



# The role of culture and personality in choice of conflict management strategy<sup>☆</sup>

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## Abstract

Globalization has led to an increased emphasis on cultural diversity and its influences on personal, social, and organizational practices. As the world becomes a smaller place, the potential for conflict in our daily interactions is increasing. Research investigating the influence of culture on conflict management and resolution behaviors has demonstrated that individualism and collectivism do indeed influence a person's style of conflict resolution behavior. However, these findings have not been linked to the related constructs of vertical and horizontal individualism and collectivism [as defined by Triandis, H.C. (1994) *Culture and social behavior*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill] which introduce the concept of accepting authority within a focus on the self versus the group. A strong parallel exists between the vertical and horizontal dimensions of individualism and collectivism and power distance. The salience of this power variable may differ from one culture to the next, and influences not only the nature of the conflict process itself, but also the conflict resolution strategies adopted. In addition, studies exploring the influence of various dispositional measures such as self-monitoring and emotional intelligence have linked them to both cultural variables and styles of conflict resolution. Although each finding that links a single personality or cultural variable with a particular style of conflict resolution is indeed useful, it is also limiting. This study explored the relationships among culture, power, personality, and styles of conflict resolution. Relevance of the findings and

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their implications with respect to conflict management and resolution issues across cultures are discussed.

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## 1. Introduction

Greater globalization has led to increased attention being paid to cultural diversity and its influences on personal, social, and organizational practices. As the world becomes a smaller place, the potential for conflict across cultural boundaries in our daily interactions is increasing. Research investigating the influence of culture on conflict management and resolution behaviors has demonstrated that cultural factors such as individualism and collectivism and power distance (as defined by Hofstede, 1980) do indeed influence a person's style of conflict resolution behavior (as originally defined by Blake and Mouton (1964) and later reinterpreted by Rahim, 1992). Cultural factors also interact with personality (Triandis, 1994), however, and this interaction needs to be taken into account when examining choices of responses to conflict as well. Accordingly, this study explored the relationships among styles of conflict resolution, culture, power, and personality. The aims of this study were to explore the influence of cultural (values and beliefs) and personality variables (self-monitoring and emotional intelligence (EQ)) on choice of conflict resolution strategy. Specifically, the extent to personality factors predicted conflict resolution strategy over and above that predicted by cultural factors was explored.

### 1.1. Conflict

Conflict is a common facet of our everyday lives. Seen as a perceived incompatibility of interests, conflict is often caused by a misalignment of goals, motivations, or actions between two parties that can be real or only perceived to exist (Taylor & Moghaddam, 1994). Whether it occurs in the form of a difference of opinion, harsh words, or a form of direct action taken to resolve competing goals, it has the potential to exist in the many domains of our lives. Over the year, busier lifestyles have translated into less time for ourselves and the people around us, leaving a precarious balance between work, family, and everything in between. This increased sense of time urgency has left many scrambling, not having the time to speak with family members, friends, and co-workers in order to maintain personal needs and the needs of others nor to clarify the motivations and intentions behind any behavior, thus increasing the potential for misperception and miscommunication, some of the negative aspects of conflict.

Although often seen in a negative light, conflict can be both positive and negative. More often than not, it is perceived as the root of disagreements, negative emotions, and maladaptive behavior, even though it is just as likely to foster needed change through creativity and innovation. With the hope of being able to maximize the positive aspects of conflict, it is important to work toward minimizing its negative aspects and thus minimizing its dangerous implications within the family, school, and work environments (interpersonal) as well as the global community as a whole (intergroup).

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