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Keep Relationships Positive or Do Things Right: Bridging Women Leaders' Conflict Management Strategies in Non-profit Organizations in Taiwan and the United States

Abstract:

Purpose – The present study aims at contributing to the knowledge of organizational communication and cross-cultural female leadership by examining the conflict management strategies between Taiwanese female presidents and their American counterparts in Rotary Clubs.

Design/methodology/approach – Data were collected through field observations and 25 in-depth interviews with 14 Taiwanese female presidents and 11 American female presidents in Rotary Clubs. Theme analysis of the interpretive method was used in this research.

Findings – This study revealed that the female presidents in both cultures applied obliging and integrating strategies to handle management conflicts. Yet, due to the interference of past presidents, the Taiwanese women leaders are more likely to follow the traditional norms whereas women leaders in the United States tend to employ new approaches and adopt new conflict management strategies in different situations.

Research limitations – This study has focused on exploring the conflict management strategies of only the female presidents in the Rotary Clubs in Taiwan and the United States. Thus, readers may not see the whole picture of the gender differences.

Practical implications – The application of conflict management strategies may be determined by the factors of face, in-group relationships, and roles of the invited third party for Taiwanese subjects whereas American subjects usually adopt appropriate strategies according to the nature of the conflicts. That is, the Taiwanese female leaders would endeavor to keep relationships positive or/and keep positive relationships with their members while the American female leaders would strive do things right or/and do the right things for their conflict strategy application.

Originality/value – As the first study of its kind, this study has filled the gap by expanding female conflict management studies to cross-cultural contexts, thus contributing to the body of human knowledge of cross-cultural leadership in non-profit organizations.

Keywords Conflict management strategies, Non-profit organizations, Rotary Clubs

Paper type Research paper

The global economy has been flourishing, information technology has kept pace with the world growth, and people around the world have gained more and more rights. Because of these factors, rapid changes are taking place in today's society and economy as well as in people's social attitudes toward diverse needs. For instance, non-profit organizations, which have been developing at an unprecedented speed, are gaining the world's attention and admiration. Collaborating with governments, businesses, and other institutions, non-profit organizations have been trying to satisfy numerous social needs and accomplish a great number of tasks. As Solamon (1987) claimed, non-profit organizations are sprouting up successfully just like bamboo shoots after a spring rain, many of which are organized by people with noble aspirations to fulfill lofty ideals and solve social problems.

Although research on the topics of non-profit organizations has become one of the newest and hottest areas, many researchers are still applying the models and theories of for-profit business organizations when they are investigating the management of non-profit organizations (Solamon, 1987). The assumptions of such applications imply an unrevealed and disguised presupposition that the management of non-profit organizations is similar to that of business organizations, with only the content of their services being different. Therefore, there is a must to understand the management practice in all areas of non-profit organizations, especially those related to social conflicts and conflict management strategies.

In addition, research results also indicated that today's organizations need more talented leaders and managers, and "these are increasingly found to be women" (Jogulu and Wood, 2006, p. 246). Gladwin and Walter (1980) further noted, research findings have long indicated that conflicts are more pervasive in international non-profit organizations where communicative adaptation must take place. However, "for a variety of reasons, including methodological hindrances, a predominance of male researchers are largely uninterested in

the topic" (Northouse, 2012, p. 301), and few researchers have conducted research studies related to gender and leadership (Chemers, 1997). Actually, previous studies have seldom touched upon the specific volunteering characteristics of non-profit organizations and female leadership styles in conflict management from a cross-cultural perspective.

We, therefore, aim to fill this void by exploring women leaders' conflict management strategies in non-profit organizations of Rotary Clubs in Taiwan and the United States. With Taiwan as a representative of oriental culture and the United States representing the Western culture, the research findings of the present study will shed light on the insightful understanding of women leaders' leadership styles and conflict management strategies in the international non-profit organizational settings. To this end, we will first clarify our theoretical framework and propose two research questions through an extensive and thorough review of the relevant literature, and then we will provide a detailed description of the methodology for collecting and analyzing our data followed by the presentation and explanation of our research findings. Finally, this paper will end with a critical discussion about our present study and some caveats for properly interpreting our research findings.

Literature Review

Definition of conflict

The definition of conflict is diverse due to different researchers' viewpoints and relevant contexts. Frequently, many scholars see conflict as a natural process of our lives. For instance, Robbins (2001) believed that conflict is a process in which one notices that antagonistic sides are bringing bad influences upon a person or a thing that the person cares about. In contrast, Luthans (2002) defined conflict as a process of communication and interaction. Once dependent individuals realize that irreconcilability, inconsistence, and tension are beneficial, conflict usually erupts.

Besides, some other scholars view conflict as a contingency or a situation. For instance, Nelson and Quick (2000) indicated that conflict represents any kind of contingency, in which irreconcilable aims, attitudes, emotions, or behaviors lead both sides to antagonism. Robbins (2001) also clearly defined conflict as a discordant situation caused by the interaction of more than two related subjects. Since this research aims to explore the conflict management strategies of female leaders in non-profit organizations, we'd like to adopt the above-mentioned definitions in order to examine how a female president coordinates, communicates with other people, and relays a difference in opinion about the goal of a project or view on service significance in her Rotary Club. Following is our review of the existing literature on various conflicts in organizations.

Conflicts resolution strategies

According to Mead (1998), conflicts may explode over almost any aspects of the organization process. Contemporary management literature holds the view that conflicts should be not only accepted but also encouraged. This is because conflicts, as positive forces in a group, provide a prerequisite for group efficiency. One of the primary topics in conflict studies is conflict management behavior, which focuses on situational impacts and corresponding strategies. According to Rahim (2001), the model of five strategies, i.e., integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding, and compromising, is the most frequently used conflict management model.

To be specific, among the five styles in the model, integrating is an ideal strategy for solving conflicts because leaders will think highly about the needs and desires of both parties in a conflict and try to satisfy the needs of both parties by solving the problem itself, thus creating a win-win situation (Rahim, 2001). Obliging style is used when the leaders will not insist on their positions but instead accept other people's viewpoints to maintain a

harmonious relation. Dominating leaders will typically use their positions or power to force their followers to accomplish the leaders' own will or preference, which is an aggressive conflict strategy. An avoidance style is used when neither the need of the leader nor the need of the other party is satisfied. The leaders using this style habitually withdraw or make excuses when facing a conflict. The result of avoiding a conflict, however, is that the conflict still exists. The compromising style meets the needs of both parties by their sacrifice (yield), and, by adopting this style, both parties will try to find an alternative choice which can be accepted by both sides (Gross and Guerrero, 2000; Rahim and Magner, 1995; Rahim, Magner and Shapiro, 2000; Rahim, 2001).

In actuality, as Ohbuchi and Fukushima (1997) noted, many factors such as the essence of conflicts, face-work, and gender may also be influencing the personal reactions to conflicts in organizations. In a similar vein, Conrad and Poole (2001) believed still other different elements, like the relationship between members, the structure of the organization, and environment will also bring profound influences on the adoption of strategies. It is clear that conflict strategies that are used vary with different situations.

Meanwhile, interference of a third party also plays a very important role. When both interested parties are unable to solve their differences through formal or informal communication, a third party may be needed to get the conflict resolved. As Rahim (2001) indicated, a third party plays eight kinds of roles (neutral witness, alley, constituent, rewarded agent, professional interventionist, mediator, judge, and authority). In brief, a third party mainly plays the roles of a mediator and professional interventionist. The mediator makes a decision that both parties must follow, while the professional interventionist encourages interactions between both parties so as to reach a decision. Harris (2002) confirmed that the interference of a third party is generally welcomed at every level. In order to maintain

harmony, an effective leader always prefers such interference and thus turns a dominating

kind of conflict into an integrating, compromising, or avoiding type. This is because

interference can frequently satisfy the needs of both parties to different degrees.

Hierarchical positions, gender role, and conflict management

Apart from the above, one's position in a hierarchical system (power relation) is also an

important factor in settling conflicts. Brewer, Mitchell, and Weber (2002) noted that

contingency elements, such as the power relation between two interested parties, are more

influential on the application of conflict strategy than one's personality. One's behavior varies

with one's position or level in an organization, and the relative positions of the two interested

parties determine the conflict solution. In general, one would solve the conflict with a

subordinate with the dominating style, while that with an associate through compromising,

and that with a superior through obliging (Lee, 2002; Rahim, 2001). Chen (2002) found that

when subordinates encounter conflicts with their superiors, the priority of choice for solving

the conflicts is from integrating, obliging, avoiding, compromising to dominating. In contrast,

the person of higher status tends to start choosing from the other end, i.e. the compromising

style first.

It is also worth pointing that many prior studies have also focused on gender roles and

conflict strategies, applying conflict strategies other than personality, conflict contingency,

and their results. These studies have developed two different views. While some indicated

that gender does not influence the method used to solve a conflict, others find that gender

difference does not reveal any difference in the style of coping with conflicts (Rahim, 2001).

However, in still other studies, scholars believed that gender is a potential influence

on solving conflicts (Mundate *et al*., 1999). Chen (2002) found that women frequently adopt

the avoiding style when facing a conflict. Cupach and Canary (1995) argued that women

prefer integrating, compromising, avoiding, and obliging conflict management strategies.
Conrad and Poole (2002) also added that in a conflict, women tend to focus more on the
relationship and thus apply the integrating style more than men. Rahim (2001) seconded these
findings and further indicated that female supervisors tend to use integrating, compromising,
and avoiding styles more than their male counterparts, but not the obliging style. In general,
women prefer to use the indirect strategies more, thus demonstrating a belief that it is more
important for women leaders to maintain a good relationship than to achieve the goal (Harris,
2002).

From the discussions above, we can see that when choosing strategies for solving
conflicts, women prefer a mild strategy (integrating, obliging, avoiding, or compromising) to
a strong one (dominating). These results partly confirm the gender stereotypes of the general
public. However, Eagly and Karau (2002) found that social environment also influences the
behaviors of both men and women. For example, in a mainly male working environment, a
female worker might also adapt a male behavior, and *vice versa*. Accordingly, the present
study assumes that female presidents might use different conflict management strategies to
deal with their members in the voluntary, male-dominated Rotary Clubs. Since this is also an
intercultural study, below is the discussion about the relationship between cultural differences
and conflict management.

Cultural differences and conflict management

Cultural differences are an important factor in solving conflicts (Chao, 2009). A study of
supervisors in Japan, Germany, and the United States shows the different preferences for
solving conflicts between the supervisors in different countries. Supervisors in the United
States prefer integrating more than supervisors in Japan and Germany, while Japanese
supervisors prefer to solve a conflict with a mediator (the intervention of the third party), and

the supervisors in Germany prefer following rules and regulations (Lee, 2002). Additionally, Tinsley and Brett (2001) echoed that cultural difference does influence a manager's style of solving conflicts. Their research showed that American managers prefer the integrating style, while a Hong Kong manager, influenced by traditional Chinese belief in emphasizing the collective interests and authority, prefers to receive aid from a superior (the third party) to solve the conflict. Thus, it can be said that different cultural preferences will become an important reference for conflict studies (Kreitner and Kinicki, 2002).

Rahim (2001) reconfirmed Ting-Toomey's (1999) study and summarized that Americans prefer dominating more than Japanese and Korean, while Chinese and Taiwanese prefer obliging or avoiding more than Americans do. This is because high emphasis on social relations in the Chinese society sees a conflict as a major problem that may jeopardize interpersonal relations and thus demands the prevention of any conflicts. According to Conrad and Poole (2002), many scholars also found that collectivism focuses more on the achievement of the collective's goal and maintaining the relationships between individuals, and thus its typical conflict management strategy demands not only the satisfaction of an individual's need, but also the maintenance of the relationship between an individual and a group.

To summarize, conflict management strategies vary with different factors such as gender role, face-work, social environment, referent roles, and culture. Although, previous studies have examined many different situations, few researches have addressed how female leaders cope with conflicts in non-profit organizations in different cultures. This study thus focuses on the relevant research on influencing variables to construct the argument for reference and comparison and lay the foundation for exploring the conflict management strategies of female leaders in Rotary Clubs in Taiwan and the United States. To this end, the

following two research questions are raised:

RQ1: What are the conflict management strategies performed by the female presidents

in Rotary Clubs in Taiwan and the United States?

RQ2: What are the main factors that influence the female presidents' conflict handling

strategies in Rotary Clubs in Taiwan and the United States?

Method

Rotary Clubs

Unlike Lion's Clubs or other international non-profit organizations, Rotary Clubs have their

own styles such as holding regular meetings once a week, nicknaming members (no business

titles used within clubs), and allowing only one person per profession to be a member in each

local chapter of the club. These characteristics and behaviors distinguish Rotary Clubs and

their members, Rotarians.

Today's Rotary is adapting itself to the rapid cultural and economic changes of the

shrinking middle class. At present, there are around 1.2 million male Rotarians worldwide but

only 90,000 female Rotarians around the world (Rotary, 2009). In addition, there has never

been a woman who served as the president of Rotary International (RI). Even the 19-member

board of RI does not have any female members. As a result, female membership and

leadership ought to be emphasized for potential success and prosperity of Rotary. Female

leaders should play an increasingly significant role globally in the twenty-first century

because many of the feminine leadership qualities fit in with urgent demands of leadership in

this century (Adler, 1999).

Therefore, RI is expected to focus more on female leadership and make all efforts to

bring the feminine leadership styles, particularly women leaders' conflict management

strategies into full play so as to face the new challenges and better meet the members' needs.

The present study addresses these concerns. Since the senior author of this study has been actively involved in the Rotary Clubs of both District 3510 in Taiwan and District 6600 in the United States, the two districts have been selected for convenience as the study settings.

Participants and procedures

For the present study, we decided to conduct participant observations in the two target districts of 3510 and 6600 in addition to applying in-depth interviews for data collection. By triangulating the data, the present study injected depth in revealing the female presidents' conflict management strategies as performed in both Taiwan and the United States. To guarantee validity or trustworthiness in our findings, we have taken the following steps:

Field observation. Participant observation is a meeting place, where different voices gather together through the practice of interactive context (Denzin, 1994). As it is taking place in the real setting of the activities being observed, field observation allows multiple perspectives of reality and alternative interpretations of data and is deemed a suitable method for a study pertaining to conflict management.

The selected settings from both Rotary districts were based on the criteria of functional equivalence and representativeness. They are functionally equivalent because Rotary is an international organization, and therefore Rotarians around the world all share similar missions and goals, provide similar objectives of services, and implement the same criteria for membership. In addition, the two districts are similar in size (71 clubs in District 3510 and 67 clubs in District 6600). As stated previously, the senior author has been an active member in both Rotary districts for many years and thus had access to the research sites.

Observation sites: District 3510. District 3510 is located in Kaohsiung, Taiwan. At the time of this study, District 3510 was composed of 71 clubs (42 male clubs, 8 female clubs, and 21 mixed gender clubs) with approximately 2,067 Rotarians, including 1763 male

Rotarians (85%) and 304 female Rotarians (15%). Among these clubs, there were 15 female presidents (21%) and 3 District Governor Assistants (15%) in the year from 2008 to 2009 (Rotary, 2009).

Observation sites: District 6610. The other site, District 6600, is located in Ohio of the United States. There were 4201 members in total who belong to 67 mixed gender clubs. There were no single sex clubs. In this district, there were 50 male presidents (75%) and 17 female presidents (25%). However, there were15 male District Governor Assistants but no female Governor Assistants from 2008 to 2009.

Interview. Since field observation is unable to specifically describe if the personal uniqueness of a female leader would influence her conflict management strategies, this research has also applied in-depth interviews as a method for collecting insightful and profound information. The interviewees in this research were not limited to only current presidents in Rotary Clubs. They also included all past or current female presidents, who completed their presidency out of their voluntariness and willingness. In addition, the interview respondents were chosen from female leaders working in business organizations as well. In total, the researchers conducted 25 in-depth interviews with female presidents in both Rotary districts, including 14 Taiwanese volunteers (coded from TF1 to TF14) and 11 American volunteers (coded from AF1 to AF11). The interviews lasted from 60 to 90 minutes in length.

To find answers to the research questions, the researchers designed the interview questions for this study based on the model of five conflict management styles with reference to the existing relevant literature. For example, one of our open-ended interview questions goes like "please briefly talk about your duty, task, and styles as a female president in the Rotary Club by giving us an example of a conflict between you and your members and telling

us how you coped with the issue." Interviewees were asked to freely tell their stories of their experienced conflicts. Through the interviewees' description of the conflicts as well as how they coped with the conflicts, the researchers were able to deduce the strategies used in dealing with the conflicts. In addition, the interviews were also videotaped for detailed records and exact quotes.

The conflict strategies noted in this research consists of the methods applied by female leaders to resolve a conflict within Rotary Clubs. As mentioned previously, the category applied in this research was based on the model of five-styles proposed by Rahim (2001): integrating, dominating, compromising, avoiding, and obliging. Furthermore, the interviewees were also probed to supply many other adopted strategies while certain conflicts developed. In this way, we found that the interviewees often used more than one strategy to approach a conflict. However, to prevent any contradictory situations during the data analysis, we just focused on the first strategy used by the interviewees or the one that they found the most effective when resolving conflicts as presidents of their respective Rotary Clubs.

Analysis

All data were examined on the female presidents' conflict management strategies and influencing factors of their strategies. Theme analysis of the interpretive method was used in this research. To do so, we repeatedly read the gathered information from the field observation notes and in-depth interview transcripts first to develop a structure for data analysis and then to determine the emerging themes as answers to the research questions. We also constantly compared the themes with the theoretical model and other relevant literature as discussed earlier to derive the conclusion of this research.

To be specific, a theme is a relevant issue, concept, opinion, understanding, knowledge, experience, or question. To become a theme for this research, according to Owen

(1984) and Glesne and Peshkin (1992), three criteria are required. As the first criterion, occurrence means that the same thread of meaning must appear at least twice in the analyzed data. The second criterion is the repetition of key words, phrases, or sentences in the selected artifacts. Finally, as the third criterion, forcefulness refers to the emphasis of words or phrases in the data concerned. While generating the themes, the two authors separately and thoroughly finished reading the field observation notes and in-depth interview transcripts and checked each other repeatedly to decide on common themes and achieve validated evidence for the whole data analysis process.

To sum up, we analyzed and compared the data collected from two methods: field observation and interview. Since triangulation emphasizes the value of examining research questions with different methods that do not share the same methodological weaknesses, the researchers in this study have built confidence through the triangulation of research methods in their assertions about the social world.

Findings

Field observation

Performed conflict strategies of Taiwanese female presidents. Observation of two conflict cases showed that female presidents would employ different conflict management strategies when interacting with their members.

In Case 1, the current president of a female Rotary club in Taiwan, Grace, has mostly applied the harmony approach to her members. Then when her presidency is approaching, she requested a meeting to be held to discuss the issue of president-elect because nobody wanted to be the candidate. When some senior members and several past presidents who were very close to Grace proposed the idea that every past president could rotate the president position, Grace at first revealed her reluctant facial expression without saying anything. However, she

accepted this proposal after the members of her club had thoroughly discussed it. However, one of the past presidents, Nancy, was strongly against this idea. Therefore, the meeting failed to come up with any solutions. Grace later invited a third party, the district governor, to persuade Nancy, but Nancy was persistent in her position. Blaming Grace for the situation, Nancy said to the district governor that Grace needed to take the whole responsibility. In the end, this Rotary club had to be dismissed, and Grace said the following words at the last meeting, "I lost face, but the club lost face as well. This was not my own responsibility only. This was all of the club's responsibility." Grace later has transferred to another club, and Nancy has tried to initiate a new club.

In Case 2, the current president of another female club in Taiwan, Sally, was holding a regular meeting. She started with jokes to create a pleasant atmosphere. When Lisa, one of the past presidents, inquired about the poor service of an activity the club had just held, Sally at first tried to avoid discussing this issue by proposing that the issue would be submitted to an upcoming board meeting. Yet, Lisa was still arguing, and Sally then obliged to allow a discussion about the issue in the current meeting. She also invited the opinion of another senior past president, Teresa, who has good relationship with her. Teresa tried to support the president by telling Lisa that she did not participate much in the activity, so she could not judge if the activity was of a good or poor service. In the end, Sally was aware of the tense atmosphere at the meeting and tried to ease up the situation by inviting the members to go to her house. Unsatisfied, Lisa left the club later.

From the observations, we found that the strategy pattern from Case 1 and Case 2 was consistent. The female presidents of Rotary Clubs in Taiwan usually began with efforts for harmony or courtesy. However, when they encountered issues about which they had no solutions, they would avoid the issue or oblige to the other party. When they were challenged

further or had to save their faces, they would invite a third party who is usually a senior

member or has a higher status to help them resolving the conflicts without really confronting

their members. Findings here echo some past findings that Chinese leaders will use the

benevolent approach due to the culture of collectivist values and tend to maintain personal

relationships and smooth over conflicts for harmony in the setting (Ting-Toomey and Oetzel,

2001).

Performed conflict strategies of American female presidents. In Case 3, Cindy, the

current president of a mixed gender club in the United States, was chairing a regular meeting.

Mark, a senior club member, was complaining about the members' poor attendance recently.

He even proposed that the president should cancel some activities or meetings in order to

make the held meetings more meaningful. Cindy patiently explained to him that she needed

to take many factors into consideration when cancelling some traditional activities, including

the overall stability of the club for the long run. She also told him that she would work out the

issue with him and other board members later, and the ultimate decision would be made by

all the Rotarians' joint efforts. Mark agreed.

In Case 4, at a board meeting, the current president of another mixed gender club in

the United States, Ana, proposed to empower a new female member, Tina, to chair and plan a

large fund-raising activity. During the discussion, the majority of the board members strongly

agreed with this idea because Tina is not only energetic and active in participating in the club

meetings but also experienced in dealing with such activities. However, three members, who

were in charge of the previous fund-raising activities, disagreed with this proposal. They felt

that a new, especially a female member was not able to conduct such a large activity yet. Ana

explained that it was at the board meeting that the decision was made, and the club needed

new ideas and new approaches for activities and services. The three members finally left the club because they still could not accept this decision.

The above findings also correspond to Tinsley and Brett's (2001) research results that American female leaders consistently focused on the integrating or dominating approach, choosing direct, confrontational, and problem-solving strategies. They perceived that avoiding conflicts is a weak strategy, so they would directly articulate their conflict concerns and bring the problem or issue to the table. For them, doing the right thing is more important than keeping the harmonious relationships in the club.

Main factors impacting upon the conflict management strategies. The analysis of the above observations has also revealed several main factors that influenced the conflict management strategies of the female presidents, including face, relationship and the role of a third party.

Face. According to Gao (1998) and Ting-Toomey (1988; 2005), people in individualistic (Western) and collectivistic (Eastern) cultures assign different meanings to the content notions of face. In individualistic cultures, face is mostly associated with self-worth, self-presentation, and self-value, whereas in collectivist cultures face is concerned more about what others think of one's worth. Therefore, the face factor was obviously seen in Case 1, where Grace at first tried to protect the club face by accepting the idea of re-rotating the president position, but when they failed to reach an agreement, she felt the whole club lost face as the club was going to be dismissed. In Case 2, Sally also tried to protect Lisa's face by obliging to her to discuss the held activity. In Case 3 and Case 4, however, the face work of the presidents was more related to self-presentation.

Relationship/Guanxi. It was found that guanxi was playing an important role in dealing with conflicts as well. According to Chang and Holt (1991) and Chung (1996),

guanxi is not only a tool used to avoid conflicts, but also a potential power source for persuasion, influence, and control to resolve conflicts among people. Findings of this study as indicated in Case 1 show that Grace was influenced by some senior members and past presidents who were close to her and, as a result, she supported their idea. In Case 2, when Sally encountered the difficult member, Lisa, she invited the opinion of Teresa, who maintained a good relationship with her, and Teresa tried to protect Sally's face by criticizing Lisa in the meeting. In Case 4, Ana was trying to build an in-group relationship with a new female member, Tina, by proposing her to chair a fund-raising activity. Even three senior group members threatened her that they would quit the membership if the decision was made, she did not change her mind.

 The third party. In Case 1, when the meeting failed to come up with any solutions, Grace invited a third party, the district governor, to resolve the disagreement. Similarly, in Case 2, when Sally was dealing with Lisa's inquiry, she invited the third party's support to avoid the confrontation. In Case 3 and Case 4, by contrast, the American female leaders would follow the structure and procedure of clubs to handle things instead of inviting a third party to intervene with the conflict management process. The above analysis agrees with the findings in our interview data that female leaders in Taiwan are more likely to resolve a conflict with a mediator than their counterparts in the United States. All together, face, relationship/guanxi, and the role of a third party were observed as active influencing factors in the management of these conflicts, particularly on the part of the Taiwanese leaders.

Interviews

 Conflict strategy analysis. The first research question of the present study examines the conflict management strategies of the female leaders. To collect data, each of the 25 female leaders was asked to describe at least one case about the conflict background and the

management strategy she used to deal with the conflict. Among the described cases, there were four cases in which dominating strategies were used (Interviewees TF8 [Taiwan Female No. 8; Ibid] and AF1, AF 5, and AF11 [American Female No. 1, 5, & 11; Ibid]). Integrating strategies were employed in eight cases (Interviewees TF4, TF5, TF6, TF10, TF14, AF2, AF3, AF6, and AF8), and obliging strategies were applied in ten cases (Interviewees TF1, TF2, TF3, TF9, TF12, TF13, AF4, AF7, AF9, and AF10). Compromising strategies were used in one case (Interviewees TF7), and exercised avoiding strategies were adopted in another (Interviewee TF11). From the above, it is clear that the 25 female leaders mainly employed the obliging strategy (40%) and integrating strategy (36%) to deal with various conflicts in their respective Rotary Clubs.

Interestingly, among the 25 cases, fourteen had solicitation of third parties, including all of the thirteen Taiwanese female leaders and only one American female leader (Interviewees TF1, TF3, TF4, TF5, TF6, TF7, TF8, TF9, TF10, TF11, TF12, TF13, TF14, and AF7). Furthermore, we can also divide the 25 cases into two major types. The first belongs to conflicts purely over the projects and decision-making processes. Twenty cases were of this first type (80%). The second type of conflicts was mainly related to the leadership styles of the female presidents and personal issues among the Rotary clubs. There were only four cases of this type in this study (20%). Below is a discussion about the adopted strategies adopted to resolve the various conflicts in the two types of cases.

Obliging strategy. Among the ten conflicts using the obliging strategy, our data revealed that obliging is the most often used strategy to face the conflicts with members. Eight of the ten cases belong to the work-related or decision-making conflicts. According to the eight interviewees, they usually tried to conform to the members because Rotarians are volunteers, and if they do not get personal satisfaction, they may not stay in the clubs.

However, there were still some complaints about these conflicts, and some female presidents

in Taiwan even emphasized that they did not insist on their ideas because some of the past

presidents tried to influence the decision results, and they were obliged to keep a harmonious

atmosphere in the club:

> At first, I was very active to propose some creative ideas about projects or
> services that we could do or needed to do. However, some senior members,
> especially the past senior presidents always disagreed with my ideas. I felt that
> they were too traditional and always wanted the current presidents to do things in
> the old ways. Unless you can do creative services by your own and do not need to
> get the financial support from the club, otherwise you just need to follow their
> ways to do things in order to keep a positive and harmonious relationship in the
> club. (Interviewee TF13)

In addition, American female presidents also used the obliging strategy to handle

interpersonal relationships and resolve potential conflicts in their Rotary Clubs. For example:

> In our club, although I am the president, I view myself at the lowest status. My
> job is to provide good services not only for my members, but also for our
> society. Therefore, I tend to use the obliging strategy to cope with any conflicts
> that may arise. (Interviewee AF10)

To deal with the conflicts with the members in Rotary Clubs, this study has found

that most female leaders adopted the obliging strategy (40%) due to the volunteer nature of

the clubs and necessity to keep a harmonious relationship with their members. However,

several Taiwanese female presidents found that some past presidents were too traditional and

tried to influence the current presidents to do things in their old ways while the American

female presidents were direct to face conflicts and would see situations to determine which

management strategy to employ.

Integrating strategy. Besides using the obliging strategy, the interviewees often

adopted the cooperative strategy. One American interviewee remarked:

> In voluntary work, the purpose of dealing with the conflicts is to solve the conflict
> instead of making your stance outstanding. Therefore, if an argument cannot solve
> the problem, why do you still keep on using it? All the methods can be used to
> solve the problem and get things done well. (Interviewee AF8)

Because most of the presidents had experience in holding different positions in Rotary
Clubs, they have established extensive networks and profound professional experiences.
Particularly for Taiwanese female presidents, when facing unexpected incidents or
conflicts, they often integrate multiple sources or the relationships of their networks to
get the problem resolved so as to create a win-win situation, which can be demonstrated
in the following example:

> At a board meeting, one of our members promised to plan a project. But after a
> while, she told me that it was impossible with such short notice. I was upset at
> first, and then asked her about the difficult point. She told me that it was hard to
> rent a place. I contacted with some Rotary friends and then I rent a great place for
> our plan, but I still asked her to plan and organize the project. (Interviewee TF10)

> Once we wanted to release a piece of news to get the public to participate in a
> service. The chair of that committee tried to use 'the first in the nation' in his
> writing. For more appropriateness, we brainstormed first, and then had an
> extensive discussion. At last, we worked it out and made it sound more reasonable.
> (Interviewee AF6)

The cases above proved again the significance of the leaders' capability. Coupled with
their professional capabilities, the female Rotary club presidents would create a win-win
situation by integrating the ideas of both sides of the conflicting parties. Nevertheless,
Taiwanese female presidents would make full use of their networks and sources, including
their natural sources of loving maternal roles to help club members whereas American female
presidents would apply different strategies to resolve the problems or get things done.

Dominating strategy. Among the 25 conflict cases, the dominating strategy was used
in only four cases. This strategy was utilized mostly on occasions when the interviewees and
their members had differences in the club agenda or club policies:

Once there was a project about fund-raising so that our Rotary Club could accomplish more. I put forward my opinion, which was different from that of another female member. As a past president, she did not like the idea of targeting new tasks for more funds. Instead, she would like the current president to follow the traditional projects, services, and rules. However, to fulfill the goal of the club, I managed to gain support of most of the club members, and finally my idea was realized. (Interviewee TF9)

We had a member who wanted to plan and organize our annual club celebration, and she wanted to be empowered to make her own choices regarding everything. I couldn't let her do that because that's a big project and she was asking too much. (Interviewee AF11)

From the above, we can see that the female leaders in both Taiwan and the United States felt that if their ideas were right and the issues were task-related, they would adopt the dominating strategy to protect the majority rights and focus on the issue under discussion rather than the persons involved.

Besides, there was one case in which the compromising strategy was used, in which Interviewee TF7 and one of her members had some different perspectives of a certain project. After making compromises, both sides stepped back to coordinate and communicate till a compromised agreement was reached. Meanwhile, the avoiding strategy was also adopted in another case (Interviewee TF11), which occurred when both sides were excited. To avoid further face-to-face confrontation, the Taiwanese female president used the avoiding strategy as she described below:

Once at a board meeting, a member stood up and scolded at me. I felt that she was anxious, and I did not want to confront her face to face. I tolerated it, but I felt that I was very much humiliated. However, I felt that so long I did not quarrel with her; I would win the upper hand. (Interviewee TF11)

To sum up, the conflicts between the female leaders and their members mostly came from disagreement about some projects or clubs' policies. To solve the conflicts and to keep a

harmonious atmosphere in their clubs, they mostly used the obliging strategy (40%), but some also adopted the integrating strategy (36%) for a win-win result.

     Main factor impacting applied strategy: the third party. Among the 25 cases, there were 14 cases in which the third party was invited to solve the problem. Among the fourteen cases, the obliging strategy was used in six cases (Interviewees TF1, TF3, TF9, TF12, TF13, AF7), the integrating strategy was employed in five cases (Interviewees TF4, TF5, TF6, TF10, TF14), the dominating strategy was exercised in one case (Interviewee TF8), the compromising strategy was applied in one case (Interviewee TF7), and the avoiding strategy was also utilized in one case (Interviewee TF11). Unsurprisingly, thirteen out of fourteen cases in which the third party was invited to solve the conflicts happened in Taiwan. The third party roles were either senior Rotarians or past Rotary presidents. In contrast, it is usually the ordinary Rotarians that play the role of the third party in District 6600 of the United States.

     In the six cases in which the obliging strategy was adopted, the interviewees mostly had more interactions with the person she had conflicts with due to different understanding or perspectives of the projects. To avoid a worsening situation from happening in the future that might affect the relationships of the whole club, the interviewees first used the obliging strategy and then asked a third party to mediate so as to avoid face-to-face conflicts.

     Similarly, the interviewees who utilized the integrating strategy had conflicts with their members mostly due to the understanding of the work. To avoid face-to-face confrontation, the mediators were invited to discuss plans and help both sides to reach a win-win situation. As for the dominating strategy, although Taiwanese female presidents would still make efforts on harmonious human relationships, both Taiwanese and American female leaders in the Rotary Clubs tended to adopt the dominating strategy and put major club goals as priority. Finally, in the application of the avoiding strategy, the interviewee was

facing an unreasonable member's verbal attack. To avoid face-to-face confrontation, she first used the avoiding strategy to calm down both sides' emotions and then invited a past president to help solving the conflict.

In summary, among the fourteen cases in which a third party was invited, the motivation was either to purely solve the work problem or to seek preventive measures so as to avoid possible conflicts and maintain the harmonious relationship. Generally speaking, Taiwanese Rotarians would frequently ask for a mediator to help with both parties' negotiation, while American Rotarians rarely invited a third party to solve conflicts. One reason is that in the Chinese culture, some Confucian values such as conformity, submission, and respect for one's parents and elders are still very much in practice. Therefore, in order to avoid confrontation and keep harmonious relationships, Taiwanese female leaders are more likely to invite past senior presidents to play the role of the third party and get conflicts resolved.

Discussion and Conclusion

The purposes of this study were to examine the conflict management strategies and the factors that exert impacts upon the application of these strategies between Taiwanese female presidents and their American counterparts of Rotary Clubs as an international non-profit organization. Through the theoretical lens of Rahim's (2001) model of five-styles of conflict management and guidance of other relevant literature, we adopted the research methods of field observation and in-depth interview for data collection and theme analysis to analyze the observed cases and interview transcripts. The research findings are twofold. On the one hand, as the answer to RQ1, the female presidents of the Rotary Clubs in both Taiwan and the United States applied obliging and integrating strategies to deal with management conflicts. However, due to the interference of past presidents, the female presidents in Taiwan are more

likely to follow the traditional norms whereas American women leaders tend to employ new approaches and adopt new conflict management strategies in different situations.

On the other hand, as the answer to RQ2, the application of conflict management strategies are usually influenced by the factors of face, in-group relationships, and roles of the invited third party for Taiwanese participants whereas American participants oftentimes adopt appropriate strategies according to the nature of the conflicts. In terms of face, while the Taiwanese female presidents who grow up in the collectivistic culture show more concern about what other club members may think of their worth, the American female presidents who bear the individualistic cultural influence pay more attention to self-worth and self-expression. Regarding in-group relations, the former make the greatest efforts to maintain harmony by making repeated compromises and even at the cost of keeping the issue under discussion unresolved. Oppositely, the latter usually appear decisive by keeping a working relationship with most club members and, more importantly, by demonstrating their professional capabilities. Finally, seeking extra help from a third and usually senior party has been regarded normal, necessary, and respectful to the former; however, it is in discord with the American pursuit of independence, innovation, and youth-power.

In addition, our research findings have indicated both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, quite a number of previous research projects have overestimated the functions of culture or cultural values in their cross-cultural studies, such as Hofstede's (1997) five dimensions of culture and Hall's (1976) high- and low-context cultures. To be more specific, according to several previous studies (Brewer, Mitchell and Weber 2002, Lee, 2002; Rahim, 2001; Daniel, Spiker and Papa, 1997), when facing conflicts, leaders of the organizations generally tend to employ the dominating or integrating strategy with subordinates, compromising strategy with colleagues, and conforming or obliging strategies

with superiors. However, by focusing on the voluntary nature of the Rotary Clubs, this study found that the female leaders in both Taiwan and the United States would adopt the obliging or integrating strategies during the daily conflict management in their respective Rotary Clubs. It can be interpreted that in non-profit settings, leaders may respect their members as equals due to the voluntary nature and will therefore employ the obliging or integrating strategies. As for the conflict strategies used by female leaders, some relevant literature (Conrad and Poole, 2002) already revealed that females are highly relation-oriented, and they tend to adopt non-confrontational strategies to deal with conflicts – no matter in profit or non-profit organizations. Our research findings support the abovementioned interpretation with evidence from the non-profit organization of Rotary Clubs in Taiwan and the United States.

Practically, this study shows that the factor of power relation influenced little on the strategies the female leaders used in both cultures. However, the factors of face, guanxi, and the third party played more critical roles for the Taiwanese female leaders than their American counterparts in their application of conflict management strategies. For instance, in Case 1 and Case 2, when the female presidents employed avoiding or obliging strategies and when they invited the senior third parties, they were trying to not only maintain the harmonious relationships among the club members but also save the face of one another. Moreover, this study revealed that without good quanxi, face protection and the third party's support, the Taiwanese female presidents could not have obtained their expected achievements.

Besides, this study found that, to emphasize harmony, female leaders in Taiwan tended to invite the third party to resolve conflicts and use the integrating or obliging strategies to bring some conflicts to an end. Culturally, Confucianism is an authoritarian

value that focuses on conformity, submission, and respect for one's parents and elders. To avoid face-to-face confrontation and keep a harmonious relationship, the Chinese leaders are more likely to invite a third party who is senior or respected by both parties to resolve the conflicts. In the case of this study, when the third party appeared as an arbiter with higher authority, the conflicts would be solved soon, and when the third party was objective, he/she was able to pacify the emotion and to save face for both parties. In fact, most of the conflicts in the Rotary Clubs in Taiwan were settled due to the important existence of the third party. Thus, in the Chinese cultures like Taiwan, the factors of face, quanxi, and the third party need to be guaranteed for group or organizational harmony and, possibly, prosperity or productivity.

In conclusion, our research presents a new cross-cultural approach to the study of female leadership styles in non-profit organizations. It is among the first to compare and contrast the female leaders' conflict management strategies in Rotary Clubs in Taiwan and the United States. Our study revealed that the Taiwanese female leaders would endeavor to keep relationships positive or/and keep positive relationships with their members while the American female leaders would strive do things right or/and do the right things for their conflict strategy application. Hopefully, the triangulated research findings and implications will serve as a bridge for those in both cultures to understand and apply the right conflict management strategies in various, especially culturally different, contexts.

Nevertheless, readers are cautioned to see the limitations of this study and interpret the research findings with full awareness to the caveats. First, this study has focused on exploring the conflict management strategies of only the female presidents in the Rotary Clubs in Taiwan and the United States. Thus, readers may not see the whole picture of the gender differences. Second, the factors influencing the application of the conflict

management strategies are mainly oriental in nature. Therefore, we suggest that appropriate application of the strategies should depend on not only the factors of face, human networks or connections, and the third party, but also other factors like the characteristics of the conflicts, the impact of the personalities of the conflicting parties, the relative positions of the conflicting parties as well as the interaction of the factors themselves. All this shows that we need to interpret the application of the relevant strategies from a more comprehensive and macro perspective rather than a single angle.

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