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Towards managing diversity: Cultural aspects of conflict management in organizations

Kurzfassung: Als eine Antwort auf den wachsenden Bedarf, Möglichkeiten der interkulturellen Zusammenarbeit ohne das Problem vermehrter Konflikte zu finden, untersucht diese Arbeit kulturelle Aspekte von Konfliktmanagement.

Als Indikator für Kultur wurde das unabhängige und interdependente Selbst-Konzept (Markus & Kitayama, 1991) erhoben und für Konfliktverhalten acht Managementstile: dominieren, integrieren, einen Kompromiss finden, vermeiden, nachgeben, von Emotionen leiten lassen/Emotionen zeigen, vernachlässigen, und die Hilfe eines Dritten in Anspruch nehmen (Rahim, 1983; Ting-Toomey et al., 2000). Darüber hinaus wird ausgehend von der face-negotiation theory (Ting-Toomey, 1988; Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998) untersucht, inwieweit das Wahren des eigenen Gesichts, das des anderen oder das aller Parteien die kulturellen Unterschiede im Konfliktverhalten erklärt.

185 Arbeitnehmer in verschiedenen Ländern beantworteten einen Internet-Fragebogen.

Eine exploratorische Faktorenanalyse der acht Stile ergab drei Faktoren, die direktes, indirektes und integrierendes, kompromiss-suchendes Verhalten beschreiben.

Die Hypothesentests zeigen konform mit den Annahmen dieser Untersuchung, dass Personen mit einer unabhängigen Tendenz eher direktes Konfliktverhalten und „integrieren“ angeben, wohingegen Personen mit einer interdependenten Tendenz eher indirektes Konfliktverhalten und „integrieren“ plus „einen Kompromiss finden“ angeben. Darüber hinaus ist das Wahren des eigenen Gesichts mit direktem, das des anderen mit indirektem Konfliktverhalten und das aller Parteien mit „integrieren“ und „einen Kompromiss finden“ verbunden. Allerdings sprechen die Ergebnisse dafür, dass das Wahren des eigenen Gesichts für Personen mit unabhängiger Tendenz nicht die erwartete Bedeutung hat. Personen mit einer interdependenten Tendenz hingegen geben an, dass ihnen das Wahren des Gesichts des anderen und das aller Parteien wichtig ist. Als Erklärung für ein bestimmtes Konfliktverhalten dürfte Gesichtswahren daher eher für Personen mit einer interdependenten Tendenz zuzutreffen, was durch die Tatsache untermauert wird, dass sich deren Bereitschaft, Konflikte zu vermeiden, durch ihre Neigung, das Gesicht des anderen wahren zu wollen, erklären lässt.

Abstract: This study investigated cultural aspects of conflict management in organizations in response to the growing need for an understanding of how people from diverse cultural backgrounds can work together without the often-resulting problem of intercultural conflict.

Culture was evaluated through self-assessments of how independent or interdependent the subjects were (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), and conflict behavior through eight conflict management styles: dominating, integrating, compromising, avoiding, obliging, emotion, neglect and third-party help (Rahim, 1983; Ting-Toomey et al., 2000). Furthermore, drawing upon face-negotiation theory (Ting-Toomey, 1988; Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998), a test was made of whether self-face, other-face and mutual-face concerns could explain cultural differences in conflict behavior.

A total of 185 professionals from different countries completed an Internet questionnaire.

An exploratory factor analysis of the eight styles revealed three factors which seem to describe direct, indirect and integrating plus compromising conflict behaviors.

In line with this study's hypotheses, persons with a tendency to act independently mentioned direct styles, as well as integrating, and persons with a tendency to act interdependently mentioned indirect styles in addition to integrating and compromising. Furthermore, a concern for self-face maintenance was related to direct conflict behavior, a concern for other-face maintenance to indirect conflict behavior, and a concern for mutual-face maintenance to integrating and compromising.

However, persons with a tendency to act independently do not seem to be particularly concerned about self-face maintenance. Persons with a tendency to act interdependently, on the other hand, show other- and mutual-face concerns in conflict situations. It was concluded that face concerns do play a crucial role, but mainly in explaining the conflict behavior of persons with a tendency to act interdependently. This was supported by the fact that other-face concern mediated their readiness for conflict avoidance.

These results are discussed and implications for further research are presented.

"The Navajo Indians believe that if one ends a dispute by having a winner and a loser, one dispute may have ended but another dispute will surely have started, because harmony will not have been restored" (in Isenhart & Spangle, 2000; p. xiv).

1 Introduction

On the tide of globalization, companies are increasingly expanding, merging and forming strategic alliances across national borders. The success and failure of these international collaborations depends on more than just managing economic and legal obstacles. Negotiations with partners from other cultures, the temporary dispatch of workforce to foreign countries and the setup of multinational work teams are all part of a day's work. This is creating new challenges for companies' employees and human resource departments. Besides the usual work demands, there is the added task of dealing with the cultural differences in partners' values and norms of behavior. Thus, the management of diversity has increasingly become a topic for company personnel and organizational researchers. Yet, little is known about what this 'management' really means (e.g. Erez & Earley, 1993).

Intercultural encounters easily give rise to misunderstandings and unintentional slights, which often result in what is called 'intercultural conflict' (Ting-Toomey, 1999). The reason is that each person is 'pre-programmed' to interpret the other's actions according to his or her own cultural standards (e.g. Hofstede, 1997).

Since there is strong theoretical and empirical evidence for such reasoning, several scholars propose to think about the management of diversity as a way to prevent, minimize or constructively deal with intercultural conflict (e.g. Erez & Earley, 1993).

Conflicts in general and intercultural conflicts in particular create substantial costs for the companies and personnel involved (e.g. Black et al. 1991). To date, however, it is commonly agreed that conflicts are neither negative nor positive per se. It is the way they are framed and managed that leads to constructive or destructive outcomes (e.g. Deutsch, 1976; Rahim, 1986; Tjosvold & Tjosvold, 1995; Kempf et al., 1996). Thus, to constructively manage conflicts, knowledge about their conditions and processes is needed. Furthermore, to constructively manage intercultural conflicts, i.e. to manage diversity in organizations, additional knowledge about the cultural influence on their conditions and processes is required, as "managing intercultural conflict constructively means managing cultural-based conflict differences appropriately and effectively" (Ting-Toomey, 1999, p.195).

This study investigates how culture relates to conflict behavior within the context of organizations, taking a culture comparative perspective. In other words, culture is understood as the most fundamental influence on conflict management. However, within any one culture it is recognized that conflict behavior is subject to a large number of further influencing factors, e.g. the conflict's circumstances, which will not be addressed here.

As most theoretical positions and research findings point out that organizations do not have cultures of their own, but are rather formed as a function of societal culture (Adler, 1997; Erez & Earley, 1999; Hofstede, 1980; Kappe, 1996), no distinction between the two will be made here. Yet, based on current trends in the scientific literature, organization is seen as a specific setting (Berkel, 1984). Thus, all conclusions regard conflict behavior in a company environment and may not necessarily apply to other contexts.

A literature review will be briefly given in the next section, followed by a description of the experimental setup and its results. The paper ends with a discussion of the findings and the conclusions.

2 Theory

2.1 Culture and Self-Concept

In most previous studies, culture was not measured, but only assumed, drawing upon Hofstede's (1980) Individualism-Collectivism (IC) scores. This approach is problematic by itself. Furthermore, Singelis and Brown (1995), building on Kashima's (1989) and Kagitcibasi's (1994) line of thought, stated that, "the popular use of IC requires an explanation of the mechanisms and intermediate steps through which the various pressures inherent in this broad-based construct shape individual behavior" (p. 355). The present study thus investigates cultural aspects of conflict management via Markus' & Kitayama's (1991) independent and interdependent self-construals, which have been shown to be better predictors of individual behavior than IC scores (e.g. Gudykunst et al., 1996; Oetzel, 1998).

Independent self-construal involves viewing oneself as a unique and independent person. Thus, in essence, having an independent self-concept means "construing oneself as an individual, whose behavior is organized and made meaningful primarily by reference to one's *own* internal repertoire of thoughts, feelings, and actions, rather than by reference to thoughts, feelings, and actions of others" (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; p. 226). In cultures that promote independent self-

construal, the normative imperative is to become autonomous and to discover and express one's own unique attributes; a concept that has been referred to as 'standing out' (Weisz, Rothbaum & Blackburn, 1984).

Interdependent self-construal, on the other hand, involves a view of oneself as interrelated with other persons. Thus, in essence, having an interdependent self-concept means "seeing oneself as part of an encompassing social relationship and recognizing that one's behavior is determined, contingent on, and, to a large extent, organized by what the actor perceives to be the thoughts, feelings, and actions of *others* in the relationship" (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; p. 227). In cultures that promote interdependent self-construal, the normative imperative is to integrate oneself, behave appropriately and maintain the interdependence among individuals (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Matsumoto, 1996); this is a concept that has been referred to as 'standing in' (Weisz, Rothbaum & Blackburn, 1984).

Independent and interdependent self-construals have been found to be orthogonal dimensions (Gudykunst et al., 1996). Markus & Kitayama (1991) show that many intra- and interpersonal processes (e.g. cognition and interaction strategies, respectively) depend crucially on whether they are rooted in an independent or an interdependent construal of self. A person's self-concept is thus supposed to be a mediator for the cultural influences on behavior in general and organizational behavior in particular (Erez & Earley, 1993).

Furthermore, Markus and Kitayama (1991) point out that an independent profile is most clearly present in a segment of American, as well as in many Western European cultures (individualistic cultures according to Hofstede, 1980). The interdependent profile is predominantly found in Asian, African, Latin American and many Southern European cultures (collectivistic cultures according to Hofstede, 1980). However, all persons are assumed to have independent and interdependent aspects of self, though differently weighted, depending on their cultural background (Gudykunst et al., 1996).

2.2 Conflict and Conflict Behavior

Conflict is a pervasive aspect of the world. In the literature, it is widely seen as a process of complex co-construction of meaning (Kempf, 2002) that may involve incompatibilities over a variety of aspects concerning issues or relationships (Ting-Toomey, 1994), is influenced by objective and subjective factors, and produces objective and subjective outcomes (Deutsch, 1976; Deutsch, 1991; Thomas, 1992; Kempf et al. 1996; Kempf, 2002). In this study, conflict is defined as "perceived and/or actual incompatibilities of values, expectations, processes, or outcomes between two or more parties ... over substantive and/or relational issues" (Ting-Toomey, 1994, p. 360).

Based on the concepts of concern for self and concern for other, Rahim (1983) developed one of the best-known scales to measure *conflict behavior*. The first dimension explains the degree (high or low) to which a person wants to satisfy his or her own needs. The second dimension (high or low) explains the degree to which a person attempts to satisfy the needs of others. The two dimensions combine to produce five different styles of conflict management: (1) dominating (high in self-concern, low in other-concern), which involves serving one's own interests, even at the expense of the other party, (2) integrating (high in both self-concern and other-concern), which involves the attempt to merge both parties' interests in order to reach a solution that satisfies both sides, (3) compromising (intermediate in both self-concern and other-concern), which involves a give-and-take approach in order to reach a midpoint agreement, (4) avoiding (low in both self-concern and other-concern), which involves evading the conflict topic, the other conflict party or the situation altogether, (5) obliging (low in self-concern, high in other-concern), which involves an accommodation to the other's interests at the expense of one's own.

2.3 Culture and Conflict

2.3.1 Culture & Conflict Behavior

Studying *cultural/ethnic influences on conflict behavior*, Ting-Toomey et al. (2000) identified three new conflict management styles: (1) neglect, which involves a passive-aggressive approach to conflict, (2) emotion, which involves expressing emotions during conflict as well as relying on them to guide conflict responses (3) third party help, which involves giving preference to a third party, helping to settle conflict. A stronger cultural identity – which corresponds to the Anglo-American background in the U.S., therefore supposed to be predominantly individualistic – was positively associated with emotion. Third-party help and neglect were positively associated with a higher ethnic identity, which corresponds to Asian, African and Latino backgrounds in the U.S., therefore supposed to be predominantly collectivistic. Earlier results by Ting-Toomey et al. (1991), show that American students used dominating behavior to a higher degree than their predominantly collectivistic-oriented fellow students, who employed more avoiding and obliging styles. The results concerning integrating and compromising were mixed. Another research group found that Taiwanese subjects indicated avoiding, obliging, integrating, and compromising styles more often than their American counterparts (Trubinsky et al., 1991).

Examining the relationships between culture and conflict management styles in an *organizational setting*, the results were less clear-cut. Elsayed-Ekhouly & Buda (1996) found Middle Eastern executives to display more integrating and avoiding, while U.S. executives used more obliging, dominating and compromising styles. Jordanian, Turkish and U.S. managers were interviewed by Kozan (1989) about their conflict behavior. Regarding conflict management with peers, he found that managers in all three countries seem to prefer to avoid conflicts.

Investigating the relationship between *self-construal and conflict management styles*, Oetzel's (1998) survey data showed the independent self to be positively associated with dominating, and the interdependent self with avoiding, obliging, integrating, and compromising styles. In addition, self was found to be a better predictor of conflict behavior than situation, which is in line with other findings (e.g. Oetzel et al. 2000; Wolfradt, 1996).

No documentation concerning the relationship between self and conflict management styles in *organizational settings* was found. However, most studies involving students used 'being a manager in a company' as a cognitive frame.

Generally, dominating and emotion are suggested to be direct, whereas avoiding, obliging, neglect and third party help are proposed to be indirect conflict management styles (Ting-Toomey, 1988; Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998; Ting-Toomey et al., 2000). The integrating and compromising conflict behaviors were considered to be rather direct. However, representatives of both cultures may be expected to engage in those behaviors, though possibly attaching the different meanings of involving a substantive- or a relational-level collaboration (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998).

On the above reasoning, the following hypotheses are stated:

1. *Self-predicting Conflict Behavior*

H 1.1: Persons with a tendency to independence are likely to express direct conflict management styles, such as (a) dominating and (b) emotion. In addition, they also tend to express (c) integrating and (d) compromising.

H 1.2: Persons with a tendency for interdependence are likely to express indirect conflict management styles, such as (a) avoiding, (b) obliging, (c) neglect and (d) third party help. In addition, they also tend to express (e) integrating and (f) compromising.

2.3.2 Face-Negotiation

The most fundamental limitation of a good number of studies investigating the cultural aspects of conflict management is their lack of a plausible explanation for the observed dissimilarities (Ting-Toomey et al., 1991). Most conflict models were developed in the United States and may therefore reflect a certain culture-specific attitude towards conflict. According to Rahim's (1983) model, the style 'avoiding' refers to neither caring for one's own, nor for the other person's concerns. It has the negative connotation of a flight from the scene without reaching a conflict resolution. In collectivistic cultures, however, avoiding is perceived as an appropriate behavior which aims at maintaining relational harmony. It is thus high in both self- and other-concern (Ting-Toomey, 1988), as concerns seem to have shifted from a more issue- to a more relation-oriented focus. Ting-Toomey's face-negotiation theory (1988, Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998) attempts to offer an enhanced theoretical framework for explaining cultural differences in conflict behavior.

Besides one's self-concept, the public presentation of oneself plays a crucial role in understanding social behavior (Wolfradt, 1996). This self-presentation is what several scholars call 'face'. In essence, "face is a projected image of one's self in a relational situation. It is an identity that is conjointly defined by the participants in a setting" (Ting-Toomey, 1988, p.215). Members of all cultures have and wish to maintain face (Goffman, 1967; Brown & Levinson, 1978; Ting-Toomey, 1988; Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998). However, which 'self' is projected into this image depends on one's cultural self-concept. Furthermore, the meaning of face in a certain situation, as well as facework – how to protect or threaten face – vary from one culture to another (Ting-Toomey, 1988; Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998).

To worry about one's own image is referred to as *self-face concern*, whereas caring for another person's image is referred to as *other-face concern*. *Mutual-face* is understood as the concern for both parties' images and/or the image of the relationship (Oetzel et al., 2000).

Ting-Toomey et al. (1991) investigated the links between *culture and face maintenance* and between *face maintenance and conflict behavior*. Their results have shown a higher degree of other-face concern for collectivistic cultures. Other-face concern in turn was strongly associated with avoiding, integrating and compromising styles. Self-face concern was strongly related to dominating conflict behavior. Furthermore, face maintenance dimensions were shown to be better predictors for conflict management styles than vice versa.

Regarding the connection between *self-construal and face maintenance*, Oetzel et al. (2000) demonstrated that self has a stronger effect on face concerns than culture and situational influences. Independent self is positively associated with self-face concern and interdependent self with other- and mutual face-concerns.

On the above reasoning, the following hypotheses are stated:

2. Self predicting Face-concerns

H 2.1: In a conflict situation, persons with a tendency for independence are likely to be concerned with self-face maintenance.

H 2.2: In a conflict situation, persons with a tendency for interdependence are likely to be concerned with (a) other-face maintenance and/or (b) mutual-face maintenance.

3. Face-concerns predicting Conflict Behavior

H 3.1: Persons who are concerned with self-face maintenance are likely to express direct conflict management styles, such as (a) dominating and (b) emotion.

H 3.2: Persons who are concerned with other- and/or mutual-face maintenance are likely to express indirect conflict management styles, such as (a) avoiding, (b) obliging, (c) neglect and (d) third party help.

Following the aforementioned line of thought by Ting-Toomey et al. (1991), two research questions will also be pursued.

Research question 1: Who is more likely to express integrating conflict behavior: persons who are concerned with self-face, other-face or mutual face maintenance?

Research question 2: Who is more likely to express compromising conflict behavior: persons who are concerned with self-face, other-face or mutual face maintenance?

4. The Mediation Role of Face-concerns

H 4.1: Persons with a tendency for independence are likely to express direct conflict management styles, because of their predominant concern for self-face maintenance.

H 4.2: Persons with a tendency for interdependence are likely to express indirect conflict management styles, because of their predominant concern for other- and/or mutual-face maintenance.

A summarizing model is presented in Figure 1.

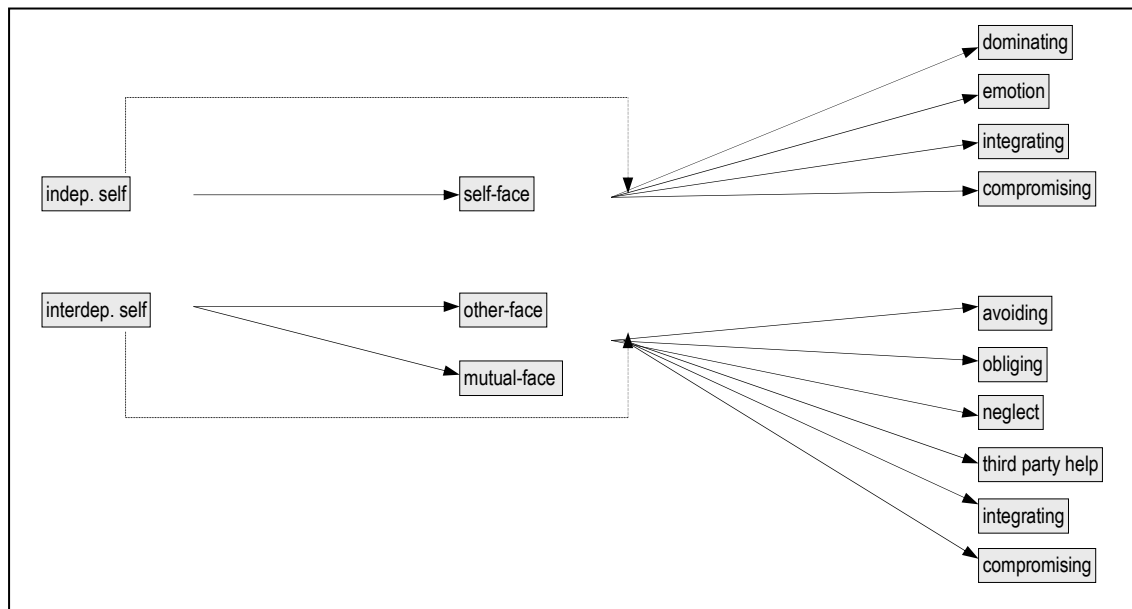


Figure 1:
Hypothesized relationships between self-concept, face-concerns and conflict behavior

3 Method

3.1 Participants

The sample in this study included 185 professionals from different countries. A complete listing of the participant's national backgrounds is shown in Table 1.

Countries			Countries			Countries		
Citizens of this country			Citizens of this country			Citizens of this country		
	N	%		N	%		N	%
Australia	1	0.5	France	5	3	Romania	3	2
Belgium	1	0.5	Germany	51	27	Russia	1	0.5
Brazil	1	0.5	Holland	3	2	Singapore	1	0.5
Canada	2	1	India	10	5	Spain	1	0.5
China	1	0.5	Ireland	1	0.5	Turkey	3	2
Croatia	1	0.5	Latvia	2	1	UK	6	3
Denmark	3	2	Lithuania	1	0.5	USA	10	5
Finland	30	16	Portugal	38	20	Vietnam	1	0.5

Table 1:
Nationalities of the participants in the study

Concerning the collected demographic information of the participants, age was segmented into six categories, ranging from under 20 to over 60 years. The categories with the highest counts were 21-30 years, with 89 participants (48 %), and 31-40 years, with 75 participants (40 %). Slightly more men than women participated in the study (110, 59 %).

Education was segmented into the categories: junior high school, high school, bachelor and five-year graduate program. Almost all participants had an educational level at least equivalent to a high school degree (181, 98 %), with 124 persons (67 %) claiming to have completed a five-year graduate program. Company size was subdivided into the categories: small, medium and large. The majority in the sample was working in large companies (126, 68 %). Tenure was divided into five categories, ranging from less than 1 to over 10 years. Participants with tenures between 1-2 and 3-5 years were the most strongly represented, with 59 persons (32 %) in both categories. Position was assessed through the categories of: no management, local management, middle management and high management duties. Half of the sample had no management duties (92), and one fourth (46) was involved in local management. Some 118 participants (64 %) claimed to have lived abroad and, given the categories of fair, good and very good, 116 (63 %) felt that their understanding of English was very good. For a more detailed account of the data collected see Hamdorf (2002).

3.2 Procedure

A questionnaire study was designed to assess the cultural aspects of conflict management in a business environment. To facilitate the recruiting of international employees and their participation in this study, the questionnaire was presented via the Internet as a website of the Helsinki University of Technology. A printed version was also available and administered to four persons, whose answers did not differ from those electronically submitted. Participation in the study was voluntary and confidential. The sample was collected using the snowball technique, making a reconstruction of the correct response rate impossible.

3.3 Measures

3.3.1 Independent and Interdependent Self-Construal

To assess independent and interdependent self-construal, a questionnaire by Gudykunst et al. (1996), consisting of twenty-nine items, was used¹:

- Independent self-construal was assessed by fifteen items, e.g., "I should decide my future on my own."

¹ The questionnaire with all scales employed in this study is presented in the Appendix B in Hamdorf (2002).

- Interdependent self-construal was measured by fourteen items, e.g., "I consult with others before making important decisions."

Items were assessed using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "fully disagree" (1) to "fully agree" (5).

The Cronbach's alpha for the entire scale was .70, with .75 for the sub-scale of independent self and .68 for the sub-scale of interdependent self.

3.3.2 Face concerns

Face concerns were assessed by twenty-two items written by Ting-Toomey and Oetzel (in Oetzel et al., 2000).

- Self-face concern was measured by seven items, e.g., "I was concerned with protecting my self-image."
- Other-face concern was assessed by eleven items, e.g., "I was concerned with helping the other person to maintain his/her credibility."
- Mutual-face concern was measured by four items, e.g., "I was concerned with respectful treatment for both of us."

Items were assessed using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "fully disagree" (1) to "fully agree" (5).

The Cronbach's alpha for the entire scale was .92, with .89 for the sub-scale of self-face concern, .92 for the sub-scale of other-face concern and .80 for the sub-scale of mutual-face concern.

The inter-correlation of other-face and mutual-face concerns was, with .6, very high. Thus, an exploratory factor analysis (e.g. Brachinger & Ost, 1996) was performed and its results were used for further analyses, as factor values are uncorrelated. Based on this data, the Kaiser-Guttman rule (e.g. Botz, 1993) suggested that only one factor should be retained. Yet, there are theoretical grounds to assume that face-concern is a three-dimensional construct (e.g. Oetzel et al., 2000). This structure was therefore imposed, and Varimax-Rotation (e.g. Bortz, 1993) was employed.

The results revealed three factors, strongly weighted on self-face concern, other-face concern and mutual-face concern (see Table 2). For reasons of simplicity and because the new factors closely matched the old variables, they were labeled 'self-face concern II', 'other-face concern II' and 'mutual-face concern II'.

	Component		
	1	2	3
Self-face	.981	.133	.138
Other-face	.158	.349	.924
Mutual-face	.151	.926	.347

Extraction-method: principal component analysis.
Rotation-method: Varimax with Kaiser-normalization.

Table 2:
Rotated component matrix

3.3.3 Conflict Management Styles

Participants were asked to picture a conflict with a *colleague* at work and describe their conflict behavior following a series of 66 statements, which were taken from the Conflict Style Dimension Scale (CSDS, Ting-Toomey et al., 2000) and Rahim's Organizational Conflict

Inventory (ROCI – II, Rahim, 1983).

The Conflict Style Dimension Scale (CSDS, Ting-Toomey et al., 2000) assesses seven conflict management styles: dominating, integrating, compromising, avoiding, emotion, neglect and third-party help. Since previous studies on conflict behavior in *organizational settings* have shown 'cultures' to differ in their use of the obliging style (e.g. Rahim, 1983; Elsayed-Ekhouly & Buda, 1996; Kozan, 1989), even though factor analyses of Ting-Toomey et al.'s (2000) student data did not reveal it, this study employed the sub-scale 'obliging' from ROCI – II in addition to the CSDS. Minor changes in the phrasing of this sub-scale were made to match the CSDS's choice of words.

- Dominating was assessed by six items, e.g., "I would argue my case with the other person to show the merits of my position."

- Integrating was measured by twelve items, e.g., "I would work with the other person to reach a joint resolution to our conflict."
- Compromising was assessed by five items, e.g., "I would usually propose a middle ground for breaking deadlocks."
- Avoiding was measured by seventeen items, e.g., "I would try to stay away from disagreement with the other person."
- Obliging was assessed by six items, e.g., "I would generally try to satisfy the needs of the other person."
- Emotion was measured by six items, e.g., "I would be emotionally expressive in the conflict situation", and "I would use my feelings to determine what I should do in the conflict situation."
- Neglect was assessed by seven items, e.g., "While in the presence of the other person, I would act as though he/she did not exist."
- And third-party help was measured by seven items, e.g., "I would ask a third person for advice in settling the dispute."

Items were assessed using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "fully disagree" (1) to "fully agree" (5).

Cronbach's alpha for the entire scale was .82. For the eight sub-scales the Cronbach's alphas were as follows: .67 for the sub-scale dominating, .84 for the sub-scale integrating, .73 for the sub-scale compromising, .87 for the sub-scale avoiding, .75 for the sub-scale obliging, .80 for the sub-scale emotion, .70 for the sub-scale neglect and .88 for the sub-scale third-party help. By excluding one item from the sub-scale dominating (DO3, see Appendix B in Hamdorf, 2002), Cronbach's alpha rose from .67 to .71. The removal of the item did not significantly change the aforementioned rating of the statements as task or relationship oriented. It was therefore excluded from further analyses. The Cronbach's alpha for the entire scale with 65 instead of 66 items did not change.

As mentioned in the theory section, at least dominating and emotion were suggested to be direct, whereas avoiding, obliging, neglect and third-party help were proposed to be indirect conflict management styles (Ting-Toomey, 1988; Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998; Ting-Toomey et al., 2000). Integrating and compromising conflict behaviors were considered to be rather direct, however, no clear proposals exist.

To see whether the scales defined by Ting-Toomey et al. (2000) and Rahim (1983) and applied to this data would group to this higher aggregation model, another exploratory factor analysis based on the Kaiser-Guttman rule was performed.

The principal component analysis revealed three main factors. Factor 1 includes integrating and compromising; Factor 2 the indirect styles of avoiding, neglect and third-party help; and Factor 3 the direct styles of dominating and emotion. The 'obliging' style was not fully explained by a single factor, but displays a stronger tendency for Factor 2.

	Component		
	1	2	3
dominating	-.11	.17	.72
emotion	.20	.01	.70
integrating	.84	-.10	.11
compromising	.74	.29	.05
avoiding	-.18	.75	-.14
obliging	.50	.56	-.03
neglecting	-.57	.51	.33
third party help	.05	.57	-.32

Extraction method: principal component analysis

Table 3:

Component matrix

3.4 Statistical Analyses

All hypotheses were tested on a .05 significance level, using linear Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis (HMRA). Face-concerns were at times independent and dependent variables in the regression equations. Culture, gender, age and

position were 'dummy coded' (see the Results section) and included in all analyses as control variables, because of their potential predicting power for conflict perception, conflict behavior and face-concerns (e.g. Ting-Toomey, 1988; Rahim, 1986; Shimanoff, 1994). As the sample included 185 persons for all analyses, the normality assumption according to the central limit theorem (e.g. Papoulis, 1991) was expected to apply. Thus, all analyses were performed with parametric tests.

To assess the mediation effect of face, predicted in Hypothesis 6, the three-equation approach, suggested by Barron & Kenny (1986) was used.

4 Results

4.1 Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Descriptive statistics for, and correlations between, the employed variables are reported in Table 4.

4.2 Hypothesis Testing

4.2.1 Self-predicting Conflict Behavior

According to Hypothesis 1.1 (a), independent self-construal should be positively associated with dominating².

The control variables culture, gender, age and position were entered in Step 1 of the regression equation and explained 3 % of the variance ($F_{10, 174} = .50, p > 0.05$). The introduction of independent and interdependent self in Step 2 explained an additional 7 % of the variance and contributed significantly to the prediction of dominating, with a $\Delta F_{2, 172} = 6.69, p < 0.05$. The regression model as a whole, explaining 10 % of total variance, failed to reach significance ($F_{12, 172} = 1.56, p > 0.05$). Yet, the Beta coefficient for independent self was significantly positive ($\beta = .24, p < 0.01$).

Hypothesis 1.1 (a) is partly supported by the data (though independent self seems not to exhaustively explain dominating conflict behavior, cf. Table 5).

According to Hypothesis 1.1 (b) independent self-construal should be positively associated with emotion.

The introduction of independent and interdependent self in Step 2 explained an additional 13 % of the variance and contributed significantly to the prediction of emotion with a $\Delta F_{2, 172} = 13.98, p < 0.001$. The Beta coefficient for independent self was also significantly positive ($\beta = .29, p < 0.001$).

Hypothesis 1.1 (b) is supported by the data (cf. Table 5). However, interdependent self-construal is as well positively associated with emotion, though displaying a weaker Beta weight ($\beta = .22, p < 0.01$). As for the fact of a weaker Beta weight, it could be further argued (cf. Backhaus et al, 2000) that persons with a tendency for independence tend to express and use emotions in conflict situations more so than persons with a tendency for interdependence.

According to Hypothesis 1.1 (c), independent self-construal should be positively associated with integrating.

The introduction of independent and interdependent self in Step 2 explained an additional 20 % of the variance and contributed significantly to the prediction of integrating with a $\Delta F_{2, 172} = 22.53, p < 0.001$. The Beta coefficient for independent self was also significantly positive ($\beta = .23, p = 0.001$).

Hypothesis 1.1 (c) is supported by the data (cf. Table 5).

According to Hypothesis 1.1 (d), independent self-construal should be positively associated with compromising.

The introduction of independent and interdependent self in Step 2 explained an additional 6 % of the variance and contributed significantly to the prediction of compromising with a $\Delta F_{2, 172} = 6.17, p < 0.01$. However, the Beta coefficient for independent self failed to be significant ($\beta = .07, p > 0.05$).

Hypothesis 1.1 (d) is not supported by the data (cf. Table 5).

According to Hypothesis 1.2 (a), interdependent self-construal should be positively associated with avoiding.

² Most results have strong common descriptors. Therefore, and for the sake of simplicity, only the first hypothesis will be described in detail. For the subsequent ones, only the relevant information is added.

The control variables (culture, gender, age and position), which were entered at Step 1 of the regression equations, usually explained between 3 and 9 % of the variance (with one exception of 13 % in the case of 'compromising conflict behavior'), as can be seen in Tables 6-12.

	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
1 Culture	.36	.48																						
2 Gender	.41	.49	.03																					
3 Age2	.48	.50	.09	.17																				
4 Age3	.38	.49	-.04	-.05	-.75																			
5 Age4	.11	.31	-.05	-.15	-.33	-.27																		
6 Age5	.02	.13	-.10	-.11	-.12	-.10	-.04																	
7 Age6	.01	.10	.03	-.09	-.10	-.08	-.04	-.01																
8 Pos2	.24	.43	.11	-.08	-.13	.19	-.03	-.07	-.06															
9 Pos3	.19	.39	.12	-.01	-.07	-.07	.05	.16	.22	-.27														
10 Pos4	.08	.27	-.02	-.09	-.12	.05	-.04	-.03	-.03	-.17	-.14													
11 DO	3.17	.63	-.05	-.06	.07	-.01	-.03	-.04	-.09	-.04	-.04	.07												
12 EM	3.25	.70	-.06	.08	.03	.01	-.02	-.03	-.17	-.14	.03	.03	.13											
13 AV	3.91	.49	-.04	-.15	.04	-.08	-.01	.17	-.02	-.01	-.05	-.01	.03	-.03										
14 OB	3.76	.53	.07	-.07	.01	-.01	.04	.00	-.13	-.05	.01	.00	.00	.03	.24									
15 NE	2.64	.57	-.03	-.03	-.07	.06	.08	-.06	-.10	.10	-.02	.10	.22	.10	.25	-.06								
16 TP	2.89	.59	.04	-.13	-.04	.08	-.08	.05	.01	.15	.00	.05	-.05	-.08	.19	.17	.19							
17 IN	1.88	.51	-.01	.02	.07	.00	-.07	-.09	-.01	-.08	.01	.02	.03	.20	-.25	.22	-.37	.11						
18 CO	2.52	.72	-.06	-.06	.15	-.04	-.19	-.02	.03	-.22	-.06	-.03	.03	.09	.14	.30	-.22	.02	.43					
19 SF II	.00	1.00	-.09	-.09	.04	.04	-.11	.01	-.04	-.01	-.12	.05	.16	.14	.06	-.20	.17	.01	.09	.12				
20 OF II	.00	1.00	.15	-.15	-.03	-.02	.02	.01	.13	-.04	.00	.02	-.09	-.05	.22	.26	-.08	-.03	.19	.09	-.03			
21 MF II	.00	1.00	-.18	.01	.10	-.04	-.06	-.01	-.09	-.10	.00	-.16	-.03	.23	.01	.10	-.21	.00	.34	.33	.02	-.05		
22 IND	3.88	.41	-.02	.10	.11	-.06	-.13	.10	.01	-.03	-.04	.02	.27	.29	-.14	-.70	-.16	-.02	.30	.11	.13	-.07	-.02	
23 INTER	3.60	.36	.09	-.07	.08	-.07	-.09	.11	.01	-.08	.07	-.05	-.12	.21	.20	.35	-.02	.31	.33	.23	.02	.37	.17	.07

* significant at p < 0.05
 ** significant at p < 0.05 (p < 0.01)
 n = 185

DO = dominating, EM = emotion, AV = avoiding, OB = obliging, NE = neglect, TP = third party help, IN = integrating, CO = compromising
 SF II = self-face concern II, OF II = other-face concern II, MF II = mutual-face concern II
 IND = independent self-construal, INTER = interdependent self-construal

Table 4:
 Descriptive statistics & non-parametric correlations for control variables, conflict behavior, face-concerns & self-construals

	dominating		emotion		avoiding		obliging		neglect		third party help		integrating		compromising	
	β	t	β	t	β	t	β	t	β	t	β	t	β	t	β	t
Step 1																
Culture	-.09	-1.09	-.07	-.98	-.00	-.03	.06	.73	-.06	-.83	.02	.24	-.03	-.36	-.05	-.61
Gender	-.09	-1.16	.02	.22	-.14	-1.80	-.08	-1.05	-.01	-.09	-.12	-1.57	.01	.16	-.11	-1.50
Age2	.33	.62	-.41	-.81	-.39	-.76	.01	.01	-.13	-.85	.06	.41	.24	.46	-.09	-.18
Age3	.27	.54	-.40	-.82	-.44	-.89	-.00	-.00	-.15	-1.20	.07	.51	.23	.44	-.13	-.26
Age4	.14	.42	-.23	-.90	-.27	-.84	.05	.14	.14	1.71	.18	2.19 *	.11	.33	-.23	-.74
Age5	.02	.13	-.15	-1.05	.09	.58	.00	.02	.05	.54	.06	.757	-.10	-.63	-.06	-.42
Age6	-.03	-.20	-.32	-2.57 *	-.09	-.69	-.17	-1.31	.09	1.18	.10	1.23	.01	.11	.02	.17
Position2	-.01	-.06	-.12	-1.52	.02	.27	-.06	-.76	-.26	-.50	.08	.17	-.08	-1.01	-.31	-3.97 ***
Position3	.02	.19	.04	.52	-.10	-1.25	.00	.03	-.22	-.43	.11	.22	.02	.20	-.14	-1.74
Position4	.05	.61	.02	.22	-.01	-.11	-.03	-.41	-.10	-.31	-.02	-.06	.02	.25	-.05	-.64
R^2 (R^2 adj.)	.03 (-.03)		.08 (.03)		.07 (.01)		.04 (-.02)		.05 (-.01)		.06 (.01)		.03 (-.02)		.13 (.08)	
F	.50		1.61		1.27		.72		.89		1.17		.60		2.59 **	
Step 2																
Indep.	.24	3.19 **	.29	4.16 ***	-.16	-2.21 *	-.05	-.67	-.12	-1.61	-.03	-.47	.23	3.31 **	.07	.99
Interdep.	-.14	-1.91	.22	3.12 **	.19	2.56 *	.37	5.24 ***	-.04	-.46	.29	3.93 ***	.39	5.72 ***	.24	3.33 **
R^2 (R^2 adj.)	.10 (.04)		.21 (.16)		.12 (.06)		.17 (.12)		.06 (-.01)		.14 (.08)		.23 (.18)		.19 (.13)	
F	1.56		3.87 ***		2.03 *		2.99 **		.98		2.35 **		4.37 ***		3.32 ***	
ΔR^2	.07		.13		.05		.13		.01		.08		.20		.06	
ΔF	6.69 **		13.98 ***		5.50 **		13.86 ***		1.44		7.77 **		22.53 ***		6.17 **	

* significant at p < 0.05

** significant at p < 0.05 (p < 0.01)

*** significant at p < 0.05 (p < 0.001)

n = 185

Table 5:
Results of the HMRA for self-construals predicting conflict behavior

The introduction of independent and interdependent self in Step 2 explained an additional 5 % of the variance and contributed significantly to the prediction of avoiding with a $\Delta F_{2, 172} = 5.50$, $p < 0.01$. The Beta coefficient for interdependent self was also significantly positive ($\beta = .19$, $p < 0.05$).

Hypothesis 1.2 (a) is supported by the data (cf. Table 5).

According to Hypothesis 1.2 (b), interdependent self-construal should be positively associated with obliging.

The introduction of independent and interdependent self in Step 2 explained an additional 13 % of the variance and contributed significantly to the prediction of obliging with a $\Delta F_{2, 172} = 13.86$, $p < 0.001$. The Beta coefficient for interdependent self was also significantly positive ($\beta = .37$, $p < 0.001$).

Hypothesis 1.2 (b) is supported by the data (cf. Table 5).

According to Hypothesis 1.2 (c), interdependent self-construal should be positively associated with neglect.

The introduction of independent and interdependent self in Step 2 explained an additional 1 % of the variance and did not contribute significantly to the prediction of neglect with a $\Delta F_{2, 172} = 1.44$, $p > 0.05$. The Beta coefficient for interdependent self ($\beta = -.04$, $p > 0.05$) also failed to reach significance.

Hypothesis 1.2 (c) is not supported by the data (cf. Table 5).

According to Hypothesis 1.2 (d), interdependent self-construal should be positively associated with third-party help.

The introduction of independent and interdependent self in Step 2 explained an additional 8 % of the variance and contributed significantly to the prediction of third party help with a $\Delta F_{2, 172} = 7.77$, $p = 0.001$. The Beta coefficient for interdependent self was also significantly positive ($\beta = .29$, $p < 0.001$).

Hypothesis 1.2 (d) is supported by the data (cf. Table 5).

According to Hypothesis 1.2 (e), interdependent self-construal should, in addition to indirect conflict behavior, also be positively associated with integrating.

The introduction of independent and interdependent self in Step 2 explained an additional 20 % of the variance and contributed significantly to the prediction of integrating with a $\Delta F_{2, 172} = 22.53$, $p < 0.001$. The Beta coefficient for interdependent self was also significantly positive ($\beta = .23$, $p < 0.001$).

Hypothesis 1.2 (e) is supported by the data (cf. Table 5).

According to Hypothesis 1.2 (f), interdependent self-construal should, in addition to indirect conflict behavior, also be positively associated with compromising.

The introduction of independent and interdependent self in Step 2 explained an additional 6 % of the variance and contributed significantly to the prediction of compromising with a $\Delta F_{2, 172} = 6.17$, $p < 0.01$. The Beta coefficient for interdependent self was also significantly positive ($\beta = .24$, $p = 0.001$).

Hypothesis 1.2 (f) is supported by the data (cf. Table 5).

4.2.2 Self-predicting Face-concerns

According to Hypothesis 2.1, independent self-construal should be positively associated with self-face concern. The introduction of independent and interdependent self in Step 2 explained an additional 2 % of the variance and did not contribute significantly to the prediction of self-face concern II³ with a $\Delta F_{2, 172} = 1.55$, $p > 0.05$. Furthermore, the Beta coefficient for independent self ($\beta = .12$, $p > 0.05$) failed to reach significance.

Hypothesis 2.1 is not supported by the data (cf. Table 6).

According to Hypothesis 2.2 (a), interdependent self-construal should be positively associated with other-face concern.

³ For the reason of construct uncorrelation, the results of the factor analysis were used, which were named self-face concern II, other-face concern II and mutual-face concern II (see Methods section).

The introduction of independent and interdependent self in Step 2 explained an additional 11 % of the variance and contributed significantly to the prediction of other-face concern II with a $\Delta F_{2, 172} = 11.45$, $p < 0.001$. The Beta coefficient for interdependent self was also significantly positive ($\beta = .33$, $p < 0.001$).

Hypothesis 2.2 (a) is supported by the data (cf. Table 6).

According to Hypothesis 2.2 (b), interdependent self-construal should be positively associated with mutual-face concern.

The introduction of independent and interdependent self in Step 2 explained an additional 5 % of the variance and contributed significantly to the prediction of mutual-face concern II with a $\Delta F_{2, 172} = 4.44$, $p < 0.05$. The Beta coefficient for interdependent self was also significantly positive ($\beta = .19$, $p < 0.01$).

Hypothesis 2.2 (b) is supported by the data (cf. Table 6).

	Self-face concern II		Other-face concern II		Mutual-face concern II	
	β	t	β	t	β	t
<u>Step 1</u>						
Culture	-.07	-.92	.22	2.88 **	-.13	-1.67
Gender	-.15	-1.91	-.16	-2.07 *	-.03	-.38
Age2	.21	.40	-.37	-.73	.22	.43
Age3	.18	.37	-.31	-.63	.13	.26
Age4	-.01	-.03	-.18	-.57	.00	.01
Age5	.04	.25	.07	-.48	.02	.14
Age6	.02	.14	.05	.41	-.02	-.15
Position2	-.02	-.14	-.10	-1.23	-.13	-1.59
Position3	-.09	-1.04	-.11	-1.35	.02	.25
Position4	.04	.50	-.01	-.14	-.12	-1.56
<hr/>						
R^2 ($R^2_{adj.}$)	.05 (.00)		.08 (.03)		.07 (.02)	
F	.96		1.65		1.29	
<hr/>						
<u>Step 2</u>						
Independent	.12	1.62	-.08	-1.15	-.11	-1.50
Interdependent	.05	.63	.33	4.68 ***	.19	2.62 **
<hr/>						
R^2 ($R^2_{adj.}$)	.07 (.00)		.19 (.14)		.11 (.05)	
F	1.06		3.45 ***		1.85 *	
ΔR^2	.02		.11		.05	
ΔF	1.55		11.45 ***		4.44 *	

* significant at $p < 0.05$
n = 185

** significant at $p < 0.05$ ($p < 0.01$)

*** significant at $p < 0.05$ ($p < 0.001$)

Table 6:
Results of the HMRA for self-construals predicting face-concerns II

4.2.5 Face-concerns predicting Conflict Behavior

According to Hypothesis 3.1 (a), self-face concern should be positively associated with dominating.

The introduction of self-face II, other-face II and mutual-face II in Step 2 explained an additional 4 % of the variance and did not contribute significantly to the prediction of dominating with a $\Delta F_{3, 171} = 2.50$, $p > 0.05$. However, the Beta coefficient for self-face II was significantly positive ($\beta = .16$, $p < 0.05$).

Hypothesis 3.1 (a) is partly supported by the data (though face-concerns seem not to exhaustively explain dominating conflict behavior, cf. Table 7).

According to Hypothesis 3.1 (b), self-face concern should be positively associated with emotion.

The introduction of self-face II, other-face II and mutual-face II in Step 2 explained an additional 5 % of the variance and contributed significantly to the prediction of emotion with a $\Delta F_{3, 171} = 3.33$, $p < 0.05$. The Beta coefficient for self-face II was also significantly positive ($\beta = .16$, $p < 0.05$).

Hypothesis 3.1 (b) is supported by the data (cf. Table 7).

According to Hypothesis 3.2 (a), other- and/or mutual-face concern should be positively associated with avoiding.

The introduction of self-face II, other-face II and mutual-face II in Step 2 explained an additional 4 % of the variance and contributed significantly to the prediction of avoiding with a $\Delta F_{3, 171} = 2.99$, $p < 0.05$. The Beta coefficient for other-face II was also significantly positive ($\beta = .20$, $p < 0.01$).

Hypothesis 3.2 (a) is supported by the data (cf. Table 7).

According to Hypothesis 3.2 (b), other- and/or mutual-face concern should be positively associated with obliging. The introduction of self-face II, other-face II and mutual-face II in Step 2 explained an additional 10 % of the variance and contributed significantly to the prediction of obliging with a $\Delta F_{3, 171} = 6.33$, $p < 0.001$. The Beta coefficient for other-face II was also significantly positive ($\beta = .25$, $p = 0.001$).

Hypothesis 3.2 (b) is supported by the data (cf. Table 7).

According to Hypothesis 3.2 (c), other- and/or mutual-face concern should be positively associated with neglect. The introduction of self-face II, other-face II and mutual-face II in Step 2 explained an additional 6 % of the variance and contributed significantly to the prediction of neglect with a $\Delta F_{3, 171} = 3.85$, $p < 0.05$. However, both Beta coefficients were negatively associated with neglect, mutual-face concern II even in a significant manner (other-face concern II: $\beta = -.04$; mutual-face concern II: $\beta = -.16$, $p < 0.05$).

Hypothesis 3.2 (c) is not supported by the data (cf. Table 7).

According to Hypothesis 3.2 (d), other- and/or mutual-face concern should be positively associated with third-party help.

The introduction of self-face II, other-face II and mutual-face II in Step 2 explained an additional 1 % of the variance and did not contribute significantly to the prediction of third party help with a $\Delta F_{3, 171} = .47$, $p > 0.05$. Furthermore, neither the Beta coefficient for other-face II ($\beta = -.08$, $p > 0.05$) nor the Beta coefficient for mutual-face II ($\beta = .02$, $p > 0.05$) were significant, other face-concern being even negatively related to third-party help.

Hypothesis 3.2 (d) is not supported by the data (cf. Table 7).

Research question 1

As aforementioned, it was further tested how self-face, other-face, and mutual-face concerns are associated with integrating conflict behavior.

The introduction of self-face II, other-face II and mutual-face II in Step 2 explained an additional 16 % of the variance and contributed significantly to the prediction of integrating with a $\Delta F_{3, 171} = 10.97$, $p < 0.001$. The Beta coefficient for self-face concern failed to be significant ($\beta = .12$, $p > 0.05$), whereas the Beta coefficients for other-face concern ($\beta = .21$, $p < 0.01$) and mutual-face concern ($\beta = .33$, $p < 0.001$) were both significantly positive.

Therefore, it can be concluded that persons who are concerned with other- and/or mutual-face maintenance tend to express as well an integrating style in conflict situations (cf. Table 7). As for the stronger Beta weight of mutual-face concern II, it could be further argued (cf. Backhaus et al., 2000) that persons who are concerned with mutual-face

maintenance seem to express an integrating style more so than persons who are concerned with other-face maintenance.

Research question 2

As aforementioned, it was further tested how self-face, other-face, and mutual-face concerns are associated with compromising conflict behavior.

The introduction of self-face II, other-face II and mutual-face II in Step 2 explained an additional 8 % of the variance and contributed significantly to the prediction of compromising with a $\Delta F_{3, 171} = 5.40$, $p=0.001$. The Beta coefficient for self-face concern failed to be significant ($\beta = .10$, $p>0.05$), whereas the Beta coefficient for mutual-face concern was significantly positive ($\beta = .27$, $p<0.001$).

Therefore, it can be concluded that persons who are concerned with mutual-face maintenance tend to express as well a compromising style in conflict situations (cf. Table 7).

4.2.6 The Mediation Role of Face concerns

According to Baron and Kenny (1986), the preconditions to be met for a mediation effect to be present are:

1. the independent variable (self) should have a significant relationship with the mediator (face);
2. the independent variable (self) should have a significant relationship with the dependent variable (conflict behavior);
3. when regressing the dependent variable (behavior) on both the mediator (face) and the independent variable (self), the former (face) should have a significant relationship with the dependent variable (behavior), whereas the effect of the latter (self) should be less (partial mediation) or even disappear (full mediation) in the third compared to the second equation.

Precondition 1 was already assessed by testing Hypotheses 2.1 and 2.2 (a) - (b). The positive relationship between independent self and self-face concern II did not reach significance. Interdependent self, on the other hand, was positively associated with other- and mutual-face concerns II (see Table 6).

Precondition 2 was already ensured by testing Hypotheses 1.1 (a) - (d) and 1.2 (a) - (f). Significant relationships for interdependent self existed with: avoiding, obliging, third-party help, integrating, compromising and emotion (see Table 5).

Precondition 3, the potential role of other- and/ or mutual-face concerns as mediator/mediators for the relationship between interdependent self and the *indirect* styles of avoiding and obliging were further tested. Since the indirect style 'third party help' was not associated with either other- or mutual-face concern, shown while testing Hypothesis 3.2 (d), it was excluded from the mediation-testing.

According to Hypothesis 4.1 self-face concern should mediate the relationship between independent self-construal and direct conflict management styles.

However, as presented above, even precondition 1 was not met.

Hypothesis 4.1 was not supported by the data (cf. Table 8).

According to Hypothesis 4.2, other- and/or mutual-face concerns should mediate the relationship between interdependent self-construal and indirect conflict-management styles.

1. Testing face as a mediator for the relationship between interdependent self and avoiding

The introduction of interdependent self, other-face II and mutual-face II in Step 2 explained an additional 5 % of the variance and contributed significantly to the prediction of avoiding, with a $\Delta F_{3, 171} = 3.56$, $p<0.05$. Only the Beta coefficient for other-face concern II ($\beta = .16$, $p<0.05$) was significant in this equation.

2. Testing face as a mediator for the relationship between interdependent self and obliging

The introduction of interdependent self, other-face II and mutual-face II in Step 2 explained an additional 15 % of the variance and contributed significantly to the prediction of obliging, with a $\Delta F_{3, 171} = 10.49$, $p<0.001$. Only the Beta coefficient for interdependent self ($\beta = .32$, $p<0.001$) was significant in this equation.

	dominating		emotion		avoiding		obliging		neglect		third party help		integrating		compromising	
	β	t	β	t	β	t	β	t	β	t	β	t	β	t	β	t
Step 1																
Culture	-.08	-1.09	-.07	-.98	.00	-.03	.06	.73	-.06	-.83	.02	.24	-.03	-.36	-.04	-.61
Gender	-.09	-1.16	.02	.22	-.14	-1.80	-.08	-1.05	-.01	-.09	-.12	-1.57	.01	.16	-.11	-1.50
Age2	.33	.63	-.41	-.81	-.39	-.76	.01	.01	-.26	-.50	.08	.16	.24	.46	-.09	-.18
Age3	.27	.54	-.40	-.82	-.44	-.89	.00	.00	-.22	-.43	.11	.22	.22	.44	-.12	-.26
Age4	.14	.42	-.29	-.90	-.27	-.84	.05	.14	-.10	-.31	-.02	-.06	.11	.33	-.23	-.74
Age5	.02	.13	-.15	-1.05	.08	.58	.00	.02	-.13	-.85	.06	.41	-.09	-.63	-.06	-.42
Age6	-.03	-.20	-.32	-2.57 *	-.09	-.69	-.17	-1.31	-.15	-1.20	.07	.51	.01	.11	.02	.17
Position2	.00	-.06	-.12	-1.52	.02	.27	-.06	-.76	.14	1.71	.18	2.19 *	-.08	-1.01	-.31	-3.97 ***
Position3	.02	.19	.04	.52	-.10	-1.24	.00	.03	.05	.54	.06	.76	.02	.20	-.14	-1.74
Position4	.05	.60	.02	.22	-.01	-.11	-.03	-.41	.09	1.18	.10	1.23	.02	.25	-.05	-.64
R^2 (R^2 adj.)	.03 (-.03)		.09 (.03)		.07 (.01)		.04 (-.02)		.05 (-.01)		.06 (.01)		.03 (-.02)		.13 (.08)	
F	.50		1.61		1.27		.72		.89		1.17		.60		2.59 **	
Step 2																
Self-face II	.16	2.10 *	.16	2.17 *	.06	.78	-.17	-2.36 *	.19	2.51 *	.04	.47	.12	1.77 *	.10	1.49
Other-face II	-.05	-.62	.01	.07	.20	2.71 **	.25	3.33 **	-.04	-.59	-.08	-1.06	.21	2.87 **	.02	.29
Mutual-f. II	-.12	-1.58	.17	2.34 *	.07	.94	.10	1.33	-.16	-2.14 *	.02	.27	.33	4.58 ***	.27	3.75 ***
R^2 (R^2 adj.)	.07 (-.00)		.14 (.07)		.11 (.05)		.14 (.07)		.11 (.04)		.07 (.00)		.19 (.13)		.21 (.15)	
F	.98		2.06 *		1.70		2.06 *		1.60		1.00		3.07 ***		3.39 ***	
ΔR^2	.04		.05		.04		.10		.06		.01		.16		.08	
ΔF	2.50		3.33 *		2.99 *		6.33 ***		3.85 *		.47		10.97 ***		5.40 **	

* significant at p < 0.05

** significant at p < 0.05 (p < 0.01)

*** significant at p < 0.05 (p < 0.001)

Table 7:
Results of the HMRA for face-concerns II predicting conflict behavior

Hypothesis 4.2 was partially supported by the data. Interdependent self is no longer a significant predictor for avoiding, when other-face concern II is also entered into the equation. Thus other-face concern is a full mediator for the relationship between interdependent self and avoiding conflict behavior. However, neither other- nor mutual-face concern is a mediator of the relationship between interdependent self and obliging (cf. Table 8).

	avoiding		obliging	
	β	t	β	t
Step 1				
Culture	.00	-.03	.06	.73
Gender	-.14	-1.80	-.08	-1.05
Age2	-.39	-.76	.01	.01
Age3	-.44	-.89	.00	.00
Age4	-.27	-.84	.05	.14
Age5	.08	.58	.00	.02
Age6	-.09	-.69	-.17	-1.31
Position2	.02	.27	-.06	-.76
Position3	-.10	-1.24	.00	.03
Position4	-.01	-.11	-.03	-.41
<hr/>				
R^2 (R^2 adj.)	.07 (.01)		.04 (-.02)	
F	1.27		.72	
<hr/>				
Step 2				
Other-face II	.16	2.07 *	.14	1.88
Mutual-face II	.05	.63	.04	.60
Interdep.	.12	1.50	.32	4.14 ***
<hr/>				
R^2 (R^2 adj.)	.12 (.06)		.19 (.13)	
F	1.84 *		3.06 ***	
ΔR^2	.05		.15	
ΔF	3.56 *		10.49 ***	

* significant at $p < 0.05$

** significant at $p < 0.05$ ($p < 0.01$)

*** significant at $p < 0.05$ ($p < 0.001$) n = 185

Table 8:

Results of the HMRA predicting conflict behavior; predictors interdependent self, other- and mutual-face concern II

5 Discussion

The objective of this study was to investigate cultural aspects of conflict management in organizations from the perspective of face-negotiation theory (Ting-Toomey, 1988; Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998). The results support most, but not all of the hypotheses, and some findings require further investigation.

To provide an adequate interpretation frame for the present study's results, several methodological issues should be addressed.

One concerns this study's cross-sectional design, which does not allow us to draw conclusions about the temporal evolution of the measured aspects or about causality. Yet, as mentioned in the theory section, a person's cultural background influences his or her development of self-concept from early childhood on. Furthermore, face is the projection of this cultural self-concept within interaction. This seems to make a causal influence of independent and interdependent self-construal, as well as of self-, other- and mutual-face concerns on conflict behavior, more plausible than the reverse.

Additionally, it should be noted that the majority of participants in this project had a high level of education, making them a fairly select group. However, the present study did not aim at generalizations from these respondents to other members of the same culture. Instead it attempted to derive statements about today's professional workforce with a potential or actual career in globally-operating companies, for which this sample could be considered quite ideal.

Finally, it should still be pointed out that this study drew upon self-reports for data collection. This method does not measure actual conflict behavior, but rather a person's general attitude towards such behavior. Thus, even though systematic response biases are assumed to be minimal, statements about conflict behavior can only have the form of expectations.

In general, the results of this study suggest that persons with a tendency for independence choose direct, whereas persons with a tendency for interdependence seem to prefer indirect conflict behaviors.

Emotionally expressive conflict modes confront the other person with one's 'inner states'. In collectivistic cultures, this seems to represent a face-threat (Ting-Toomey, 1988). *Yet, in this study, not only persons with a tendency for independence, but also persons with a tendency for interdependence indicate 'emotion'.* This could stem from a highly probable qualitative difference in the value attached to emotional expression between Asian and the Latin American / Southern European collectivistic cultures, making emotional expression more acceptable for the latter.

In this study not only persons who are concerned with self-face maintenance, but also persons who are concerned with mutual-face maintenance indicate 'emotion'.

For 'individualists', expressing emotions, at least by openly talking about one's feelings, could mean that they show emotions in order to stay true to themselves, thus maintaining their self-face. For Latin American and Southern European collectivists, expressing one's emotions in a conflict situation may be perceived as part of a constructive way to argue, which would correspond to a concern for the preservation of both parties' faces.

Neglect, considered a passive approach to conflict, was thought to be employed mainly by persons with a tendency to interdependence. However, in this study, neither of the two groups indicated its use.

This study was conducted within an organizational setting, which by itself may be perceived to demand 'appropriate behavior' to a higher degree than, for example, intimate relationships. Furthermore, the assessment of neglect includes statements like: "I would say nasty things about the other person to other people." Hence, a social desirability bias could be a plausible explanation for this result.

In general, however, the social desirability distortion is expected to be minimized in this data, as participants filled out the study's questionnaire anonymously and on-line. In fact, an experimental study by Joinson (1999) comparing Internet and paper-and-pencil questionnaires in combination with anonymous and non-anonymous submission has shown that social desirability answers were the least frequent in anonymous Internet questionnaires. Furthermore, participation was entirely voluntary and in no way connected to the participant's employer.

Its 'mild forms' of individualism and collectivism may account for the fact that *this study – in contrast to Oetzel et al.'s (2000) findings – does not suggest that persons with a tendency to independence are predominantly concerned with self-face maintenance.*

Oetzel et al.'s (2000) study involved 'the exponents' of individualism (U.S.) and collectivism (Japan). *However, 'mildly collectivistic' as they may be, the answers of persons with a tendency to interdependence were in line with the expected response pattern.*

Therefore, it seems more plausible that the outcomes of this study are due to qualitative differences in the definition of face, as well as in the relative importance attached to it in individualistic, compared to collectivistic, cultures.

In collectivistic cultures, especially with an Asian background, one's self is maintained and codified through active facework, which follows the principle of reciprocity. In individualistic cultures, on the other hand, facework, which does not follow explicit social norms, is therefore expected to be rather self-directed and seems less crucial for a person's self-

concept (Ting-Toomey, 1988). Additionally, the loss of personal face in collectivistic cultures not only affects the individual, as in individualistic cultures, but also his or her position (e.g. management, professorship, ...) (Kim, 2000).

This potential difference in the meaning of face could explain as well the fact that *persons who are concerned with other- and/or mutual face maintenance seem not to ask significantly more for third-party help in conflict resolution than persons who are concerned with self-face maintenance.*

In cultures with a strong normative orientation regarding face, calling in a third party appears to take the responsibility for face-maintenance away from the conflict parties, therefore saving both sides' faces. This seems to be the case in Asian collectivistic cultures, where third-party intervention is more 'institutionalized' (e.g. Ting-Toomey et al., 2000). Without such an institutionalization, however, calling in a third party could also be perceived as exposing one's problems to yet another person, towards whom one may lose face as well.

The preconditions for mediation were not met in the case of persons with a tendency for independence and self-face concern, implying that their direct conflict behavior is not well explained through a concern for self-face maintenance. Persons with a tendency for interdependence, on the other hand, seem to accept avoiding a conflict because of their concern for other-face maintenance. However, they do not appear to be obliging, as a function of their other- and/or mutual-face concerns.

It could be proposed that all conflict management styles involve both a concern for the issue at stake, as well as some kind of face negotiation. In particular, it could be suggested that face is more closely connected with the relational dimension, whereas concerns are more closely related to the issue dimension of conflict negotiation.

Focusing on interaction, as social conflicts do, avoiding is per definition disconnected from a negotiation of the conflict issue, as no outward attempts are initiated to come to terms with the problem. If the precondition is met that the problematic issue is worked out inwardly, the relational dimension, however, is fully preserved. Therefore, if actively used, avoiding can only be explained by a weak concern for the issue and a strong concern for the relation of the parties involved, hence by a concern for face. As the conflict management styles move from one extreme, i.e. avoiding, to the other, i.e. dominating, the weight balance between face and concern shifts accordingly. Obliging implies that the problem was already put on the table, which brings a concomitant increase in the concern for the issue. In proportion, this would lead to a decrease in the explanatory power of face and therefore in its potential mediation role. This could explain why face-concerns only mediate avoiding, even though they are present in all conflict interactions.

Further explanation is needed for the fact that only other-face, and not mutual-face or both face-concerns were seen to mediate avoiding conflict behavior. In this sample the indirect styles are associated with other-face concern, whereas integrating and compromising are more strongly related to mutual-face concern. Thus, it seems that indirect conflict behavior is perceived to involve generally more concern for the other than for both sides.

6 Conclusions and Outlook

Referring to this study's introduced research model (p.8), it must be concluded that the choice of conflict behavior seems not to be a direct function of the face maintenance one is concerned with. Yet, with some caution the following may be concluded:

- 'face-concerns' are associated with the five classical conflict-management styles in a similar way as 'concerns' are;
- communication always involves both issue and relational aspects (e.g. Schulz von Thun, 1980), so does conflict communication and thus social conflicts as such;
- 'concerns' seem to better represent the issue aspects, whereas 'face-concerns' appear to better represent the relational aspects (subsuming also the normative ones);
- cultures seem to differ in the relative importance they attach to these aspects (i.e. some place more importance on 'free discussion of issues' and some more on 'appropriate behavior within such discussions');
- depending on the relative importance attached to these aspects, different conflict behavior is shown
 - a more direct conflict behavior is chosen when the focus is mainly on the issue aspects;
 - a more indirect conflict behavior is chosen when the focus is mainly on the relational aspects.

A model integrating Rahim's approach (1983) and Ting-Toomey's face-negotiation theory (Ting-Toomey, 1988; Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998) seems to be useful to fully account for the cultural aspects of conflict management. This may be even more relevant when studying conflict management in less definitely individualistic and collectivistic cultures, like those in *Europe*.

A potential solution may assume that:

- conflicts always involve issue aspects. These can be the other person's, mine or ours;
- conflicts always involve relational aspects. These can be the other person's, mine or ours;
- depending on the issue and face aspects to be addressed, as well as how much weight is given to either face-concerns or both, different conflict management styles will result.

In the following example, for the five classical conflict management styles, bold fonts correspond to a stronger weighting factor for the particular concern:

Dominating:	high in own concerns	&	high in self-face concern
Integrating:	high in both parties' concerns	&	high in mutual-face concern
Compromising:	high in parts of both parties' concerns	&	high in mutual-face concern
Avoiding:	low in concern	&	high in other-face concern
Obliging:	high in other's concerns	&	high in other-face concern

As for the additional three styles,

- third-party help may be a strong Asian characteristic, at least when brought in association with face;
- emotion and neglect could be seen as forms of affective expression which may exist parallel to other styles and 'color' their appearance. One can, for example, dominate in an emotionally expressive way.

It would be worth verifying whether these theoretical considerations stand up to further empirical testing. One of the main issues should be to investigate how face is defined and weighted in individualistic, compared to collectivistic cultures.

Furthermore, it seems clear that face comprises a relational as well as a normative component. A better knowledge of the weight given in different cultures to each of these elements, as well as its variation over consecutive stages of the conflict, may lead to a deeper understanding of the role of face in conflict handling.

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