

# The Relationship between Cultural Intelligence and Conflict Management Strategies: Viewpoint of Managers of University Hospitals in Ahvaz

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## Abstract

**Introduction:** In order to achieve their genuine goals, namely the health of the community, important health organizations need an effective and appropriate way to solve inter- and intraorganizational conflicts. Therefore, this research was conducted with the aim of determining the relationship between cultural intelligence and conflict management strategies from the viewpoint of managers of university hospitals in Ahvaz, southwest of Iran. **Methods:** This is a descriptive-analytic study carried out in 2018. The statistical population of this study included 120 managers of university hospitals of Ahvaz Jundishapur University of Medical Sciences. Data collection was done using two questionnaires, namely cultural intelligence questionnaire ( $\alpha = 0.87$ ) and conflict management strategies questionnaire ( $\alpha = 0.93$ ). The sample included the entire statistical population. For analysis of the data, Spearman correlation tests were employed using in SPSS-22. **Results:** There was a weak correlation and no significant linear relationship between cultural intelligence and conflict management strategies of managers ( $P > 0.001$ ). The average cultural intelligence of the managers of university hospitals in Ahvaz ( $90.1 \pm 15.5$ ) was in "good" condition. The average conflict management was  $101.1 \pm 1.35$ . There was a positive and significant relationship between the knowledge dimension of cultural intelligence and conflict management strategies of managers. **Conclusion:** The "non-coping" strategy was the most commonly used strategy among managers. According to the relationship between some of the components of cultural intelligence (knowledge) and conflict management, it can be concluded that the familiarity of managers with other strategies can be beneficial in conflict management, exerting a positive impact on human resource management and improvement of organizational performance.

**Key words:** Cultural Intelligence, Conflict Management, Hospital Managers, Ahvaz Jundishapur University of Medical Sciences

## Introduction

In recent decades, individuals and organizations have gradually come to understand the important role of knowledge in competitive environments. In fact, knowledge has stabilized its position among other sources of wealth in a relatively short period of time.

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Knowledge creation in any organization is impossible without cooperation and establishment of appropriate relationships with no organizational conflicts. Conflicts are double-edged swords, and the way we deal with them determines their effects, for good or ill, on the organization (Faraji-Khiavi et al., 2017; Faraji-Khiavi et al., 2015).

Among the skills required to avoid organizational conflicts, the ability to continuously get adapted to people from different cultures and the ability to manage intercultural communication are of paramount importance (Taravat Rasooli et al., 2019). Cultural intelligence is a new domain of intelligence that has many links with diverse workplace environments. This type of intelligence is one of the most effective tools for performing tasks efficiently in environments with a diverse and heterogeneous workforce. Cultural intelligence is a special ability and skill that allows a person to act effectively in multicultural situations (Intelligence and job performance, 2013). Peterson defines cultural intelligence as the ability to apply skills and abilities in different environments (Peterson, 2004).

Conflict management is one of the most difficult yet important responsibilities of any manager. The conflict resolution skill involves choosing the most appropriate strategies for corresponding situations (Ramirez, 2010). Conflicts occur when two or more values, goals, or beliefs are naturally contradictory, and no agreement has yet been made about them. A conflict can also be defined as a social situation in which two or more people do not agree on the basic premises of the organization, or they show some hostility to each other (Monograph on the internet: McNamarea C, 2007).

The organizations' move toward diverse workforce is associated with changes, and an important question that is posed at this juncture is: How do managers tend to cope with conflicts in different organizations with a variety of cultural backgrounds? The approach adopted by managers for conflict resolution has a direct impact on employee job satisfaction since unresolved conflicts reduce employee engagement. Without conflicts, an organization will not grow, and both managers and employees should think of resolving conflicts instead of avoiding them (Huan and Yazdanifard, 2012).

Zardashtian et al came to the conclusion that cultural intelligent is necessary in assigning top managerial positions and in improving the performance of managers working at that level, and with continuous training of managers in conflict resolution, the way for a timely and correct conflict resolution is paved (Zrdshtian et al., 2015). Also, Sanagoo and Rahimi emphasize the role of cultural intelligence in dealing with organizational conflicts as a key factor influencing the success of organizations (Sanagoo and Rahiminik, 2014). Since it is necessary to explain and apply strategies for resolving conflicts and disputes for the management of hospital affairs and resources, an understanding of effective leadership and management methods in hospitals as the most important healthcare institution in healthcare networks, particularly in how to deal with different cultures and conflicts, can assist managers adopt a managerial approach tailored to these cultures and can help managers better take care of hospital affairs. It can also provide a useful guide for policymakers and managers to deal with issues concerning organizational barriers and employee management (College of Nurses of Ontario, 2009). In fact, important health organizations need an effective and appropriate way to resolve inter- and intraorganizational conflicts in order to achieve their genuine goals, namely the health of the community. Therefore, this research was conducted with the aim of determining the relationship between cultural intelligence and conflict management strategies from the viewpoint of managers of university hospitals in Ahvaz in 2018.

## Methods:

This research was a descriptive-analytic and cross-sectional study. The statistical population of this research included 120 senior and middle managers (head of hospital, hospital director, matron, accounting officer, medical equipment officer, etc.) of university hospitals affiliated to Ahvaz Jundishapur University of Medical Sciences. Due to the limited statistical population, no sampling was done in this study. The present study was conducted in all university hospitals of Jundishapur University of Medical Sciences in Ahvaz including Golestan, Shafa, Imam Khomeini, Razi, Abouzar and Taleghani hospitals. After collecting a research report from the School of Public Health, the researcher distributed and collected data within 4 weeks. The questionnaires were distributed among all managers, and explanations were offered by the researcher if needed.

Data were collected using two questionnaires of cultural intelligence and conflict management strategies. Cultural Intelligence Questionnaire of Ang et al (2004) includes 19 items which are related to the concept of cultural intelligence with 4 dimensions: strategic dimension (4 questions), knowledge (7 questions), motivational (4 questions) and behavioral (4 questions). Answers to these items were based on 5-point Likert scale: from always (5 points) to never (1 point). The range of scores derived from the scoring method is between 33 and 165, with higher scores representing higher cultural intelligence. Ranking the scores is follows: 132-165 = Excellent Cultural Intelligence, 99-131 = Good Cultural Intelligence, 66-98 = Medium Cultural Intelligence, and 33-65 = Low Cultural Intelligence (College of Nurses of Ontario, 2009).

Robbins' Conflict Management Strategies Questionnaire (Hadadi Kohsar et al., 2007) includes 30 questions in 3 dimensions. The first 7 questions are related to control, from 8 to 18 deal with decision-making, and from 19 to 30 are related to non-coping (avoidance). The scoring of this questionnaire was the same as the other questionnaire used in the study. The validity of this questionnaire was confirmed

by 5 faculty members. The reliability of Conflict Management Strategy Questionnaire and Cultural Intelligence were calculated to be 0.93 and 0.87, respectively.

To analyze the data, descriptive statistics including relative frequency, mean and standard deviation, as well as T-test, ANOVA and Spearman correlation test were used by SPSS ver 22.

## Results:

Of the 130 individuals making up the population, 120 completed the questionnaires and the response rate was 92.3. Of these participants, 36 (30%) were male and 84 (70%) were female, 52.5% of the respondents aged between 25 and 35, 40% between 36 and 45, and 7.5% were above 45. In terms of marital status, 20% of the respondents were single and 80% were married. As far as qualifications were concerned, 21.8% of the respondents had a Master's degree, 66.7% had a bachelor's degree and 11.8% had associate degrees or diplomas. As with their work experience, 44.2% of the respondents had less than 10 years of experience, 43.3% between 11 and 20 years, and 12.5% had more than 20 years of service experience. The highest and smallest number of managers was in Golestan Hospital (20%) and Abouzar Hospital (13.3%), respectively. Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation of cultural intelligence dimensions.

Table 1: The mean and standard deviation of cultural intelligence dimensions

Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation	Dimensions
5	39		29.8 ± 4.9	Strategic
6	30		23.2 ± 4.1	Knowledge
6	29		21.5 ± 3.7	Motivational
4	21		16.5 ± 3.4	Behavioral
21	119		90.1 ± 15.5	Cultural Intelligence

Table 1 shows that the average cultural intelligence of the managers of university hospitals in Ahvaz ( $90.1 \pm 15.5$ ) was in a "good" condition. Among the cultural intelligence dimensions, the strategic dimension was the highest ( $28.9 \pm 4.3$ ) while the behavioral dimension was the lowest ( $16.5 \pm 3.4$ ). Table 2 shows the mean and standard deviation of the dimensions of conflict management strategies.

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation of the dimensions of conflict management strategies

Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation	Dimensions
4	31		21.4 ± 6.7	Control
6	47		31.2 ± 8.1	Problem-solving
7	50		48.5 ± 20.3	Not-coping (avoidance)
17	128		101.1 ± 35.1	Conflict management

Table 2 shows that in terms of conflict management and its strategies in the selected hospitals, the mean conflict management was  $1.01 \pm 35.1$  with the most and least commonly used strategies being avoidance (not coping) (mean:  $48.5 \pm 20.3$ ) and controlling (mean:  $21.4 \pm 6.7$ ). Table 3 illustrates the correlation between conflict management strategies and the dimensions of cultural intelligence.

Table 3: Correlation of Conflict Management Strategies with Cultural Intelligence Dimensions

Conflict Management Strategies		Dimensions Strategic
P-value	Spearman Correlation	
0.50	-0.04	Knowledge
0.00**	0.38	Motivational
0.01	0.18	Behavioral
0.40	-0.40	Cultural Intelligence
0.06	0.12	Dimensions

\* P < 0.05 \*\* P < 0.01

Table 3 indicates that there is a positive and significant relationship between the knowledge dimension of Cultural Intelligence and the conflict management strategies of the studied managers. However, there was no significant relationship between conflict management

strategies and cultural intelligence and its dimensions. Table 4 illustrates the correlation of cultural intelligence dimensions with conflict management strategies.

Table 4: Correlation of cultural dimensions with conflict management strategies

Cultural intelligence		Dimension
P-value	Spearman Correlation	
0.08	0.20	Controlling
0.60	0.02	Problems-solving
0.50	0.03	Not-coping (avoidance)

(P < 0.05)\*\* P < 0.01

According to Spearman's coefficient obtained in Table 4, the correlation of cultural dimensions with conflict management strategies was "weak", and there was no significant relationship between cultural intelligence and conflict management strategies of the managers.

### Discussion:

There was a weak correlation between cultural intelligence and conflict management strategies of the studied managers, nor was there any significant linear relationship between them. According to our findings, from the viewpoint of managers of university hospitals, cultural intelligence does not have any effect on managers' conflict management strategies. Another finding of our study is the difference in the way managers use different conflict management strategies and the controlling strategy as the least commonly used conflict management strategy among managers. We believe this could be attributed to the studied managers' lack of knowledge and understanding of conflict management and its strategies. In fact, knowing about the nature, characteristics and causes of conflicts has a profound effect on controlling and dealing with conflicts, and reducing the consequences associated with them. If properly controlled and managed, not only will conflicts be not detrimental but they can also provide the basis for transformation and improvement of performance, address organizational bottlenecks, improve the quality of decision-making, and increase accuracy in practice. In sum, conflicts flourish creativity, innovation and employee participation in the organization (Ghorbani, 2001).

According to our results, the cultural intelligence of managers is at a good level, and we believe due to the managers' unawareness about conflict management and its strategies and application in solving organizational problems, the value of conflict management in the organization is little-understood, and this causes conflicts between employees and the management. It seems that planning with the aim of familiarizing managers with conflict management and its strategies as a management tool and using its techniques in management and staff conflicts can gradually reduce conflicts and discrepancies between managers and employees. In this way, the high level of cultural intelligence of managers is expected to contribute to the appropriate and wise use of conflict management strategies (Iranzadeh et al., 2012). In fact, the conflict caused by different perceptions is the result of phenomena (Shiri et al., 2016). The results of this study were consistent with those of Keshtkaran et al (2010) who conducted a study on educational and research managers of Shiraz University of Medical Sciences in that they also showed that there is no meaningful relationship between cultural intelligence and the controlling strategy of conflict management. In fact, managers use different strategies to solve conflicts in organizations, and the manner in which managers tend to solve conflicts depending on a variety of factors such as the nature of conflict, personality, organizational status, the personality of the opposite party, leadership style, the degree of power, the predominant culture of the organization, the level of familiarity with conflict management styles, and the manager's degree of enjoyment from emotional intelligence (Hadadi Kohsar et al., 2007; Afzalur et al., 2002).

Due to the importance of conflicts and the fact that they can be both constructive and destructive, it is recommended that managers receive the necessary training in order to become more familiar with the advantages and disadvantages of conflict management strategies. Non-coping means the use of avoidance and compliance or compromising conflict management techniques. In compliance strategy, the manager tries to abandon her opinions to satisfy the other party (Ma et al., 2008).

According to the results of this study, the most commonly adopted conflict management strategy among the studied managers was the non-coping strategy. Of course, the constructive or destructive nature of the conflict depends to a large extent on how it is managed and controlled, and this, we believe, leads to the willingness of managers to actually cope with the conflict and reduces their tendency to adopt the non-coping strategy as the first and foremost option for conflict resolution. The conflict management literature focuses on three key issues, namely workplace conflicts and conflict management styles, cultural differences in conflict management, and conflict management in practice (Yu ChSh et al., 2006).

According to the results of the current study, the strategy of problem-solving as a conflict management strategy used by managers was ranked second. Effective use of conflicts requires the full understanding of their nature as well as their causes and the ability to manage and control them, which are considered as one of the most important management skills today. The ability to deal with conflicts and

manage them plays a valuable role in the success of managers of organizations. When constructive, conflicts create new and creative thoughts, and provide the ground for change and innovation in the organization, and ultimately help the management team to achieve its organizational goals (Mozaffari et al., 2012).

In the present study, there was a positive and significant relationship between the self-motivation component of emotional intelligence and conflict management. That is, managers who had higher self-motivation scores were more successful in conflict management. In other words, self-motivation leads to better conflict management and optimizing strategies to achieve better performance. Therefore, the cultural intelligence of managers could be argued to lead to better conflict management in the organization. It is imperative to educate managers to improve their conflict skills, and in the meantime, by providing solutions to enhance cultural intelligence, managers can better run the organization with more effectiveness and efficiency.

### Conclusion:

The "non-coping" strategy has been the most commonly adopted among managers, and due to the relationship between some of the components of cultural intelligence (knowledge) and conflict management, it can be concluded that the familiarity of managers with other strategies can have a positive impact on conflict management strategies and improvement of human resource management and organizational performance. Holding conferences and workshops, especially group training sessions, in hospitals regarding conflict management strategies can be a good way to implement the results of the present study. In this context, it can be noted that employee participation in workshops and group discussions can be effective in helping them deal with conflict resolution issues. It is suggested that hospital managers be trained in achieving the goals of cultural knowledge in conflict resolution and tolerance.

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