Americans as the out-group is indicative of this claim. Therefore, learning about the way Thais deal with conflict, as well as Thais’ perceptions of conflict behavior, has contributed to the richness of information about collectivistic cultures.

When testing Face Negotiation Theory, the majority of researchers, if not all, have adopted a cross-cultural perspective in comparing the preferences for conflict styles among individualistic and collectivistic participants in their own countries. Because interacting with people from different cultures may not be the same as interacting with people from the same culture, the present study adopted an intercultural perspective to provide a different viewpoint to this area of research. An ultimate goal of communication scholars interested in cultural influences is to promote better understanding, as well as provide guidelines for competent interaction between people from different cultures. Therefore, an intercultural perspective is essential to understanding how people from different culture interact, instead of how they act with fellow members of their own culture.

In addition to testing Face Negotiation Theory, which focuses on individualists’ and collectivists’ preferences for given styles, the perception of conflict styles, as well as other aspects of conflict behavior in the MNC context, were matters of interest. Sriussadaporn-Charoenngam and Jablin (1999) have indicated that the way people evaluate communication competence is culture-specific. Most studies concerned with organizational communication competence have mainly relied on Western approaches to study other cultures. Many Thai scholars have directly applied Western theories in their studies of Thai culture, which may have led to questionable conclusions. Since representatives of different cultures may have different perceptions of what is appropriate and effective, studies of these perceptions from a wide range of countries are warranted.
to expand and test the validity and applicability of the Western conceptualization of competence.

Consistent with Sriussadaporn-Charoenngam and Jablin’s (1999) findings, Thais shared some task-related concerns, as in the Western conceptualization, but they also reflected unique elements of Thai culture in judging the competence of communicative behavior as well. The findings have helped bridge this gap between applying Western conceptualizations to the Thai cultural context and understanding behavior from the point of view of Thais, as well as added to the intercultural perspective in the existing body of research concerning perceptions of communication competence.

Canary, Cupach, and Serpe (2001) have observed that the relational outcomes of conflict interactions are not exclusively the result of manifest behavior, but are mediated by the parties’ evaluation of the quality of conflict communication. The findings of this study provided support for their ideas to a certain extent while also introducing additional issues for future researchers to investigate. Judgments of conflict behavior are context-bound. In addition to the perception of competence of other parties’ behavior, the results revealed other factors that may affect reactions to conflict and its management, such as the personal relationship between the parties, the ability to separate personal issues from task-related issues, and understanding of the issues and the conflict parties. Therefore, even when the counterparts are viewed as incompetent in some cases, the relationship may remain the same or even become more positive.

The qualitative exploration revealed information concerning the participants’ beliefs in the effects of national culture on their conflict interaction. However, some deviations were apparent. Thais tended to move toward adoption of American ways of dealing with conflict more than Americans moved toward those of Thai culture, even when they all were working in Thailand. These findings raise the awareness for cultural adaptation research that, in American-owned/co owned MNCs, expatriates might not have to adapt to the national culture as much as those in the host country have to adapt to the organizational settings. Organizational culture was also explored in the qualitative part of the study to determine how it seemingly affected conflict interactions and related perceptions of members of MNCs. American and Thai participants felt that
organizational culture shaped their conflict behavior to a great extent. Moreover, American-owned/co owned MNCs in Thailand tended to subscribe to the Cultural Dominance Model, in which the cultural styles of management serve as guidelines for behavior. Individualistic ways of dealing with conflict were prevalent in the organizations selected. Although the present study explored the effects of organizational culture on conflict behavior and related perceptions, it is still in a preliminary stage. Nevertheless, it has paved the way for further investigation about the manner in which power in organizations influences conflict interactions, as well as more in-depth details about other organizational effects on conflict behavior and perceptions of it.

The present study has also provided additional perspective to gender research in intercultural settings. Research in this area often focuses on gender and preferences for conflict styles; this study offers insights into how males and females perceive different conflict styles in terms of competence. In line with Cupach and Canary’s (1997) observation, for the most part, males and females did not reveal different perceptions of conflict styles; when differences were apparent, they deviated from gender stereotypes. However, the small number of American females limits the generalizability of these results.

Intercultural studies often focus on cultural adaptation and acculturation of sojourner into the new culture. Many aspects of culture have been investigated, but studies of adaptation to styles of managing conflict and attitudes toward these styles remain scarce. This study aimed at filling the gap. As the results indicated, although exposure to other cultures did bear some, but not many significant relationships to styles and perceptions of styles conflict management, it tended to influence a wider range of conflict behavior and perceptions. Specifically, exposure to other cultures ostensibly contributed to a greater sensitivity and understanding of other cultures, a key component of many aspects of intercultural competence. For example, in counseling, exposure to other cultures has shown a causal connection to competence in counseling (e.g., Barone, 1996). Ting-Toomey (1999) also suggests that cultural knowledge and sensitivity are among the important first ingredients in building skills for constructive conflict management.
The use of a mixed-methodology approach has other implications for researchers. Rossman and Wilson (1985) note that triangulation methods associated with surveys and interviews enhance a study’s generalizability because the two forms of data are used to verify, elaborate, and illuminate the issues investigated. Such an approach also strengthens the utility of findings in other settings (Marshall & Rossman, 1989).

Qualitative and qualitative investigations were complementary forms of methodology in this study. The quantitative approach provided a snapshot that could apply to the larger population from which the data were collected. The qualitative data provided more in-depth and a wider range of information. They helped clarify and provide insights into issues to which quantitative analysis could not provide much direct access. A qualitative approach is especially valuable when one is studying a sensitive topic like culture. When both methods yield similar findings, conclusions and generalizations can be made with greater confidence. The body of study in the area of conflict styles and competence associated with those styles has relied mainly on quantitative methods; this mixed-method study has provided the field with additional information, as well as a more comprehensive approach to gaining in-depth understanding of intercultural conflict and how people deal with it.

**Implications for Practitioners**

Multicultural organizations represent an environment in which conflict easily occurs and can be difficult to manage because of the different conflict lenses through which participants view it, especially when they are from different cultures. Understanding the nature of conflict and how people from different cultures manage it can benefit organizations in many ways. Providing suggestions for the constructive management of intercultural conflict, Ting-Toomey (1999) notes that having culturally-sensitive communication skills is of utmost importance. Furthermore, understanding and being sensitive to others’ cultural backgrounds are fundamental condition in acquiring and honing such skills.
The results of the present study have implications for people who work for MNCs that consist of Americans and Thais, people who provide training for members of these MNCs, and the representatives of management who are responsible for creating and implementing organizational policies. People who are already working for MNCs can apply the information generated in their everyday interactions. Trainers can incorporate it into courses for both American expatriates preparing to come to Thailand and Thais who are preparing to work in the company, as well as in on-the-job training to reinforce these ideas. Management and policy developers should take the cultural styles, perceptions, and values of the members of different cultures into account so as to form policies that are satisfactory to representatives of all cultures comprising their organizations and to foster healthy internal environments.

Unlike many cross-cultural studies showing differences in preference for conflict styles between individualists and collectivists, this study revealed that when Americans and Thais interacted in MNCs, they reportedly did not rely mainly on styles of their primary culture. Overall, the results indicated that both Thais and Americans tended to value verbal expressiveness and outcome-oriented conflict styles, as well as viewed direct straightforward expression of thoughts and ideas as the most outstanding factors in the perception of competence. However, Americans tended to focus more on the directness and straightforwardness than Thai participants did. Although Thais had concerns about the styles and behavior that lead to task accomplishment, they also heavily focused on relational maintenance and face concerns. These foci may seem to be contradictory, but there are many ways to balance them. For example, many comments in the interview data suggested that being direct and honest in conflict situations is of value and to be encouraged from the Thais’ perspective; however, not any plain direct criticism would be acceptable. Some participants suggested being tactful and using a soft approach in making comments (especially negative ones) or discussing issues in private settings are some behavior they view as more competent. Thais reportedly tend to accept and tolerate a wide range of conflict behavior and styles. To them, the key to being perceived as competent is the manner in which the styles are displayed. As any conflict style can be displayed in a hostile or amiable manner, one should keep in mind that when dealing with
Thais, any style should have as an aim maintaining relationships and upholding the face of the parties involved. In addition, a few Americans showed concern about face issues. However, when excessive concern for face affects task accomplishment, they seemingly view that in a negative light. What needs to be stressed in dealing with conflict in an intercultural setting is that proper balancing of task accomplishment and relational concerns is critical. Understanding the cultural background of the other party, as well as having knowledge of the counterpart’s personality, can be very important information in achieving such a balance.

Like Ting-Toomey (1999), Collier (1989) believes that for disputants to be interculturally competent, the parties involved must understand what those from other cultures perceive as appropriate and effective. In this regard, the present study sheds light on the ways Thais and American deal with conflict, as well as their perspectives on what they consider as effective and appropriate behavior. The results provide a basis of such understanding that practitioners can apply when dealing with people from the United States and Thailand in organizational settings.

Strengths, Limitations, and Recommendations for Future Research

Even with a careful design and great effort to control for unwanted influences, there are many factors that can affect the findings of a study such as the present one. These limitations should be taken into consideration in future research.

Data Collection and Samples

Originally, I attempted to select Thais and Americans working in MNCs in Thailand on random basis, so as to maximize chances for acquiring a more precise representation of the population of interest. However, that proved not to be possible, even with the assurance of confidentiality, the researcher’s credentials, and letter of support from the dean of a highly credible university in Thailand. Some companies have
policies that prevent them from allowing researchers to conduct studies; in other companies, the personnel contacted felt too uncomfortable to endorse the study. As it turned out, I used random sampling in combination with convenience sampling. Nonetheless, the data came from a variety of business sectors, which assured representativeness to the degree possible.

Another problem was that there was not a sufficient number of American participants for the study. American expatriates in Thailand usually have executive positions in the company. This made it very difficult to gain access to them. The contact persons in each company felt hesitant about approaching them to participate. Part of the reason for the small number of American participants was the economy. During the downturn of the economy, many Americans left expatriates returned to their home country. The small number of Americans had further drawbacks, such as insufficient sample size to conduct some statistical analyses, and the inability to test one of the hypotheses and others fully.

The American participants in this study did not represent American population in the United States. The ethnic and gender composition of the sample did not reflect the country’s diverse cultural backgrounds. There was no African-American, Hispanic, nor Indian American subculture in the study, and only a small number of females participated. However, the sample might reasonably have represented the American expatriate population in Thailand, which consists largely of male European descendents.

Such factors should be taken into account when interpreting the data. Although a strength of this study was the reliance on business people, as opposed to using students and then generalizing findings to business settings, there were many problems in data collection that had to be addressed along the way. Future researchers should be better equipped to deal with these aspects of data collection procedures, as well as prepare contingency plans to deal with problems that can occur.
Self-Reports

Another limitation is the self-report nature of this study. Both the quantitative and qualitative methods in this study relied on self-reports. Social desirability, which refers to the tendency for a participant to respond in a manner that contributes to being viewed in a positive light by the researcher, may have affected the findings. The participants, especially in the interviews in the present study, might have provided answers that they felt were “politically correct” to present themselves as being mature or fair, especially when sensitive issues, such as the evaluation of a counterpart from a different culture was the focus of attention.

Recalling, as part of the self-report approach, has some drawbacks, in that the situation recalled or imagined (in some cases) may not be as vivid as an actual situation and might not completely reflect what actually happened. Participants may also recall unusual situations that do not represent the average interactions in which they engage in everyday experience. One should also keep in mind when interpreting the results that, in respect to preferences for conflict styles, the study was based on the participants’ reports of how they viewed themselves and others interacting in conflict situations. Such reports may or may not reflect their actual behavior, in that they could easily distort what they, the other, or both did. There was no independent corroboration.

Triangulation of methods of survey and interview techniques can help to minimize the social desirability effect. Survey methods tend to be less subject to self-presentation bias since participants are assured confidentiality of their responses and do not have to provide information that can be linked to their identities. At least, that was the case in this study. Although social desirability may have influenced the results, self-reports were essential, since one of the major purposes was to determine the participants’ perceptions of their conflict experiences, as well as the way they evaluated others. Although the participants may have attempted to present themselves in a positive light, framing the same questions in many different ways, synthesizing the answers, as well as the effort to detect nonverbal cues reflecting discomfort in telephone and face-to-face interviews served as safeguards and led to confidence in the accuracy of the information.
In addition, self-presentation might not be a concern. Many participants did reveal negative thoughts and feelings toward their conflict counterparts and admitted harboring some biased views that they generally have about individuals from the same and different cultures. To verify the results and minimize the limitations associated self-reports even further, however, future studies should consider triangulation of the results with observations of actual conflict behavior in actual settings.

**Dyadic Interaction**

This study relied only on the perspective of one party in the conflict situation. The accuracy of the description of the other parties’ behavior and the interpretation of the other’s feelings about reaching their goals was not subject to independent corroboration or verification. In future studies, researchers should make an effort to observe dyadic interactions and interview both parties in the conflict situation to gain a better understanding and precise picture of the pertinent conflict phenomena.

**Instruments**

There were some limitations with the instruments used. There might have been different interpretations of some words or some concepts that do not apply or even exist in Thai cultural context. Western instruments correspondingly might not capture the concepts and behavior that are prevalent in Thai culture. For example, the conflict style instrument might not be reflective of all conflict styles people in Thai culture enact. These shortcomings were likely minimized by interview data in which researcher was able to explain the concepts, as well as captured three more conflict styles that Thais, as well as Americans, reported employing. These three styles of conflict management and the further exploration of other possible styles warrant further investigation, as they could be helpful in providing strategies in managing conflict more competently.
Since the survey was in English, there might also have been some language related difficulties. Thai participants may have had to spend more time completing the survey. However, the study included attempts to simplify and clarify the questionnaire by having Thai students, as well as Thais who worked in MNCs, complete the survey and make comments that resulted in appropriate revisions. Because Thais who worked with Americans in MNCs were expected to have a good command of English, the language problems should have been minimal. For future research, however, especially if it involves participants with limited English proficiency, a translation of the instrument is recommended. Special attention should be given to ensuring the equivalency of the translated version to the original version, however.

**Manipulation Check**

Even though the present study reflected attempts to eliminate possible effects of the rank and position of the conflict counterpart in the survey by directly asking each participant to recall or imagine a person who held similar position in the company, this did not assure that the participants recalled such people, especially since American expatriates often held higher level positions in the companies. The manipulation checks included did not help with the verification because there were some problems with wording that caused confusion. Possible differences in the rank and position of conflict counterpart in the survey should be kept in mind when one is interpreting the results. However, when looking at the distribution of positions reported in the survey, overall, it seemed that Americans and Thais reported having similar types of positions in the company. The interviews also helped clarify the role of rank and position in conflict interaction. Nevertheless, future studies should either tightly control for the effects of position of the counterpart or manipulate it in order to determine how actual power-distance affects conflict behavior. The interview data suggested that both Thais and Americans tended to interact in a different manner as a function of rank and position.
Rater

One limitation of the qualitative investigation was that I was the only person who analyzed the data. Therefore, I have no evidence of reliability. However, I took precautions to bracket my experiences when analyzing the data. I tried my best to let the data drive the investigation and to assure that the results were trustworthy, credible, dependable, conformable, and transferable. My research background and what I believe are presented, along with the careful description of the data investigation procedure and results. This should help the reader form better judgments in interpreting the findings. Moreover, triangulation of quantitative and qualitative methods was strength of study that helped offset concerns about this limitation, especially as the two methodologies yielded more similar than different findings.

Exposure to Other Cultures

A concern about exposure to other cultures was mentioned earlier. Although the participants indicated the time they spent living in other cultures, there was no assurance that individualists were only exposed to collectivistic cultures and collectivists only to individualistic cultures. This might be a partial reason for why there were only a few statistically significant correlations between exposure to other cultures and preferences for and perceptions of styles of conflict management. However, from the survey, the majority of the countries in which American participants reported living were Asian and other collectivistic cultures, and, of course, all Americans were exposed to Thai culture, as the study was conducted while they were in Thailand. Thais reported mainly being exposed to American and other individualistic cultures. In the interviews, I was able to focus on how living in an individualistic or collectivistic culture affected Thais and Americans, respectively, which further enabled me to confirm that there was more exposure to cultures at the opposite ends of the individualism-collectivism dimension than to one at the same ends.
In addition to exposure to other cultures, the training the companies provided might also have helped the participants to become more aware of cultural issues and learn how to interact in conflict situations in intercultural context. Therefore, the time of exposure, which was a focus of the quantitative analysis, might not relate as strongly to conflict behavior or perceptions of it as one might expect in other circumstances. Training, as well as other variables, might be more important aspects of cultural adaptation than exposure in terms of conflict interaction. Scholars should investigate these factors to be able to understand and help enhance the adaptation process to facilitate the transition of sojourners.

Other Factors

During the interviews, participants identified many additional factors that they felt affected conflict interactions and perceptions. These factors included age/maturity/experience, nature of occupation, and the interaction of multiple backgrounds. These factors appear to warrant further exploration in respect the roles they play in intercultural conflict.

Concluding Comment

Despite the limitations noted above, the study did provide evidence indicating that intercultural communication in multinational corporations is both consistent with and in opposition to expectations one has from previous research and theory. In the process, it has opened a large number of avenues for further inquiry that others will hopefully begin to pursue.
References


Appendix A

Samples of Survey

INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR BEHAVIORAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH
The Pennsylvania State University

Title of Project: Competence is in the Eye of the Beholder: Conflict Management Styles and the
Perceived Competence of Conflict Management Styles by Thais and Americans in Multinational
Corporations in Thailand

Principal Investigator: Wasita Boonsathorn, 234 Sparks Bldg., University Park, PA 16802
(714) 697-3310 wxb13@psu.edu
(Thailand) Wasita Boonsathorn, School of Language and
Communication, National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA), Bangkapi, Bangkok
10240
(01) 805-8282 wxb13@psu.edu

Other Investigator(s): Dr. Dennis S. Gouran, 220 Sparks Bldg., University Park, PA 16802
(814) 863-8966 g8v@psu.edu

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study is to examine the conflict management styles of
Thais and Americans as well as explore the perceived competence (effectiveness and
appropriateness) of different conflict management styles from the perspectives of Thai and
American participants.

Procedures to be followed: You will be asked to answer 6 pages of closed-ended questions on a
survey.

Discomforts and Risks: There are no risks in participating in this research beyond those
experienced in everyday life. Some of the questions about conflict might cause discomfort and
referring to conflict with colleagues might stimulate concern about job security.

Benefits:
a. You might learn more about yourself by participating in this study. You might have a chance
to reflect on how you and others manage conflict as well as evaluate conflict interaction in multi-
cultural organizations.
b. This research might provide a better understanding of how people manage and evaluate
conflict behavior. This information could help people understand how members of different
cultures interact and could serve as a helpful guideline for how to deal with others more
competently. This can be a major step toward harmonious atmosphere in the multi-cultural
workplace.

Duration: It will take about 10-20 minutes to complete the questions.

Statement of Confidentiality: Your name and your company’s name will be kept confidential to
assure that your job security will not be in jeopardy because of the information provided. There
will be no information that can be linked to your identity. If this research is published, no
information that would identify you or your company will be written. Moreover, no one inside or outside of your company will have access to the information. Only the principal investigator and her supervisor will have access to the information provided in the survey.

Right to Ask Questions: You can ask questions about the research. The principal investigator will answer your questions. Contact Wasita at (01) 805-8282 (Thailand) (714) 697-3310 (USA) with questions. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, contact Penn State’s Office for Research Protections at (814) 865-1775.

Voluntary Participation: You do not have to participate in this research. You can end your participation at any time by telling the principal investigator. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

You must be 18 years of age or older to consent to participate in this research study. If you consent to participate in this research study and to the terms above, please sign your name and indicate the date below.

You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your records.

______________________________________  _____________________
Participant Signature     Date

The informed consent procedure has been followed.

______________________________________  _____________________
Investigator Signature     Date
Section 1

Instructions: Interpersonal conflict arises when there is a disagreement between two or more people that involves incompatible or opposing goals, needs, or viewpoints. Recall situations when you have been involved in conflict with a person in your company (your co-worker who has a relatively equal position in the company). For such situations, indicate the extent to which you usually act by circling the appropriate number for each question below. (1= Strongly disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Neutral, 4= Agree, 5= Strongly agree)

1. I try to carefully examine a problem with others to find a solution acceptable to both of us. 1 2 3 4 5
2. I generally try to satisfy the needs of others. 1 2 3 4 5
3. I try to keep my conflicts with others to myself because I want to avoid being in an embarrassing/difficult situation where I am forced to make important decisions in a small amount of time. 1 2 3 4 5
4. I try to incorporate my ideas with those of others to come up with a decision jointly. 1 2 3 4 5
5. I try to work with others to find solutions to a problem which satisfy our expectations. 1 2 3 4 5
6. I usually avoid open discussion of my differences with others. 1 2 3 4 5
7. I try to meet others halfway when solving a serious conflict. 1 2 3 4 5
8. I use my influence to get my ideas accepted. 1 2 3 4 5
9. I use my authority to make a decision that gives me an advantage. 1 2 3 4 5
10. I usually follow the wishes of others. 1 2 3 4 5
11. I avoid meeting others who I have conflict with. 1 2 3 4 5
12. I exchange accurate information with others to solve a problem together. 1 2 3 4 5
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<td>I usually let others get what they want.</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>I usually propose a middle ground to end extreme situations.</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>I negotiate with others so that a compromise can be reached.</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>I try to stay away from disagreement with others.</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>I surrender to the wishes of others.</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>I use my knowledge and experience to reach decisions in my favor.</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>I often go along with the suggestions of others.</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>I use “give and take” so that a compromise can be made.</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>I am generally firm in defending my side on an issue.</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>I try to bring all our concerns out in the open so that the issues can be resolved in the best possible way.</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>I collaborate with others to create decisions acceptable to everyone involved.</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24.</td>
<td>I try to satisfy the expectations of others.</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.</td>
<td>I sometimes use my power to win in a competitive situation.</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26.</td>
<td>I try to keep my disagreements with others to myself in order to avoid bad feelings between us.</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.</td>
<td>I try to avoid unpleasant conversations with others.</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.</td>
<td>I try to work with others to develop a proper understanding of a problem.</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Section 2
Instructions: In your line of work, you might have encountered a variety of conflict situations. Your co-workers might have interacted in different ways in those conflict situations. For this questionnaire, consider the situation in which you and another Thai (or American for conflict with American versions) co-worker with similar rank and expertise have a disagreement concerning how to solve a work-related problem, such as what to do about a poorly performing employee. For the scenario below, please indicate how much you agree with the statements following. Circle the appropriate number for each item below (1= Strongly disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Neutral, 4= Agree, 5= Strongly agree). Feel free to use your previous experience about how you have felt when your Thai (or American for conflict with American versions) co-workers have behaved in a manner similar to that of each description.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior A (Integrating)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>For the type of conflict situation described in the instructions, your co-worker tries to investigate an issue with you to find a solution beneficial and acceptable to both of you. During the conflict, your co-worker approaches the conflict issues directly. S/he tries to exchange accurate information with you. S/he asks about how you want the problem to be solved and why you want it that way. At the same time, s/he shares her/his viewpoints with you, even if her/his ideas are sharply in conflict with yours, and s/he expects you to do the same thing too. S/he explores and examines the issue to find out what each of you really wants from the situation. S/he tries to solve the problem with you and brings both of your concerns out in the open. S/he explores and genuinely takes your concerns into account when considering solutions. S/he tries to work with you for a proper understanding of a problem. S/he tries to work with you to find solutions to the problem that satisfies both of your interests. In doing so, s/he integrates her/his ideas with yours to produce a joint decision. S/he works together with you to blend both of your viewpoints so, at the end, the two of you can generate creative solutions to the problem at hand. S/he relies on both your and her/his ideas in developing new alternatives to problems.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the situation described above, how would you feel about the co-worker?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. * I feel that the co-worker’s behavior seems out of place (not proper).</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The way the co-worker interacts would make me feel that s/he is</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a smooth conversationalist.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I would consider the co-worker’s behavior to be appropriate.</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The co-worker’s behavior would be suitable to the situation.</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I would consider the co-worker’s behavior to be very proper.</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Some behavior noted should not have been done.</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. The behavior described would embarrass me at times.</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. The way the co-worker interacts is all in good taste in my opinion.</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. The way the co-worker behaves appears to be rude to me.</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. The way the co-worker behaves would enable her/him to achieve</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>everything s/he apparently wants to achieve in the conversation.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I feel that, for the co-worker, the conversation would be useless.</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. The co-worker appears to me as being effective in the conversation.</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. The co-worker’s interaction would make me feel that the</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conversation was unsuccessful.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. I feel that the co-worker would get what s/he wants from</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the interaction.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. The interaction seems to be unprofitable for the co-worker.</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. I feel that the co-worker would obtain her/his goals in the conversation.</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. The way the co-worker acts makes me feel that s/he is an</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ineffective conversationalist.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Judging from the way the co-worker behaves, s/he would feel happy</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>from the conversation.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. I believe that the co-worker would likely feel that the conversation is</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>useful and helpful.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. In my opinion, the co-worker would find the conversation to be</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>very unsatisfying.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The underlined items require reverse scoring to make the higher scores consistently reflect the more favorable evaluations.
Section 3

Instructions: In this part of the questionnaire, you will find statements about certain social behaviors and beliefs. For each statement, please circle the appropriate number that best applies to you. (1= Strongly disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Undecided, 4= Agree, 5= Strongly agree)

1.* If one is interested in a job about which the spouse is not very enthusiastic, one should apply for it anyway.

2. It is better for a husband and wife to have their own bank accounts rather than to have a joint account.

3. The decision of where one is to work should be jointly made with one’s spouse, if one is married.

4. Young people should take into consideration their parents’ advice when making education/career plans.

5. It’s reasonable for a child to continue her/his parents’ business.

6. I practice the religion of my parents.

7. I would not share my ideas and newly acquired knowledge with my parents.

8. I would help, within my ability, if a relative told me that s/he is in financial difficulty.

9. Each family has its own problems unique to itself. It does not help to tell relatives about one’s problems.

10. I can count on my relatives for help if I find myself in any kind of trouble.

11. I have never chatted with my neighbors about the political future of this state/country.

12. My neighbor always tell me interesting stories that have happened around them.

13. I am not interested in knowing what my neighbors are really like.

14. I would rather struggle through a personal problem by myself than discuss it with my friends.
15. I would not pay much attention to my close friends’ views when deciding what kind of work to do. 1 2 3 4 5

16. My good friends and I agree on the best place to shop. 1 2 3 4 5

17. I have never loaned my camera/personal belongings to any colleagues. 1 2 3 4 5

18. I would help if a colleague at work told me that s/he needed money to pay utility bills. 1 2 3 4 5

19. A group of people at the workplace decided to go to a recently-opened restaurant even though one person discovered that the food there was not good at all. In this situation, the person’s decision not to join the group is a better choice. 1 2 3 4 5

* The underlined items require reverse scoring to make the higher scores consistently reflect the more favorable evaluations.

**Section 4**

Instructions: Please complete the following section as accurately as possible.

Native Country: _____________    Gender:  Male____  Female____
Age: _______
Race/Ethnicity: ___ Asian    ___ Asian-American
    ___ African-American    ___ European-American
    ___ Other (Please specify) _____________________
Education: ___ High school or less    ___ Bachelor degree
    ___ Some college    ___ Graduate degree (Master’s or Ph.D.)
    ___ Two-year degree (Associate degree)
Name of the company: ______________________
Position in the company: ____________________
Length of work in this company: _____________
Have you lived in a country (countries) other than your home country?  Yes_______   No_______
If yes, where? _____________________________ For how long? __________________

When you imagine about the person in the conflict situations, are they from the same or different cultures as you? ______________

When you imagine about the person in the conflict situations, are they in a lower, the same, or a higher position than/as you in the company? ______________
Would you be willing to participate in a telephone interview which will take about 20-30 minutes?

_____Yes  _____No

If you are interested and willing to, please provide the information below:

Name: _______________________

Address: __________________________________________________________

Phone: Home ______________________

Phone: Office ______________________

Appropriate time to contact by phone: ____________________
## Descriptions of the Remaining Styles of Conflict Management for Section 2

### Behavior B (Avoiding)

For the type of conflict situation described in the instructions, your co-worker tries to keep her/his disagreement with you to her/himself. S/he avoids unpleasant conversations or arguments in order to prevent bad feelings between both of you. S/he attempts to avoid being forced to answer difficult questions which can cause embarrassment and keeps away from open discussion of her/his differences and disagreement with you. S/he tries to stay out of discussing any aspect of the topic that could lead to an argument. When you try to discuss the conflict issue with her/him, s/he minimizes the importance of the disagreement or shifts the discussion to other topics. S/he tries to withdraw from the discussion of conflict or keeps quiet when the topic is raised. S/he withholds complaints or any comments that can cause further disagreement or hard feelings. S/he even avoids speaking with you, if at all possible. S/he would rather solve the problem on her/his own or ignore the problem altogether than being in a conflict situation that could disturb the workplace.

### Behavior C. (Dominating)

For the type of conflict situation described in the instructions, the co-worker uses her/his power to win a competitive situation without taking your concerns into account. For instance, s/he argues her/his case with you to show the advantage of her/his position. S/he tries to dominate the conversation until you understand and agree with her/his position. S/he forcefully argues her/his position and insists that her/his ideas should be implemented. S/he uses her/his expertise or authority to try to reach a decision in her/his favor and is firm in fighting for her/his side of the issue. In response to disagreement, s/he insists on her/his solution to the problem and uses her/his influence to have her/his ideas accepted. S/he tries to make you follow the alternative s/he proposes and ignores your input, suggestions, or concerns. In the conversation, s/he mainly discusses her/his ideas and the solution s/he favors. S/he focuses on why her/his ideas are worthy of adoption, while paying little attention to yours. S/he does not take what you want or the benefits of your proposed solution into consideration when trying to reach a conclusion concerning what to do about the problem.
**Behavior D** (Obliging)

For the type of conflict situation described in the instructions, the co-worker tries to satisfy your needs. S/he acts according to your wishes and helps you to make a decision you favor. In the disagreement, s/he minimizes the importance of her/his position and downplays the differences between the two of you. S/he is paying special attention to your ideas and interests. S/he shows concern for how to satisfy your wishes and a willingness to comply with what you want. S/he yields to you and goes along with your suggestions. S/he does not express or argue to emphasize the benefits of her/his own ideas; instead, s/he tries to satisfy your expectations. S/he supports your position and helps you achieve what you want. S/he responds favorably to your ideas and ultimately follows the suggested solution you have for the problem. S/he minimizes the differences between the two of you in order to accomplish the goal of finding a solution to the problem that caused the conflict. S/he is willing to surrender to your wishes, while keeping the disagreement or opposing ideas to her/himself.

**Behavior E** (Compromising)

For the type of conflict situation described in the instructions, the co-worker tries to find a middle course to resolve the conflict concerning the solution to the problem. S/he tries to play down the differences between both of you to reach a compromise. In a disagreement, s/he tries to learn about what you want, tell you what s/he wants, and then come up with a solution that requires each of you to give up something to gain something in return. S/he proposes a middle ground for resolving extreme differences and negotiates with you so that an agreement can be reached. Her/his strategy is “win some and lose some.” During the disagreement, s/he agrees to accept some of your ideas if you agree to go along with some of her/his ideas. S/he shows a “give and take” approach to finding a middle range solution. Neither one of you achieves all you want; each of you has to give up something in order to have a workable solution. S/he is willing to meet you halfway.
Appendix B

Semistructured Interview

INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR BEHAVIORAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH
The Pennsylvania State University

Title of Project: Competence is in the Eye of the Beholder: Conflict Management Styles and the Perceived Competence of Conflict Management Styles by Thais and Americans in Multinational Corporations in Thailand

Principal Investigator: Wasita Boonsathorn, 234 Sparks Bldg., University Park, PA 16802
(714) 697-3310 wxb13@psu.edu
(Thailand) Wasita Boonsathorn, School of Language and Communication, National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA), Bangkapi, Bangkok, 10240
(01) 805-8282 wxb13@psu.edu

Other Investigator(s): Dr. Dennis S. Gouran, 220 Sparks Bldg., University Park, PA 16802
(814) 863-8966 g8v@psu.edu

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study is to examine the conflict management styles of Thais and Americans as well as explore the perceived competence (effectiveness and appropriateness) of different conflict management styles from the perspectives of Thai and American participants.

Procedures to be followed: You will be asked to answer questions in a telephone interview format. The tape recorder will be used to record the information if you permit the researcher to do so.

Discomforts and Risks: There are no risks in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life. Some of the questions about conflict might cause discomfort and referring to conflict with colleagues might stimulate concern about job security.

Benefits:
a. You might learn more about yourself by participating in this study. You might have a chance to reflect on how you and others manage conflict as well as evaluate conflict interaction in multi-cultural organizations.
b. This research might provide a better understanding of how people manage and evaluate conflict behavior. This information could help people understand how members of different cultures interact and could serve as a helpful guideline for how to deal with others more competently. This can be a major step toward harmonious atmosphere in the multi-cultural workplace.

Duration: It will take about 20-30 minutes to complete the interview questions.
Statement of Confidentiality: Only the principal investigator and her supervisor will know your identity and have access to the tape. No one inside or outside of your company will have access to the information. Your name and your company’s name will be kept confidential to assure that your job security will not be in jeopardy because of the information provided. If this research is published, no information that would identify you or your company will be in the transcription. The tape will be stored in a locked box and will be destroyed by July 30th, 2005.

Right to Ask Questions: You can ask questions about the research. The principal investigator will answer your questions. Contact Wasita at (01) 805-8282 (Thailand) (714) 697-3310 (USA) with questions. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, contact Penn State’s Office for Regulatory Compliance at (814) 865-1775.

Voluntary Participation: You do not have to participate in this research. You can end your participation at any time by telling the principal investigator. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

You must be 18 years of age or older to consent to participate in this research study. If you consent to participate in this research study and to the terms above, please sign your name and indicate the date below.

You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your records.

______________________________________  _____________________
Participant Signature     Date

The informed consent procedure has been followed.

______________________________________  _____________________
Investigator Signature     Date
Semistructured Interview Protocol*

Opening

Researcher:

Hello Mr. /Ms. _________. My name is Wasita Boonsathorn. I am conducting follow-up interviews to the questionnaire on work-related conflict management styles and the perceived competence of the conflict management styles from the perspectives of Thais and Americans working in MNCs in Thailand.

Before we start, I would like to assure you that any data gathered in this interview will be kept strictly confidential. Other than myself, only my dissertation advisor, Professor Dennis S. Gouran, will have access to the interview data. These data will be summarized and included in research reports in the form of direct quotations identifying interviewees by ethnic background only. No interviewees will be identified by name. You can decline to answer any question I ask.

Also for the purposes of transcription and analysis, I request your permission to audio-tape this interview. Tapes will be erased as soon as the study is completed. Tapes will not be played for anyone except my advisor, if necessary, and me. The interview should require no more than half an hour of your time.

Do you have any questions?
Do I have your permission to proceed and to record the interview?

Body

Please answer the following questions by using specific examples and describe the situations in as much detail as you can. Keep the specific situation in mind while answering all the questions below.

1. What is a situation you recall in which you had a conflict with a Thai/an American person (someone from different culture) in your workplace? Please describe it. Conflict in this case refers to a situation in which you and the other person have
different goals, opinions, or approaches to some issues and you see the other person as potentially interfering with the achievement of these goals.

Probe: How did the other person behave in that situation?

Probe: How did you react to her/his specific behaviors in conflict? Please give some specific examples.

2. Did you think the person achieve her/his goals in the conflict situation? Why or why not? For example, did communication and the result of the conflict with you make the other person feel personally rewarded, helpful, useful, and successful? (Effectiveness)

3. How do you think the person should have behaved in order for her/him to achieve her/his goals?

4. Did you think the person behaved appropriately for the situation s/he was in? Why or why not? For example, did the person communicate in a smooth and adaptive manner? (Situational Appropriateness)

5. How do you think the person should have behaved in order to be considered appropriate in that kind of situation?

6. Did you think the person behaved appropriately according to the relationship you have with this person? For example, did the person approach the conflict constructively or appear to be rude? Why or why not? (Relational Appropriateness)

7. How do you think the person should have behaved in order to be considered appropriate according to your interpersonal relationship with the person?

8. How did your judgment regarding the conflict situation enter, if at all, into your interpersonal relationship with that person?

9. What is the standard you use to judge whether the other person in the conflict reach his or her goal or not?

10. What role do you think your cultural background played in your judgment of whether the person reached her/his goal(s)?

11. What is the standard you use to judge whether the other person is appropriate in the conflict situation or not?
12. How do you think your cultural background affected your judgment of whether the person behaved suitably in the situation?

13. What is the standard you use to judge whether a person behaved suitably in respect to the relationship you have with her/him?

14. How do you think your cultural background affected your judgment of whether the person behaved suitably in respect to the relationship you have with her/him?

15. How may the cultural background of the other person (target person) have influenced your judgment of competence? In other words, did the fact that the other person was Thai/American affect your assessment of the appropriateness and effectiveness of the person’s behavior? If s/he came from the same (different) culture as you, would it make any difference in your evaluation of her/his behavior?

16. How do you think that the fact that you have been working in another culture (Thailand or America) affects the way you handle the conflict you have with the other person? How?

17. How do you think that the fact that you have been working in another culture (Thailand or America) affects the way you judge the way the other person deal with conflict? How?

18. Do you have anything to add or do you have any recommendation about how people should behave in a conflict situation in the workplace that involved people from different culture, such as Thai and American?

**Ending**

Thank you very much for your participation in the study and your time. If you are interested in seeing the results of the study, please give me your address so I can send a summary of the results to you. If, for any reason, you need to contact me, please feel free to call or e-mail me at the address given in the Informed Consent Form.

*Note: *The format of the interview protocol was adapted from An Analysis of Intercultural Work-Related Conflict Management Strategies by S. Siddo, 1996, Unpublished doctoral dissertation, The Pennsylvania State University, University Park. 
Appendix C

Sample of an Interview Transcript*

Interviewer No. 17 (American vs. Thai)

Demographic Information

Culture: American  
Time: 30 minutes  
Race: European-American  
Gender: Male  
Age: 48  
Education: Graduate  
Company Type: Gas, Natural and Processed  
Position: Staff Geologist  
Length in the Company: 25 years  
Time Spent in other Countries: Indonesia 5 years, Africa 5 years, and Thailand 2 years

Researcher began by reading the Opening and Directions from the interview protocol (See Appendix B).

Researcher: Can you recall a situation in which you had a conflict with a Thai person in your workplace? Please describe it. Conflict in this case refers to a situation in which you and the other person have different goals, opinions, or approaches to some issues and you see the other person as potentially interfering with the achievement of these goals.  
#17: Yes.  
Researcher: Can you give me a specific example and some details about that conflict?  
#17: Actually it’s not (long pause) it was very usual. We were choosing a new hire. And we had (pause), basically, it has been going on (pause). We made the final cut and she was one of the final two. And there was a disagreement between various people in the committee of 6-8 people.  
Researcher: How did you discuss things out? Can you focus on one Thai person in the group that you have a conflict with? I am focusing on the interpersonal conflict, which is between 2 people as opposed to a group setting?  
#17: Yes. First, we went and talked about it at length, and we were both (pause) normally you would kind of think (pause) we both were kind of passionate about whom we wanted. First, we just talked about it; we talked about the strong points and the weak
points.

**Researcher:** How did both of you interact in the conflict? Were both of you calm or emotional?

#17: This conflict probably has more emotion than normal.

**Researcher:** Were you emotional or the other party was emotional or both of you?

#17: Both. We weren’t yelling or anything like that.

**Researcher:** Were you emotional in a professional way?

#17: Yes.

**Researcher:** How did the other person react when you explained your point of view?

#17: It’s a while back. What we did (pause), we had tools to the situation (pause). We had a list of what was a strong point, what was the weak point of the person and discussed. “I think it’s like this; it’s like that.”

**Researcher:** How did the conflict resolved?

#17: It wasn’t resolved very well. The first thing we did, after the first meeting came through, after the big disagreement, was that we would come up. We would think about it and think about the traces and go back to meet; the same the next day and the day after. And to see maybe after that, among people involved, we would be able to find a common ground.

**Researcher:** How was the conflict resolved? What was the solution?

#17: Well, we went back and try to arrive at consensus for the next time, but that didn’t work. So then another expat proposed that we would take votes because there was no compromise on that. But we were to a limit. So we took it to the head of the company, basically put it back. And finally it was the head of the group who came and basically said this is the way we were going to do it. And the arbitrators made the choice. There was, in a way, a compromise. We had to make sure that the person we were not hiring, we would support. We actually ended up sponsored them and find them jobs.

**Researcher:** If you pick one of the people, you have a conflict with. Focusing on that one Thai person, did you think this person was effective in dealing with the conflict? Did s/he reach his/her goal in the conflict situation?

#17: Well he didn’t reach his goal because it wasn’t the person he chose got hired. But he was effective in that he got his point across. And it was very obvious to us that he wanted it. Once things start to get a bit heated (pause), he could just say “whatever.” I don’t know him that well but there was an expat who was with him all the time said that (pause). We discussed (pause) basically thinking that the expats were worried because he has been in this company longer. We had to seriously work that out to compensate the man’s attitude. We didn’t want him to think he got rolled over or his opinion wasn’t valued.

**Researcher:** So you think he reached one of his goals, expressing his opinion, but didn’t get the person who he wanted hired. Do you think this person should have done something different in order for him to reach his goal?

#17: This is probably a contractible situation. The truth is we have to set it up one way or the other. From his position, I really think he was really effective, I think he could have putting things forward. It may have had more, a little more, influence. He should have volunteered to be the one who talks to the management in the next level. I think he was pretty effective.
Researcher: How about in terms of appropriateness? Do you think he was appropriate in the way he dealt with conflict?

#17: There is probably (pause) some people who might have missed or might have cheered about when he have decided to go along with the flow after making his point and thinking about people who might not consider that as well.

Researcher: Can you explain that to me again?

#17: Toward the end, when we decided to compromise his goal, it was plain to all of us that that was what he was doing. It may not have been (pause) or somebody (pause) a manager who didn’t care as much might have said, “Fine. It makes no difference.” But it was tough to the rest of us. And it was clear that he was not happy about what this was though we have to do the reading between the lines.

Researcher: What do you think he should have done in order to make things more appropriate in the conflict situation?

#17: (long pause) I think he was appropriate as you could get. It was something where we would like to have more give and take. And I am sure if it was a different kind of problem, then a compromise would then be reached. I think the only other thing he could have done is that he should have just go out and said, “OK, you get your way and I am not happy because of this, this and this,” just so it was really clear. And I can think of another Thai person dealing with different expat from another company in a situation where there is a lot of time and money involved. But there you can work out a compromise; it was possible to do that. And the other guy is really fairly intractable. He has his ideas, and he was able to stand up for his ideas (pause) what he wanted to do and the compromises.

Researcher: So you think he was appropriate.

#17: He was appropriate because there was some emotion displayed to show that he cared about the topic. And it was reacted toward, “I feel strongly about this goals,” not toward the other person in the argument.

Researcher: Do you think this person act appropriately according to the relationship between you and him?

#17: Yes.

Researcher: Can you expand on that a little bit?

#17: Well, he is a co-worker, and he behaved professionally. I know if I found a problem, he would be willing to help. Likewise, if he has a problem, I feel compel. I have a lot of respect for him.

Researcher: In that situation, his behavior was appropriate to the relationship.

#17: Yes, it was on a professional level. In my opinion, it was not personal. But you have to ask him if he took it personal.

Researcher: How did you think the conflict affect your relationship afterwards?

#17: I think I gain a bit more understanding. About how he worked, his (pause), how he think as an individual.

Researcher: Was the relationship better, the same, or worse?

#17: It was the same.

Researcher: How do you think your cultural background play a role in the judgment whether the other person reaches his goals or not?

#17: Yeah, my cultural background. There are certain things I value in people that come
from cultural background. If he do those things that I value, it will be good.  
**Researcher:** What are the things that you value in a conflict situation?  
**#17:** Whether you are honest, fair, treat other with respect. Whether you are competence at what you do.  
**Researcher:** And he was honest and was pretty effective in your perception. How about in term of appropriateness? How does your cultural background play a role in your judgment about appropriateness in a conflict situation?  
**#17:** That is the thing I expect to be appropriate, that he had got his point across, that he was concerned about the problem. He wasn’t going to say “yes” to whatever (unclear). He wasn’t going to probably *Kreng Jai*. He wasn’t going to be abusive.  
**Researcher:** What role do you think your cultural background play in your judgment whether the person was appropriate according to the relationship that you have with him.  
**#17:** We had to go double check and talk with other people who were in the meeting. I did a double check because I didn’t want things to get cross fired because of the different culture. We wanted to make sure we didn’t miss anything.  
**Researcher:** How do you think the culture of the other person affect your judgment? What if a Thai and an American behave exactly in the same manner, would you rate them the same way?  
**#17:** Yeah. If they behave exactly in the same way, I will have the same judgment. But I probably wouldn’t have tried to analyze the situation as much [if the other person was an American] because I would have felt that I might have known him (unclear) showing much easier. So I might not have to second guess if the situation was working out OK.  
**Researcher:** So with a Thai person, you have to weigh and think about the situation and the behavior more?  
**#17:** Yes.  
**Researcher:** What is a difficulty you found when dealing with Thai people in a conflict situation?  
**#17:** That was about the real conflict I went into. In general, I think you have to make sure that there is no misunderstanding in term of language and (pause) that is mostly it. The thing is the people we work with here, they all have been to universities, and they all are scientists or engineers in general. So they pick up (pause) they have a different worldview than, say, someone who may not have much education or someone who didn’t go to college somewhere. That may lead to different values just like Americans who have come from different backgrounds. So we have common ground and that well of though. You know, people value things differently.  
**Researcher:** Do you think the fact that you have been working in another culture affect your behavior in a conflict situation?  
**#17:** Yeah. But this isn’t the first other culture I worked in. So I come to realize that there are all kinds of different people in the world.  
**Researcher:** What other culture you have been living in?  
**#17:** Indonesia for 5 years, Angola, Africa 5 years, and Thailand 3 years.  
**Researcher:** How do you think that the exposure to different cultures affects the way you handle conflict? Do you think you have changed?  
**#17:** Yes. I probably try to be less authoritative and a little more (pause) consensual.  
**Researcher:** What is African culture like? Is it like Asian culture?
#17: It’s probably more authoritative.

**Researcher:** Do you think the exposure to Asian culture make you softer in conflict? You talked about being less authoritative and use more consensus.

#17: Yes. Because you don’t want to shut other people off.

**Researcher:** Other than affecting the way you behave, do you think the exposure to different cultures affects your perception and the way you evaluate other people?

#17: Um (pause) you might see a lot more of cross section on how people deal with conflict so that might give you a little more insight. I really don’t know (pause).

**Researcher:** How does this insight affect the way you judge others? For example, before you have been exposed to Thai culture, you might see being quiet in a certain way, but when you have been in Thai culture, that might change your perspective of quietness.

#17: Yes, that’s true. I might be a little more (unclear) someone as shy. Still not as much as (unclear) (pause). You talked about I am going back to the US and see someone as shy (pause) I can’t say it. It has been so long (pause). I might (pause). I don’t know. I would be more aware that there might be somebody that there might be a lot going on. They might just not be forthcoming. From that aspect, I would, I am more aware, give higher mark. Likewise, I am more tuned to the guy who is not being shy all the time. So maybe it would give me more perceptive. But whether I would still rank them 5 or not, I don’t know. But I would put more reasons to it.

**Researcher:** So you would be more careful in giving reasons to their behavior.

#17: Yes.

**Researcher:** How do you feel now toward a Thai person being very talkative and open or direct? What is the feeling before and after the exposure to Thai culture?

#17: I would have a different opinion. I might not have any idea that somebody is talking too much or whatever. It may not make any difference to me before being exposed to the culture. And now it would be kind of unusual. It would be unspoken. They will be less cultured in my eyes.

**Researcher:** Do you have any suggestion or anything to add about how people should behave in a conflict situation in multinational workplace or with people from many cultural backgrounds?

#17: Try to understand each other. You have to learn something about the other person. Aware (pause) always give people the benefit of a doubt. Try to figure out why they do what they do.

**Researcher:** Thank you very much. Before we end, I would like to ask some demographic information.

Researcher gathered **Demographic Information**.

Researcher read the **Ending** section from the interview protocol (see Appendix B).

*The interview transcripts are available upon request.*
## Appendix D

### Companies and Positions Information

#### Business Areas of the Companies Participated

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<th>Product of Chemical Industries</th>
<th>Machinery, Electricity, and Electrical Equipment</th>
<th>Transport Equipment</th>
<th>Product Classified by Material</th>
<th>Manufactured Articles</th>
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<td>Office Machine and Peripherals</td>
<td>Road, Motor Vehicles, and Parts</td>
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VITA
Wasita Boonsathorn

Education
Pennsylvania State University, USA
Ph.D. in Communication Arts and Sciences 1999-2003
MA in Speech Communication 1997-1999

Chulalongkorn University, Thailand
BA in Arts (English) 1992-1996

Experience
Lecturer, School of Language and Communication
National Institute of Development Administration,
Thailand Since 1996
Intern, Public Relations

Honor
Scholarship from the Royal Thai Government to
Further MA and Ph.D. in the United States 1996-2003

Thesis