INDIVIDUALISM-COLLECTIVISM, CONFLICT-MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES AND ORGANIZATIONAL RESILIENCE IN CULTURALLY DIVERSE TEAMS: A STUDY OF UZBEKISTAN'S BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

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1. Introduction

Organizations rarely fail because disagreement exists; they fail because disagreement is handled badly. In culturally diverse workplaces, conflict is more frequent and harder to read, since colleagues may differ in what they regard as legitimate disagreement, appropriate tone and acceptable resolution. How managers and employees respond to such conflict influences trust, cooperation and the capacity of a team to absorb shocks and recover, which is the core of organizational resilience (Duchek, 2020; Williams et al., 2017). Conflict-handling competence is therefore not a soft skill at the margins of management but part of the infrastructure of resilient organizations.

This issue is especially relevant in Uzbekistan, a multiethnic, post-Soviet economy undergoing rapid institutional change. Uzbek, Russian and other ethnic communities work side by side, languages are mixed within teams, and firms operate under economic and regulatory uncertainty that tests their adaptive capacity. Yet little empirical work examines how culturally rooted orientations shape conflict behaviour among managers and entrepreneurs in this setting. Practitioners and human resource specialists must therefore rely largely on imported models whose fit with local conditions is untested.

This study investigates how individualist and collectivist orientations relate

to preferred conflict-management strategies among entrepreneurs and managers in Uzbekistan. It also asks whether strategy flexibility depends on managerial experience, and whether the strength of ethnic identity predicts compromise-seeking behaviour in a polyethnic business context. The study's broader aim is to clarify how culturally grounded conflict-management competence may contribute to team cohesion and organizational resilience. It forms part of a doctoral project on business negotiation competence and organizational management effectiveness.

Three considerations make the question timely. First, firms in Uzbekistan are growing, recruiting across communities and entering partnerships with foreign companies, so the number of occasions on which culturally different colleagues must resolve disagreements is rising. Second, the conflict-management literature is dominated by samples from North America, Western Europe and East Asia, and it is not known whether the cultural patterns reported there transfer to a Central Asian, post-Soviet setting. Third, existing studies mostly treat culture as a national average, which obscures differences among individuals who share a workplace but not necessarily a cultural orientation or ethnic background.

2. Theoretical background and hypotheses

2.1. Conflict-management strategies

Research on conflict handling has long described a small set of strategies defined by concern for oneself and concern for the other party (Rahim, 2002). De Dreu et al. (2001) propose a measurement model with five strategies: yielding, in which one gives in to the other party's wishes; compromising, in which both sides make concessions; forcing, in which one pursues one's own aims at the other's expense; avoiding, in which one withdraws from or ignores the issue; and problem-solving, in which parties seek an arrangement that satisfies the interests of both. Problem-solving is generally associated with better joint outcomes and stronger relationships, whereas forcing and avoiding tend to damage relationships or leave issues unresolved. Strategies are not fixed traits. Skilled managers vary their approach with the situation, and this flexibility is itself a competence.

2.2. Individualism-collectivism and conflict strategies

Individualism-collectivism describes the extent to which people see themselves primarily as independent individuals pursuing personal goals or as members of groups whose goals and obligations take priority (Hofstede, 2001; Triandis & Gelfand, 1998). Collectivists typically value harmony, interdependence and the preservation of relationships, and they attend closely to the needs of the in-group. Individualists place more weight on autonomy, personal achievement and direct expression of one's own position.

Comparative research on conflict has consistently linked these orientations to different preferences. Where harmony and long-term relationships are valued, parties should be more inclined to seek solutions that serve everyone's interests and to invest effort in finding them. Where autonomy and personal goals dominate, assertive pursuit of one's own position becomes more acceptable. Applying this logic to Uzbekistan, where family, community and workplace networks carry strong relational obligations, we expect the following.

H1: Collectivist orientation is positively related to the use of problem-solving strategies.

H2: Individualist orientation is positively related to the use of forcing strategies.

These hypotheses are deliberately framed at the level of individual orientations rather than national averages. Cultural values vary within any society, and in a multiethnic setting such variation is likely to be considerable. Measuring orientation at the individual level avoids the ecological fallacy of attributing a national profile to every respondent.

2.3. Managerial experience and strategy flexibility

Cultural orientation sets a default, not a destiny. Managers accumulate experience in handling disputes with superiors, subordinates, partners and officials, and this experience broadens the repertoire of strategies on which they can draw. Experienced managers are better able to diagnose a conflict and to choose a response suited to it, even if that response departs from their cultural default. We therefore

expect experience to weaken the link between orientation and strategy choice.

H3: Managerial experience moderates the relationship between cultural orientation and conflict-management strategy, such that the association between orientation and the preferred strategy is weaker among more experienced managers.

In other words, more experienced managers should display greater strategy flexibility, with their choices depending less on their cultural orientation than those of less experienced colleagues.

2.4. Ethnic identity and compromise-seeking

Uzbekistan's workplaces bring together people of different ethnic backgrounds, so ethnic identity is a relevant individual difference. Ethnic identity refers to the extent to which people explore and feel committed to their ethnic group (Phinney & Ong, 2007). People with a strong and secure ethnic identity may feel less threatened by contact with other groups, and so be more willing to meet others halfway. Conversely, a threatened or undeveloped identity may drive defensive or rigid behaviour. Because compromise requires mutual concession, a stable sense of one's own identity may make concession easier to offer and accept. We therefore test the following.

H4: Strength of ethnic identity is positively related to the use of compromising strategies.

Given the relative scarcity of research on this question in Central Asia, this hypothesis is partly exploratory, and its direction will be interpreted cautiously.

2.5. Conceptual link to organizational resilience

Organizational resilience is the capability to anticipate, cope with and recover from adversity while maintaining or improving functioning (Duchek, 2020). At the team level, resilience depends on psychological safety, the shared belief that one can speak up without being punished (Edmondson, 1999), and on the capacity to resolve disagreement without lasting damage to relationships. Strategies that integrate the interests of both parties support these conditions, whereas chronic forcing or avoidance undermines them. The present study does not measure

resilience directly. It treats resilience as the conceptual frame for interpreting the findings, and it identifies which orientations and strategies are likely to be resources for team cohesion under uncertainty.

3. Research design

3.1. Participants and procedure

The study uses a cross-sectional survey of entrepreneurs and managers working in Uzbekistan. The target sample is 400 participants, recruited through purposive and snowball sampling, and data collection is under way. To be eligible, respondents must hold a managerial or ownership role and work in an environment where colleagues, clients or partners come from more than one ethnic or linguistic background. The questionnaire is anonymous and voluntary, and participants give informed consent.

3.2. Measures

The survey is available in Russian and English, reflecting the linguistic reality of Uzbek business. A pilot with 15 respondents showed acceptable-to-excellent reliability for the scales.

The questionnaire is organized in blocks so that predictors and outcomes are separated: a brief professional profile, the orientation and identity scales, and the conflict-handling inventory. Respondents are asked to think of disagreements with colleagues, partners and subordinates in their recent working experience, which anchors answers in real situations and not in abstract preferences.

Individualist and collectivist orientations are measured with the INDCOL scale (Triandis & Gelfand, 1998), which distinguishes horizontal and vertical forms of each orientation and permits composite individualism and collectivism scores. Preferred conflict-management strategies are measured with an inventory based on the Dutch Test for Conflict Handling (De Dreu et al., 2001), which yields scores for yielding, compromising, forcing, avoiding and problem-solving. Strength of ethnic identity is measured with the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure-Revised (Phinney & Ong, 2007), which captures exploration of and commitment to one's ethnic group.

Managerial experience is recorded as years in a managerial role and the number of direct reports. Controls include age, gender, sector, firm size and educational level.

3.3. Analytic strategy

Descriptive statistics, reliability coefficients and correlations are examined first. H1, H2 and H4 are tested with multiple regression, using the relevant strategy score as the outcome and entering controls first. H3 is tested by adding mean-centred interaction terms between orientation and experience, with significant interactions probed through simple slopes (Aiken & West, 1991). Because respondents rate all five strategies, the analysis also compares the strategy profile within individuals to show which strategies are most and least preferred overall. As all data are self-reported, procedural and statistical checks for common method variance are applied (Podsakoff et al., 2003), and effect sizes with confidence intervals are reported. The small sample limits power, so non-significant findings will be described as inconclusive rather than as evidence of no effect.

Before testing hypotheses, the data are screened for missing values, outliers and violations of regression assumptions. Where the final sample is smaller than planned, the number of predictors in each model will be reduced accordingly, and pilot responses will be merged with the main sample only if the instrument is unchanged. The aim is a transparent analysis that other researchers can replicate.

4. Expected contribution and implications

The study aims to make three contributions. First, it provides empirical evidence on how individual-level cultural orientations relate to conflict behaviour in Uzbekistan, a context largely absent from the conflict-management literature. Second, by examining managerial experience as a moderator, it tests whether the influence of culture on conflict behaviour is fixed or can be changed through professional learning, which has direct implications for development. Third, by including ethnic identity, it addresses an aspect of diversity that studies relying on national-level culture usually overlook.

For practice, the findings are expected to inform human resource and

leadership development in multiethnic organizations. If collectivist orientation proves to support problem-solving, organizations can build conflict-resolution practice on existing relational strengths, using team-based mediation and consultation. If experience weakens the link between orientation and strategy, structured exposure, mentoring and reflective practice can be used to broaden the repertoire of younger managers. If ethnic identity is related to compromise-seeking, diversity initiatives may do better to support secure identities than to seek to minimize ethnic difference. In each case the practical aim is to strengthen psychological safety and constructive conflict handling, which are building blocks of resilient and adaptive management systems.

For organizations, an additional implication concerns the selection and development of team leaders. Where team members differ in orientation and identity, leaders who recognize the sources of these differences can choose mediation, joint problem definition or structured dialogue, instead of defaulting to the style that feels natural to them. For education providers, the results can guide the design of conflict-management modules in management programmes serving multiethnic student groups, where the same dynamics appear in classroom teamwork.

5. Limitations and conclusion

The study has several limitations. Its cross-sectional design prevents causal claims, and preferences reported in a questionnaire may differ from behaviour in real disputes. The sample is non-random and small, which restricts generalizability and the detection of modest effects. Resilience is treated as an interpretive frame and not measured, so conclusions about it remain inferential. Future research could combine surveys with scenario-based or observational measures of conflict behaviour, assess team-level outcomes directly, and compare several Central Asian countries.

Conflict is unavoidable in diverse teams, but its consequences are not. By linking individualist and collectivist orientations, managerial experience and ethnic identity to the strategies that managers prefer when conflict arises, this study seeks

to identify the culturally grounded competencies on which resilient organizations in Uzbekistan and the wider region can build.

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