# ISCTE ◎ Business School
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# RESEARCH ON CONFLICT MANAGEMENT: A CASE STUDY ABOUT SMALL WORK GROUPS IN CHINA

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- Spine -

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# Abstract

This research is focused on a qualitative case study about conflict management in small work groups in China. Data were gathered in companies that have their offices in four Chinese cities, including Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Bozhou and Fuyang. 74 informants from 26 work teams participated in this study. Participants were asked to recall events happened in their teams through face-to-face interviews. This case study aims to understand what types of conflict people experienced in their teams, the strategies people adopted to deal with conflicts and the orientations that emerge in the conflict management process.

Overall, results show that the most common type of conflict is relationship conflict. With regard to conflict management styles, integrating and compromising styles are more frequent among managers, whereas avoiding, obliging and dominating styles are more frequent among subordinates. Overall, most of orientations are constructive. Furthermore, the findings were interpreted based on the Chinese culture.

*Keywords*: Organizational conflict, intra-group conflict, conflict management styles, Chinese culture

**JEL Classification:** J52; Y40

# Resumo

Esta investigação está centrada num estudo de caso qualitativo sobre gestão de conflitos em pequenos grupos de trabalho na China. Os dados foram recolhidos em empresas com escritórios em quatro cidades chinesas, incluindo Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Bozhou e Fuyang. 74 informantes pertencentes a 26 equipas de trabalho participaram neste estudo Foi solicitado aos participantes para recordarem acontecimentos que surgiram nos seus grupos através de entrevistas presenciais. Este estudo de caso tem por objetivo compreender que tipos de conflito os colaboradores presenciam nas suas equipas, as estratégias que adotam para lidar com os conflitos e as orientações que emergem no processo de gestão de conflitos.

Globalmente os resultados mostram que o tipo de conflito mais comum é o conflito de relações. No que respeita aos estilos de gestão de conflitos, os estilos integração e compromisso são mais frequentes entre gestores, enquanto os estilos afastamento, resignação e dominação são mais frequentes entre os subordinados. Globalmente a maioria das orientações são construtivas. Adicionalmente, os resultados foram interpretados com base na cultura chinesa.

*Palavras-chave:* Conflito organizacional, conflito dentro do grupo, estilos de gestão de conflitos, cultura chinesa

**JEL Classification:** J52; Y40

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# Chapter I Introduction

Conflicts naturally occur in teams and organizations (Neck, Houghton & Murray, 2017). Conflict is unavoidable in all cultures, but every culture has its own way to manage it (Hanif, Khan, Adeel & Shah, 2016). Back to precious studies of organizational conflict, Jehn (1997) defined three types of organizational conflict, which are task conflict, relationship conflict and process conflict. Rahim (2002) stated five styles of managing conflict, including integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding and compromising styles. Deutsch (1973) initially argued two orientations of conflict, containing constructive and destructive orientations. In this study, the research was focused on intra-group conflict in small work teams. Intra-group conflict is the conflict between people who work together in the same department or teams (Rahim, 2001).

In this study, the author went to four cities in China, including Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Bozhou and Fuyang. The main objective is to do a qualitative case study about team dynamics in China. The purpose of research is to understand conflict management in Chinese small work groups. In order to do it, critical incident interview technique was used to conduct the interviews (Flanagan, 1954). In total, 26 Chinese teams with 74 team members participated in the interviews. The present case study aims at answering three research questions:

1. Which type of conflict did emerge in the interviews?

2. What type of strategy did people adopt to deal with the conflict?

3. What kind of orientations did people adopt to handle conflicts? If the conflict is constructive, to what extent does the incident help team members to improve work performance or connect with each other? If the conflict is destructive, how do team members keep focus on performing the work at hands?

Participants were asked to recall stories or events happened in their teams. The author

believed that it is possible to understand conflict management in Chinese small work teams through interview transcriptions and Chinese cultural dimensions.

This thesis is composed of five parts:

1. The Literature Review includes chapter Ⅱ and chapter Ⅲ and presents the review of previous studies on organizational conflict and Chinese culture characteristics.

2. The Methodology includes a brief explanation of the methods and techniques used to conduct the study.

3. The Findings describe several incidents gathered from interview transcriptions.

4. The Discussion focuses on answering three research questions based on Chinese cultural dimensions.

5. The Conclusion presents a brief conclusion, practical implications and limitations.

# Chapter Ⅱ Conflict in small work groups

This chapter presents the state of the art about conflict, including six sections: definition of conflict, nature of conflict, types of conflict, orientations of conflict, conflict process and conflict management techniques.

## 2.1 Definition of small work group

In this study, the research was focus on conflicts in small work groups (teams). Work teams are defined as "*interdependent collections of individuals who share responsibility for specific outcomes for their organizations*" (Sundstrom, DeMeuse & Futrell, 1990: 120). With regard to the size of work teams, one typology of work group is the small work group. Studies indicate that the optimal size of work team is less than 10 people which are called small teams (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993). According to the duration of existence, small work group can be divided into permanent formal group and temporary formal group. In this thesis, the research was focused on permanent formal groups which have long life spans (Sundstrom, DeMeuse & Futrell, 1990). Permanent formal groups have various forms, for example, Sundstorm *et al.* (2000) distinguished six team categories: production, service, management, project, action and performing, and advisory.

Although some scholars believed that work teams and work groups should be distinguished (e.g. Katzenbach & Smith, 1993), in this thesis, the labels "group", "team" and "department" will be used interchangeably because they refer to the same thing (e.g. Sundstrom, DeMeuse & Futrell, 1990). This viewpoint seems supported by the argument that "*the distinction is a rather artificial one that reflects more about subdisciplinary territoriality than about fundamental differences in focus or objectives*" (Kerr & Tindale, 2004: 624).

## 2.2 Definition of conflict

Conflict is inevitable in the workplace. It exists anytime and anywhere at work. CPP Global Human Capital Report (2008) shows that the average number of hours per week for employees to spend on dealing with workplace conflict is approximately 2.1 hours. To begin with, we should understand the definition of conflict.

According to Deutsch (1973: 10), "*a conflict exists whenever incompatible activities occur. The incompatible actions may originate in one person or group; such conflicts are called interpersonal or intergroup conflict*". Thomas (1992: 265) proposes a conceptual definition for "conflict", which was generally accepted by most of scholars. He defined conflict as "*the process which begins when one party perceives that another has frustrated, or is about to frustrate, some concern of his*". Katz and McNulty (1994: 1) argues that "*a conflict situation exists when there are at least two parties involved who are interdependent, who are experiencing strong emotions, who seemingly hold incompatible outcomes or beliefs, and at least one of the parties recognize the incompatibility and perceives this to be problematic*". Rahim (2001: 18) analyzes different views of conflict and defines conflict as "*an interactive process manifested in incompatibility, disagreement, or dissonance within or between social entities (i.e., individual, group, organization, etc.)*".

Organizational conflict can be classified into different types, such as intrapersonal, interpersonal, intra-group, intergroup, intra-organization and inter-organizational conflicts. In this thesis, the researcher was focus on intra-group conflict. Intra-group conflict refers to the conflict between people who work in the same department or team at workplace. Such a conflict may occur as a result of incompatibilities or disagreements between some or all members of a group or between group members and its leader(s) (Rahim, 2001). In conclusion, intra-group conflict is known as "*disagreement or confrontation between members of the same group*" (Forsyth, 2010: 381).

## 2.3 Nature of conflict

Rahim (2002) reviewed previous studies of conflict and came up with the nature of conflict. He wrote:

> *"Conflict may occur when:*
> - *A party is required to engage in an activity that is incongruent with his or he needs or interests.*
> - *A party holds behavioral preferences, the satisfaction of which is incompatible with other person's implementation of his or her preferences.*
> - *A party wants some mutually desirable resource that is in short supply, such that the wants of everyone may not be satisfied fully.*
> - *A party possesses attitudes, values, skills, and goals that are silent in directing his or her behavior but are perceived to be exclusive of the attitudes, values, skills, and goals held by the other(s).*
> - *Two parties have partially exclusive behavioral preferences regarding their joint actions.*
> - *Two parties are interdependent in the performance of functions or activities."*
>
> (Rahim, 2002: 207)

Forsyth (2010) suggests few roots of conflict: a group brings individuals into contact with other people, who have their own interests, motivations, outlooks, and preferences; when members interact with each other, they compete against one another; they selfishly claim more than their fair share; they treat better those people who they like more than those they dislike. Thus, conflict seems to be an unavoidable consequence in groups.

## 2.4 Different views of conflict

Khaiyat (2016) stated that researchers have been working on three different views of conflicts in organizations for years. The three views of conflict are: (1) Traditional

view, (2) Human relations view, (3) Inter-actionist view.

**Traditional view of conflict**

The traditional view of conflict is consistent with attitudes about group behavior that prevailed in the 1930s and 1940s. Robbins and Judge (2005) suggests that the early approach to conflict assumed all conflicts were bad and to be avoided. Conflict was viewed negatively and discussed with such words as violence, destruction, and irrationality to emphasize its negative connotation. Conflict was a dysfunctional outcome resulting from poor communication, a lack of openness and trust between people, and the failure of managers to be responsive to the needs and aspirations of their employees. The view that all conflict is bad certainly offers a simple approach to looking at the behavior of people who create conflict. For example, by directing our attention to the causes of conflict, we can correct those malfunctions to improve group function and performance, because as it was referred earlier, conflict is inevitable.

**Human Relation school view of conflict**

The human relations view is also called the management view. Conflict can be avoided by creating a goodwill and trusty environment. Management has been concerned about avoiding conflicts and, if possible, resolving conflicts as soon as possible (Thackore, 2013). The manager should not suppress or completely eliminate the conflict, but he or she should accept effectively manage the conflict (Ebhote and Osemekev, 2015). They should not allow the conflict to rise above a certain level or should not make conflict unresolved (Khaiyat, 2016).

**Inter-actionist view of conflict**

The third view, also known as the latest view of conflict, is called the inter-actionist view. In this view, conflict is necessary for an organization, because it promotes the organization's performance. If there is no conflict in an organization, the organization cannot make any progress and innovation (Bacal, 2004). Andersen (2009) argues that

conflict can enhance an organization's ability to deal with changes. Thus, this argument encourages conflict occurring in organizations.

## 2.5 Types of conflict

Generally speaking, there are three main types of conflict in organizations, task conflict, relationship conflict, and process conflict (Jehn, 1997).

**Task conflict**

According to the historical overview, conflicts about the task have been given various labels: cognitive conflict, substantive conflict, content conflict and realistic conflict. From recent studies about the definition of task conflict, Jehn (2014) states that task conflict are focused on disagreements among group members about the tasks being performed. Organizational employees describe these conflicts as "task problems," "work conflict," and "work disagreements".

Task conflict refers to a clash between individuals about the direction, content, or goals of a work assignment. Task conflict is related with group performance. According to Jehn's (1995) study of intra-group conflict, the result showed that task conflict are not strictly linear with group performance, because there is an optimal level of task conflict in no routine-task groups. Jehn (1995) stated that high levels of conflict interfered with group performance, because of confusion over responsibilities and time management problems, while low levels of conflict were effectively for allocating resources and tasks. Later, Jehn (1997) argues that moderate task conflict generally improves group performance, but it can be dysfunctional when it includes strong negative emotion, such as anger, defensiveness, and perceptions that it is not resolvable. More recently, studies show that high task conflict and low task conflict have different outcomes for individuals in groups. For instance, high task conflict can lead to disagreements that may raise negative emotions such as resentment, anger, and aggression. On the contrary, low levels of task conflict have the most positive effect

on organizations by stimulating creativity, healthy competition, and critical thinking among the individuals discussing the various ways to approach a task (Neck, Houghton & Murray, 2017).

**Relationship conflict**

The concept of relationship conflict was initially introduced and defined as existing when there are interpersonal incompatibilities among group members (Jehn, 2014). Relationship conflicts involve disagreements among group members about interpersonal issues, such as personality differences or differences in norms and values (Wit, Greer & Jehn, 2012). According to Jehn's (1997) qualitative study of intra-group conflict, the results demonstrated that issues of relationship conflict were related with interpersonal relationships among coworkers, including problems that members had with others' personalities or dispositions.

On one hand, relationship conflict has negative outcomes on organizations. The negative reactions associated with relationship conflict arouse uncomfortable feelings and dejection among members, which inhibits their ability to enjoy each other and their work in the group (Jehn, 1995). Similarly, Pelled (1996) states that relationship conflicts made organizations' productivities decreased as perceived by team members. In addition, De Dreu and Weingart (2003) also mention that the effect of relationship conflict was detrimental to group performance and member satisfaction. In a recent paper, Meier *et al.* (2013) examine the effect of conflict among 131 employees from several organizations. The authors focused on the effects of relationship conflict on mood and the result provided evidence that relationship conflict was positively related to negative mood. Thus, their result confirmed that relationship conflict has negative effects on human beings.

**Process conflict**

Jehn (1997) did a qualitative analysis on conflict types and defined process conflict as the third type of conflict. Process conflict refers to conflict about how task

accomplishment should proceed in the work unit, who is responsible for what, and how things should be delegated. Process conflict includes disagreements about assignments of duties or resources. Jehn' s (1997) data show that high levels of process conflict interfered with performance by allowing group members to work at cross-purposes, by creating inconsistencies in task roles in the group, and by generating time-management problems that sometimes resulted in failure to meet deadlines.

Thatcher *et al.* (2003) did a quantitative research on the three types of conflict among 144 teams from 55 different countries and they noted that the process conflict was negatively related to group spirit and performance.

To sum up, the table 1 shows a summary on these three types of conflict.

**Table 1: A Summary of Three Types of Conflict**

| Type of conflict | Description |
|:---:|:---|
| Task conflict | -There is often conflict about the work being done<br>-There are differences of opinion<br>-People often disagree about opinions regarding the work being done<br>-There are frequently conflicts about ideas |
| Relationship conflict | -There is emotional conflict among team members<br>-There is often friction among team members<br>- Personality conflicts are evident<br>-There is often tension among team members |
| Process conflict | -There is disagree about the way to do things in the team<br>-There is disagreement about procedures in the team<br>-There are frequent disagreements about who should do what in the team |

*Source*: Adapted from Ayoko, Ashkanasy & Jehn (2014: 89)

## 2.6 Orientations to conflict: constructive/destructive

Deutsch (1973) is the first scholar to distinguish constructive and destructive conflict. Constructive conflict is a conflict with productive consequences. In other words, the participants are all satisfied with their outcomes and feel that they have gained as a result of the conflict. In contrast, destructive conflict is defined as a conflict with destructive consequences. In other words, the participants are dissatisfied with the outcomes and feel they have lost as a result of the conflict.

Weitz and Jap (1995) mention some of the benefits of constructive conflict:

Conflict can often act as a source of novelty for the relationship, forcing it into new terrain that, if handled successfully, can strengthen the interpersonal relationship and cultivate greater trust, communication and relationship satisfaction.

On the contrary, dysfunctional conflict usually hinders organizational performance and decreased productivity. This conflict orientation is characterized by competing individual interests over-riding the overall interest of the business. Frequently, managers withhold information from one another (Kinicki and Kreitner, 2008; Omisore and Abiodun, 2014). Furthermore, Deutsch (1973) states that in a destructive conflict process, individuals compete, trying to defeat others and ultimately there would be only a winner, that is, other parties will always lose something.

Nowadays, constructive and destructive conflicts are also known as functional and dysfunctional conflict.

When conflict is functional, it is mainly task oriented and focused on judgmental difference about how best to achieve common objectives (Brehmer, 1976; Cosier & Rose, 1977; Jehn, 1992; Amason, 1996). This type of conflict is also called cognitive conflict (Amason & Schweiger, 1994; Amason, 1996).

When conflict becomes dysfunctional, it tends to be emotional and focused on personal incompatibilities or disputes (Brehmer, 1976; Coiser & Rose, 1977; Jehn, 1992; Priem & Price, 1991; Riecken, 1952; Torrance, 1957; Amason, 1996).

## 2.7 Stages of conflict process

Pondy (1967) identified five stages of conflict process as follows:

(1) Latent conflict (conditions):

This stage of conflict is marked by a potential tension between one or both sides, which have not evolved into a clear dispute. In latent conflict stage, there are tensions caused from a problem that is not fully defined and is known by some, but not all people who will be affected by the problem and participate in the dispute. Latent conflict is the stage where there is a potential for conflict because of three latent factors:

    a. Competition for limited sources

    b. Drive autonomously

    c. Target differences

(2) Perceived conflict (cognition):

Conflict is perceived when no latent conflict arises. This stage results from the parties misunderstanding each other's true position. Such conflict can be resolved by improving communication between the parties.

(3) Felt conflict (affect):

Felt conflict is the stage where conflict parties are emotionally aware of the conflict, they feel anxious or stressful, and begin to think about strategies for handling conflict. There is an important difference between perceiving conflict and feeling conflict. For example, perceived conflict refers to a situation where A may feel that B and A are in disagreement on some things, but A may not feel anxious, and A's feeling may not have any effect on B; while felt conflict means that both A and B perceive that there is a conflict and begin to formulate strategies about how to deal with the conflict

(4) Manifest conflict (behavior):

Manifest conflict refers to a stage where both parties have some behaviors to stimulate each other. The most typical behavior is open confrontation. Violence rarely exists in manifest conflict stage. The motivation of violence may remain but the parties prefer non-violent behaviors.

(5) Conflict aftermath (conditions):

The aftermath of a conflict may have positive or negative effect on the organization depending on how conflict is resolved. Conflict aftermath may be split into two kinds of conflict episodes: one is that the conflict is resolved and all participants are satisfied with it, the other is that the conflict is merely suppressed but not resolved correctly. This conflict stage is called conflict aftermath.

Rummel (1976) suggests that conflicts pass through five stages:

1. The initial conflict stage: parties hold different attitudes, which could lead to conflict. For example, differences in values, goals, and prospects set the stage for future conflicts.

2. During the initiation stage, some triggering event causes the parties to act. At this stage, the potential differences become the basis for conflict.

3. After the conflict has been initiated, the conflict moves into a stage of open conflict. In this third stage, parties assess each other's capabilities and willingness to use force, threats, and rewards, and sometimes they attack and act in their own defense.

4. The settlement leads to a balance of power stage in which the participants come to understand the consequences of the resolution and learn to accept the outcomes.

5. Such evolving changes lead to a disruption stage. In this stage, the parties recognize that if a new trigger event happens, conflict and the final confrontation may happen again.

Robbins and Judge (2005) suggest five stages of conflict process: potential opposition or incompatibility, cognition and personalization, intentions, behavior, and outcomes. The diagram below shows the explanation of five stages of conflict process (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Conflict Process**
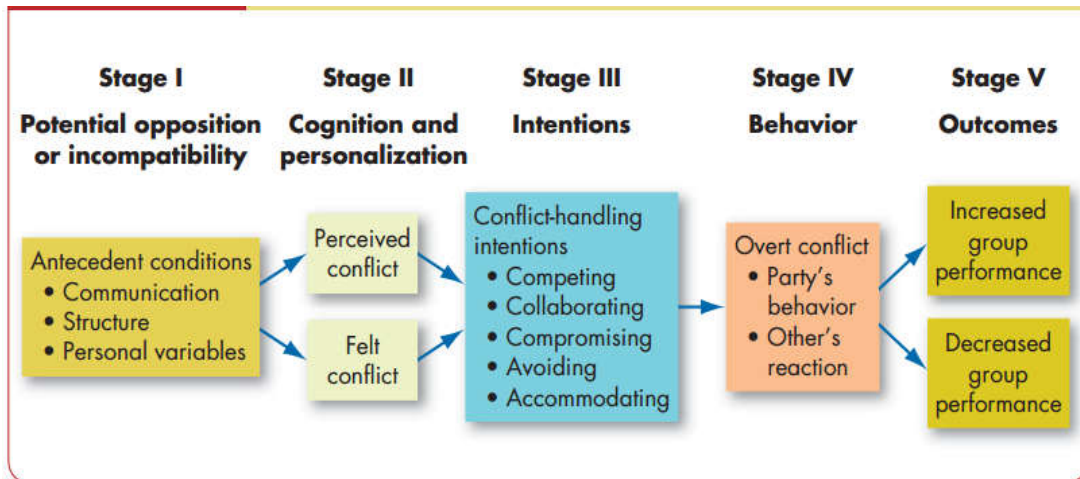


*Source:* Robbins & Jugde (2005: 450)

According to this diagram, five stages of conflict process can be described as follows:

**Stage I: Potential Opposition or Incompatibility**

The first step in the conflict process is potential opposition or incompatibility. This step is divided into three general categories: communication, structure, and personal variables.

· Communication:

Obviously, an increase in communication is up to a point, after which it is possible to over-communicate, with an increase in the potential for conflict.

· Structure:

Structure includes some variables such as size of the group, degree of specialization in the tasks assigned to group members, jurisdictional clarity, member–goal compatibility, leadership styles, reward systems, and the degree of dependence between groups.

· Personal Variables:

It refers to personality, emotions, and values.

**Stage II: Cognition and Personalization**

If the conditions in Stage I negatively affect something one party cares about, then the potential for opposition or incompatibility will come true in the second stage.

Individuals perceived and felt conflict in this stage.

**Stage III: Intentions**

We can identify five conflict-handling intentions:

- Competing*:*

  When A seeks to satisfy his or her own interests regardless of the impact on B, it means that A is competing.

- Collaborating:

  When A and B all desire to fully satisfy the concerns of each other, there is cooperation and they search for a mutually beneficial outcome.

- Avoiding*:*

  A may recognize that there is a conflict and wants to suppress it.

- Accommodating*:*

  A seeks to appease an opponent and may be willing to place the opponent's interests above his or her own, sacrificing to maintain the relationship.

- Compromising:

  Both A and B intend to give up something.

**Stage IV: Behavior**

In Stage IV, conflicts become visible. The behavior stage includes the statements, actions, and reactions made by the conflicting parties, where they usually attempts to implement their own intentions.

**Stage V: Outcomes**

The outcomes of conflict may be functional or dysfunctional. If the conflict improves the group's performance, the outcome will be functional; if it hinders performance, it will be dysfunctional.

- Functional outcome:

  Conflict is functional when it improves the quality of decisions, stimulates creativity and innovation, encourages interest and curiosity among group

members, released members' tensions and resolves problems correctly.

· Dysfunctional outcome:

Members who are unsatisfied with the resolution of conflict may feel unhappy which may lead to the destruction of the group.

## 2.8 Conflict management techniques

In the field of conflict management strategy, the earliest and most influential experts were Blake and Mouton. They studied conflict from one-dimensional space to two-dimensional space. Blake and Mouton (1964) proposed a classification model of dealing with interpersonal conflict. They defined the abscissa as "caring people", and the ordinate is defined as "concerned with production", thus distinguishing between five conflicts management strategies: problem - solving, smoothing, forcing, withdrawal, and sharing.

Later, the five-factor model proposed by Thomas (1976) has also been widely influenced. He defined two dimensions to determine conflict strategies: to meet one own interests and to meet the interests of others. The desire to meet one own interests depends on the pursuit of individual goals with arbitrary or not arbitrary degree. The wish to meet the interests of other people's desire depends on the degree of cooperation. On this basis, Thomas proposed five strategies to resolve conflicts:

(1) Avoiding, neither satisfied with one own interests nor meet each other's interests. Here, people try not to deal with the conflict;

(2) Forcing, that is to only consider their own interests, in order to achieve the goal and ignore the interests of others;

(3) Accommodation, that is, only consider other interests at the expense of one own interests;

(4) Cooperation, that is, as much as possible to meet the interests of both sides, to seek a win-win situation;

(5) Compromise, that is, both sides have concessions.

Rahim *et al*. (2002) developed the conflict management styles and stated that there are five specific styles of handling conflict (Figure 2). Descriptions of these styles are:

(1) Integrating (high concern for self and others),

(2) Obliging (low concern for self but high concern for others),

(3) Dominating (high concern for self and low concern for others),

(4) Avoiding (low concern for self and others),

(5) Compromising (intermediate in concern for self and others.

The diagram below can clarify these five styles of managing conflict.


**Figure 2: Styles of Managing Interpersonal Conflict**
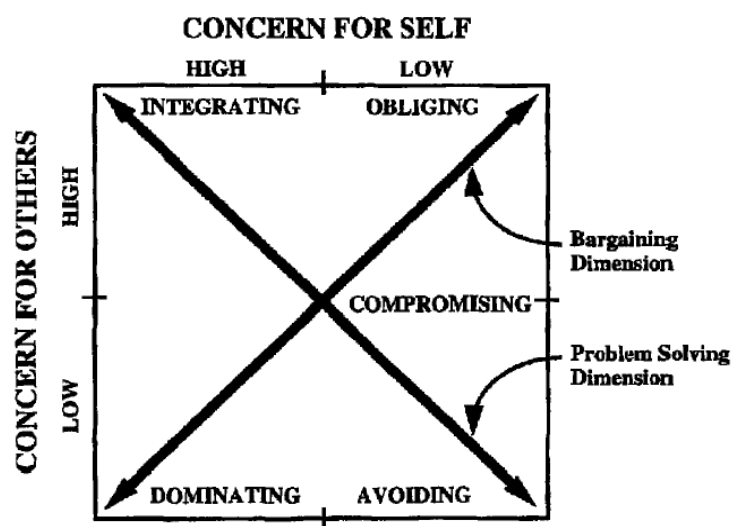


*Source*: Rahim *et al.* (2002: 310)


This diagram presents five different styles of managing interpersonal conflicts:

(1) The integrating style indicates high concern for self and others. It involves collaboration between the parties that are willing to reach a mutual and acceptable solution through openness, exchange of information, examination and exploration of differences for arriving to a constructive solution that goes far beyond personal and limited visions of the problem.

(2) The obliging style, which suggests low concern for self and high concern for others, is also known as a style in bargaining dimension. An obliging person neglects

and sacrifices personal concern so to satisfy the concern of the other party. This style is associated with a non-confrontational element, which is characterized by minimizing differences and emphasizing common things to satisfy the other person's concerns.

(3) The dominating style shows high concern for self and low concern for others. A dominant person maintains his rights and ignores the needs and expectations of others; he tries to defend what he thinks is the right personal position. This is a win-lose expression of compulsive behavior in order to win one's position.

(4) The avoiding style indicates low concern for self and others. An avoiding person can neither satisfy their individual concerns nor satisfy others' concerns. It is related with shirking responsibility and avoiding problems. This style often reflects the concerns of the parties involved in the conflict, and reject to admit or deny a conflict in public.

(5) The compromising style indicates intermediate concern for self and others. It shows that both sides are willing to accept or share solutions, and both sides are willing to give up something to make acceptable decisions. The compromise style may include differences, exchange concessions, or seek a quick middle ground. A compromise person or party is not a dominant or coercive. Similarly, a compromise party is more openly to solve a problem, not avoid people or parties, but try to be as an integrated person or find an alternative solution.

In addition, the diagram shows two dimensions of conflict management styles, which are problem solving dimension and bargaining dimension. A High-High use of the problem solving dimension indicates that it attempts to increase the satisfaction of the two parties by including a unique solution to the problem they can accept. A Low-Low use of the problem solving dimension show that the involved parties failed to face and solve their problems because focus on both sides are reduced. A High-Low use of the bargaining dimension indicates that you are trying to achieve a high level of self-attention and provide low satisfaction to other people's concerns. A Low-High use of the bargaining dimension indicates an attempt to achieve the

opposite result. A positive score on a problem solving scale indicates a common gain, but negative scores indicate losses for both parties. In the bargaining dimension, a positive or negative score represents a gain (or lost) to one party but a lost (or gain) to the other party. Compromise is the intersection of the two dimensions, that is, a party has an intermediate level of concerns for own and others.

To sum up, this chapter reviews previous studies of conflict in organizations, the research is focus on conflict in small groups, including definitions of conflict, nature of conflict, different views of conflict, three types of conflict, two orientations of conflict, stages of conflict process and conflict management techniques.

# Chapter Ⅲ Chinese business culture

Hofstede (2001: 9) defined national culture as *the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others*. Thus, in order to understand the reason why conflict occurs, how people behave in Chinese organizations and what conflict management styles are adopted by Chinese employees, we should understand Chinese business culture first. This part introduces the Chinese business culture, including Hofstede cultural dimensions on China, Chinese "Guanxi" culture and the impact of Confucius theory on Chinese practices.

## 3.1 Hofstede cultural dimensions in China context

Hofstede (2011: 8) proposed six culture dimensions called "Hofstede cultural dimensions:

*(1) Power distance, related to the different solutions to the basic problem of human inequality;*

*(2) Uncertainty Avoidance, related to the level of stress in a society in the face of an unknown future;*

*(3) Individualism versus Collectivism, related to the integration of individuals into primary groups;*

*(4) Masculinity versus Femininity, related to the division of emotional roles between women and men;*

*(5) Long Term versus Short Term Orientation, related to the choice of focus for*

*people's efforts: the future or the present and past;*

*(6) Indulgence versus Restraint, related to the gratification versus control of basic human desires related to enjoying life.*

Each country has been positioned relative to other countries through a score on each dimension (Hofstede, 2011). However, researchers prefer Hofstede five-dimension

framework than six-dimension, because of its clarity, parsimony, and resonance with managers (Kirkman, Lowe & Gibson, 2006). In order to understand culture differences in China, Yao (2014) summarizes the Chinese culture characteristics using Hofstede's (1980) five cultural dimensions (Table 2).

**Table 2: A Summary of the Chinese Culture Using Hofstede's (1980) Cultural Dimension**

| Cultural dimensions | China's score (world average) | Level | Cultural characteristics |
|---|---|---|---|
| Power distance (PD) | 80 (56.5) | High | Acceptance on uneven distribution of power. Respect organisational hierarchies. Individual behaviours are shaped by authorities and rules. Individual behaviours should be within their social rank. |
| Individualism (IM) | 20 (40) | Low | The importance of family. The importance of good *guanxi* (over task and skills). The impact of individual behaviours on their social identity. The differences between in-groups and out-groups. |
| Masculinity (MT) | 66 (50) | High | Personal satisfaction is driven by objective achievement. The need to ensure success. Highly competitive working environment. |
| Uncertainty avoidance (UA) | 30 (65) | Low | Acceptance on unclear information and unstructured situation. Risk-taking on career behaviours. Being adaptable and flexible to changes. Intuitive decision–making. |
| Long-term orientation (LT) | 118 (45) | High | Focus on long-term goals. The importance of maintaining mutual benefits in long term. Prefer job stability and security. |

*Source:* Yao (2014: 612)

According to table 2, the Chinese culture dimensions have these characteristics:

**<u>High score in power distance.</u>** The power distance remains high in business and in society in general. This means that people are less willing to challenge authority which is likely due to old communism beliefs which still have a strong influence on people's behavior.

Research shows that, in countries with large power distance culture, employees are unlikely to express their concern to colleagues and managers, because they try to avoid direct conflict with others. They believe that they should learn to be obedient in the workplace (Hofstede, 1991).

Scholars find that in countries with high power distance, the way in which people interact in organizations is affected by the interaction between employees and supervisors. People are less open to show their emotions or feelings, they usually hide their emotions when they face their supervisors and do not want to be treated directly in conflict situations (Huang *et al.*, 2005). In a contextual simulation study of employee's inhibition, Wei and Zhang (2010) found that the higher the tendency of employees to be distant from their supervisor, the more they are reluctant to express different objections to the decision-making of the superior.

**Collectivist culture.** Chinese businessmen tend to stay with the same partners or suppliers to keep loyalty and not deteriorate relationships. Lu *et al.* (2006) mentioned that countries with high collectivist culture emphasize obedience, harmony and coordination.

Studies show that in most collectivist cultures, direct confrontation of another person is considered rude and undesirable. For example, the word "no" is seldom used, because saying "no" is a confrontation; "you may be right" and "we will think about it" are examples of polite ways of turning down a request. At the same time, the word "yes" should not necessarily be inferred as an approval, since it is used to maintain the line of communication. Thus, culture is more often a source of conflict than of synergy (Hofstede, 2005).

**High sore in masculinity.** China is a masculine society. It means that promotion, money welfare and objective career success are more important than the success of subjective things, such as personal satisfaction (Briscoe, Hall & Mayrhofer, 2012). In

a highly competitive work environment, employees are willing to accept challenging work even if there is a personal/familial sacrifice.

**Low score in uncertainty avoidance.** Many scholars have different views on uncertainty avoidance dimension in China. Recent studies suggest that China is in the low score of uncertainty avoidance, which means that Chinese people are more disgusted with risk and tolerance of ambiguity (Hofstede, 2007; Fang, Zhao & Worm, 2008). However, other scholars highlight that Chinese people are flexible and easily adapt to changes in the new environment. For example, Shen (2006) stresses that Chinese companies do not have clear structure selection procedures and rarely provide training. However, this does not affect the effectiveness of staff in carrying out international missions.

**High score in long-term orientation.** Chinese people are focus on long-term orientation, such as stability and job security (Hofstede, 1980). Chinese employees also focus on long-term career goals rather than immediate benefits. For example, the Chinese people will not reject management's decision because they are afraid that this may affect their future career opportunities. They also focus on maintaining long-term relationships, which provides mutual beneficial in the future (Shen, 2006).

## 3.2 Chinese Guanxi culture

Guanxi culture can be regarded as a typical and unique culture characteristic in China. The Chinese word "Guanxi" refers to networks of informal relationships and exchanges of favors that dominate business activity throughout China and East Asia. It is an ancient system based on personal relationships.

Guanxi is one of the major dynamics in the Chinese society where business behavior revolves around Guanxi. It is widely recognized that Guanxi is a key business determinant of firm performance because the life blood of the macro economy and the

micro business conduct in the society is Guanxi network (Luo, 1997).

Gong and Suzuki (2013) did a quantitative study about Guanxi actions in China and Japan, the results shows that collectivism has an important relationship with relationships, especially with close relationships. In the collectivism society, Guanxi determines who are in the group and who are out the group, and people's attitude about the relationship between in-group and out-group is totally different. They share more long-term orientation, mutual trust, loyalty and reciprocity with members of the in-group than with members of the out-group. Zhang and Pimpa (2010) also mention that in collectivist societies, people only establish relations with reliable partner, and relationship orientation is only applicable to network of insiders, rather than network of outsiders. Thus, understanding Guanxi and establishing it as a foundation for business activities is a key in Chinese business culture.

To sum up, China is a country where business relations are highly socially embedded and Guanxi plays a pivotal role in the shaping and advancement of daily business operations. Specifically, in a business context, Guanxi occurs through individual interactions first; then it is applied on a corporate level (Gu, Hung & Tse, 2008).

## 3.3 The great impact of Chinese traditional culture on Chinese business culture

Born 500 years before Christ, the great philosopher and teacher, Confucius, established the cultural foundation of China. Western culture respected individualism, the pursuit of personal goals and personal values, advocate fair, reasonable, competitive, whereas Chinese traditional culture respected collectivism, the pursuit of collective goals and collective values, advocate harmony, tolerance and moderation (Dai, 2007).

Many scholars believed that Confucius theory has a great influence on Chinese

business culture. Chen (2000) concludes that the wheel of Equilibrium and Harmony proposed by Confucius has been running in the Chinese society for over two thousand years and continues to influence Chinese behaviors in the contemporary age. Rarick (2007) proposes that current managerial values, beliefs, and practices are strongly influenced by its Confucian tradition. Leadership under the Confucian tradition emphasizes a holistic concern for the welfare of employees, and harmony plays an important role in groups, teamwork, and self-sacrifice. At the same time, Confucian leaders are frugal and demand loyalty and dedication to the organization. They expect employees to work tirelessly for the good of the group, the organization, and the nation. Zakić (2010) noted that Confucianism is more about an act or a way of life. Confucianism also influenced the way China did business.

Some incidents happened in Chinese companies show that employees' behavior and ideas for handling conflict are deeply affected by the impact of traditional Chinese culture. For example, Liu (2010) did a case study about conflict management in a Chinese oil company. He found that the Chinese traditional culture emphasizes "tolerance", "moderation" and "harmony", so employees usually choose to avoid conflict, rather than to use an open and direct way to show the conflict they experienced. Employees tried to control and constrain their emotions and behavior to transfer conflicts. Scholars' research shows that Chinese traditional culture emphasizes stability and harmony. In that case, employees usually held a negative attitude towards the positive effect of conflict.

Furthermore, Leung (1997) points out that the motivation behind the conflict avoidance is the nature of harmony. There are two motivations for maintaining harmony in Chinese society, one is to prevent the loss of relations, and the second is to promote the relationship between them. Driven by the first motivation, people maintain harmony as a means to protect themselves from the interests of self and thus avoid the conflict with others. On the contrary, if they are motivated by the promotion of relations, people want to build a long-term, mutually beneficial relationship, they

welcome rather than avoid the debate, so as to achieve the results of both sides satisfactory. Tjosvold and Sun (2002) state that conflict avoidance can be constructive when the relationship is already effective in China.

Researchers generally regard conflict avoidance as the influence of cultural values. For example, Friedman, Chi and Liu (2006) compared the conflict management styles between the Chinese and Americans in a specific conflict situation. The Chinese preferred to avoid the conflict because the Chinese were concerned with the relationship with others. In order to maintain interpersonal harmony, people decided to avoid conflict. Wei and Zhang (2009) analyzed people's judgment and approaches of specific conflict situations, they use the social life situation simulation study, confirmed that in conflict situations, people concerned about interpersonal relationships rather than each other's own opinions, because they believed that confrontation will destroy the relationship between each other, hence, they avoid conflict rather than direct conflict resolution.

However, with the development of Chinese society, some scholars argued that Chinese traditional culture have negative effects on Chinese business culture and conflict management styles. In fact, when employees avoid conflicts, they can not effectively solve the problem. Studies of Tjosvold, Hui and Ding (2003) found that conflict avoidance has a negative impact on team effectiveness and organizational citizenship behavior. For example, Lu *et al.* (2006) proposed that Chinese traditional culture emphasize moderation and obedience, thus, people pay attention to maintenance rather than development. It is true that harmony is beneficial for society. However, it encourages people to avoid conflict rather than deal with conflict. With the progress of the Chinese society, Chinese culture and people's ideas had great changes, but if conflict handling styles has always been the avoidance and tolerance, in the long term, it will not only cause the break of emotional conflict, but also inhibit the cognitive conflict excitation.

In summary, this chapter reviewed previous studies of Chinese business culture and explained three sections in detail.

# Chapter Ⅳ Methodology

This chapter presents the description of methodology of this thesis. The methodology chapter is composed of 7 sections: research strategy, research setting, data generation, interview participants, the nature of individual interviews, interpretation of the data and goodness and trust worthiness.

## 4.1 Research strategy

**Case study**

According to Yin (2009), case study refers to an empirical inquiry that studies a contemporary situation in depth and within its real-life context, particularly when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly. The case study method allows researchers to record the characteristics of real-life events, for example, small group behavior or organizational and managerial processes (Yin, 2009). Thus, in this thesis, in order to study conflict management in small work groups, case study is the most appropriate research method.

**Advantages of case study**

According to previous studies, there are many advantages of case study method. Researchers indicate that using case studies to analyze the detailed qualitative data not only help to explore the data in real-life environment, but also help to explain the complex real-life situations, which are better than other research methods (Zainal, 2007). Yin (2009) states that a unique advantage of case study is that it can deal with a variety of evidence, like artifacts, interviews, and observations.

Thomas (2016) argues that case study provides a rich picture with information from different angles of many insights and is a frame that offers a boundary. Case study is not only a research method, but also provides the direction of study and explains what

changes will happen to the research. Thus, readers can learn a lot from a case through the researcher's narrative description (Stake, 2005). Shields (2007) also argues that case study is an ideological, methodological, epistemological and humanly research method, which can be regarded as the gold standard.

**Disadvantages of case study**

In spite of advantages, there are also some disadvantages of case study. In fact, case study received some criticisms. A common criticism of case study method is that it is difficult to reach a generalizing conclusion depending on a single case exploration making (Tellis, 1997). Yin (2009: 15) suggests that the "*case studies provide little basis for scientific generalization. 'How can you generalize from a single case?' is a frequently heard question*". In addition, case study is often regarded as a time-consuming research method, because it is difficult to conduct and producing a massive amount of documentation (Yin, 2009). In this study, the researcher adopted Thomas's (2011) definition of case study. Therefore, case study is defined as "*analyses of persons, events, decisions, periods, projects, policies, institutions, or other systems that are studied holistically by one or more methods. The case that is the subject of the inquiry will be an instance of a class of phenomena that provides an analytical frame—an object—within which the study is conducted and which the case illuminates and explicates*" (Thomas, 2011: 513).

## 4.2 Research setting

In this research, a case study about team dynamics was studied in some Chinese organizations. From October 15$^{th}$ 2016 to December 1$^{st}$ 2016, the researcher went to four cities in China, including Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Bozhou and Fuyang. Guangzhou and Shenzhen come from Guangdong province, which are located in the southern part of China; Bozhou and Fuyang belong to Anhui province, which are located in the middle part of China. The researcher interviewed 2 teams in Guangzhou, they came from finance management and property agency sectors; 1 team in

Shenzhen, they came from manufacturing and production industry; 12 teams in Fuyang, they came from customer service, telecom, real estate and media & advertisement industry; 11 teams in Bozhou, they come from hotel, telecom products, cosmetics and retail industry. In total, 26 teams participated in the interviews.

In this study, the researcher investigated work teams in different types of companies in China, including private company, international company, government company and family company. These companies belonged to different sectors, such as finance, insurance, tourism, education, media, telecom, customer service, real estate management, property agency, advertisement and hotel. Permission to conduct this study was obtained in each company.

## 4.3 Data generation

The qualitative research was used in this study. There are many data gathering techniques of qualitative study, such as observations, interviews, audio materials and collections of different kinds of documents (Creswell, 2003). In this research, interviews were used to collect data. The emphasis was placed on the interview format, that is, semi-structured interviews with team members (Robson, 2002). In semi-structured interviews, themes to speak about are predetermined, but questions can be changed according to what the interviewees talk about (Sarma, 2012). Thus, during the interviews, the researcher used both predetermined and open interview questions. Opened questions were used to better understand what interviewees were saying, because the aim was to understand deeply what was going on when informants were working in their teams.

The purpose of qualitative research interview is to describe the meanings of events happened in the real-life world. Interviews aim to understand the meaning of what the interviewees say (Kvale, 1996). Interviews are useful for getting the story behind an interviewee's experiences. In an interview, the interviewer can seek deep information

of the topic (McNamara, 1999).

## 4.4 Interview participants

This study investigated 26 teams. 74 team members participated in the interviews and were interviewed separately.

Table 3 illustrates the socio-professional information of interviewees and teams that participated in this research.

**Table 3: General Information of All Teams that Participated in the Interviews**

| Team | Sector | Department | Number of interviewees | Number of team members | Age | Gender | Job description |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Hotel | Front office | 3 | 8 | 24~30 | 2 males and 1 female | 1 assistant manager, 2 clerks |
| 2 | Telecom & Products | Sales | 3 | 6 | 23~28 | 3 females | 2 shopping guides, 1 accountant |
| 3 | Retail industry | Sales | 2 | 8 | 23, 25 | 2 females | 2 shopping guides |
| 4 | Telecom & Products | Sales | 2 | 5 | 23, 28 | 1 females, 1 males | 1 salesman, 1 saleswoman |
| 5 | Tourism | Consultant | 2 | 5 | 23 | 2 females | 2 consultants |
| 6 | Retail industry | Sales | 3 | 7 | 26~30 | 3 females | 1 accountant, 2 shopping guides |
| 7 | Electronic products | Sales | 1 | 5 | 32 | 1 male | 1 salesman |
| 8 | Retail industry | Sales | 2 | 8 | 22, 25 | 1 female, 1 male | 1 saleswoman, 1 salesman |
| 9 | Cosmetics | Sales | 2 | 6 | 24, 26 | 2 females | 2 saleswomen |
| 10 | Retail industry | Sales | 2 | 8 | 22, 23 | 2 females | 2 shopping guides |
| 11 | Skin care products | Sales | 1 | 6 | 25 | 1 female | 1 shopping guides |
| 12 | Finance management | Channel | 1 | 8 | 24 | 1 male | 1 assistant manager |
| 13 | Property agency | Consultant | 4 | 6 | 24~28 | 3 females, 1 males | 1 manager, 3 office clerks |
| 14 | Real estate management | Customer Service | 3 | 6 | 27~31 | 2 males, 1 female | 1 manager, 2 office clerks |
| 15 | Real estate management | Engineering maintenance | 1 | 8 | 27 | 1 male | 1 maintenance man |
| 16 | Real estate management | Device management | 2 | 6 | 42, 25 | 2 males | 1 manager, 1 technician |
| 17 | Real estate management | Order maintenance | 7 | 15 | 25~32 | 5 males, 2 females | 1 manager, 6 clerks |
| 18 | Education, training | Marketing | 4 | 8 | 32~40 | 3 females, 1 males | 1 manager, 1 assistant manager, 2 clerks |
| 19 | Real estate management | Quality testing | 3 | 6 | 26~35 | 3 males | 3 quality inspectors |
| 20 | Real estate management | Real estate measurement | 2 | 6 | 46, 55 | 2 males | 2 measurers |
| 21 | Real estate management | Produce and manufacture | 3 | 6 | 26~30 | 2 males | 1 manager, 1 technician |
| 22 | Real estate management | Engineering | 2 | 6 | 25, 28 | 2 males | 1 manager, 1 clerk |
| 23 | Telecom | Government and enterprises clients | 10 | 20 | 25~40 | 5 males, 5 females | 1 director, 4 managers, 5 office clerks |
| 24 | Telecom | Sales | 3 | 6 | 25~35 | 3 females | 1 financial manager, 1 sales manager, 1 clerk |
| 25 | Advertisement & media | Business and planning | 3 | 6 | 26~31 | 2 females, 1 male | 1 planning manager, 1 business manager, 1 assistant manager |
| 26 | Electromechanical equipment | marketing | 3 | 8 | 35~40 | 3 males | 1 director, 1 manager and 1 clerk |

## 4.5 The nature of individual interviews

In this study, the researcher adopted the critical incident technique to conduct the interviews.

Critical incident technique is often used to collect observations reported from memories. The purpose of interview is to ask people to recall real stories or events happened in their teams at work, the incidents can be positive or negative. Critical incident technique aims to obtain the necessary observations and assessments of specific behaviors from the records of those who are in the best position, rather than collecting opinions or researcher's observations and estimations (Hughes, 2007; Chell, 2004; Flanagan, 1954).

In this study, informal conversations were used in the interviews. For example, if interviewees were in the company, the author went to the company with permission, have a coffee with the informant and ask some open questions; when it was not possible to meet the respondent, the interviews were made by phone, providing the same informal conversations.

In summary, in order to get rich description of employees' behaviors and interactions at workplace, to understand what happened when people had conflicts with each other and how they managed it, critical incident technique was used in the interviews. In this study, the researcher conducted 63 face-to-face interviews and 11 phone interviews. The durations of the interviews were between 10 minutes to 40 minutes.

Table 4 presents the guideline used by the researchers to run the interviews.

**Table 4: Interview Guideline**

| | Interview questions about team dynamics |
|---|---|
| | Introduction of interviewer:<br><br>Hi, I'm Qingyang Peng, a master student in ISCTE-IUL (Lisbon, Portugal). My major is human resources management, I'm doing face-to-face interviews for my master thesis and interviewees will be interviewed separately. I'll ask some questions about team dynamics. Thank you for your cooperation. |
| 1 | Brief self introduction of interviewees: What's your name? How old are you? What's your position? The name of your team/department? The name of your company? How many members are in your team/department? |
| 2 | How many years have you been working in your team/departments? What project are your team working on?/What are your team/department's responsibilities now? |
| 3 | Could you please tell me some positive incidents that occurred among your team members at work? For example, the happiest and the most successful thing occurred in your team. Please give me examples and details. |
| 4 | Could you please tell me some negative incidents that occurred among your team members at work? Please give me examples and details. |
| 5 | Did your team members have conflicts with each other at work before?<br>-If so, what happened at that time? How did people behave in that incident? If the conflict was well resolved, how did you resolve the conflict? If the conflict was not resolved, what happened later?<br>-If otherwise, did you have some difficulties (such as communication/cooperation/cognition/relationship/task difficulties and so on) when you work with your team members? Please give me examples and details. |
| 6 | How do you get along well with your colleagues/team members? Please tell me your suggestions. |
| 7 | What are your team-building activities? How were these activities going on? |
| 8 | How do you enhance team's cohesiveness at work? What's your opinion? |

## 4.6 Interpretation of the data

In this research, content analysis technique was used to interpret interview data. All interviews were recorded. In total, 52 interviews were transcribed in Chinese, 20 interviews were transcribed from Chinese to English and 32 interviews were not fully transcribed because some interviews were not well recorded.

Krippendorff (2004) states that content analysis is a research technique that can be replicated and effectively inferred from text or other meaningful things to its usage Content analysis is a scientific and reliable tool which helps researchers to understand particular phenomenon or practical actions. Weber (1990) reviewed previous studies of content analysis and suggested that content analysis is a research method to make valid inferences from text. Content analysis method can be used for qualitative operations on texts and reveal the focus of individual, group or societal attention. Qiu and Zou (2004) argue that content analysis is a scientific research method. The reason is that from the philosophical point of view, through the analysis of objective information, researchers can have a correct understanding of the objective world. Hence, in this process, content analysis is a correct and effective analytical method that can be used in a variety of studies and researchers can see the nature of the phenomenon after using this method. Furthermore, the strength of qualitative content analysis is that the analysis is resolved into individual steps of interpretation which are determined in advance. Therefore, this method can be applied to other studies and regarded as a scientific method (Mayring, 2014).

In content analysis, investigators should define the categories. Stemler (2001) states that content analysis method is a systematic, reproducible technique which can be used to compress many words into smaller categories that based on coding rules. Particularly, content analysis is very useful to handle large amounts of data. In this study, the categories were identified in the literature review presented in the previous chapter. Accordingly, three categories and respective subcategories were defined: (1)

type of conflict (task conflict, relationship conflict and process conflict), (2) orientation to conflict (constructive or destructive), and (3) styles of managing conflict (integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding and compromising).

Table 5 illustrates the three categories and respective subcategories used in this study.

**Table 5: Categories and Subcategories Used in the Study**

| Categories<br><br>    Subcategories | Brief description |
|---|---|
| Type of conflict<br><br>    Task conflict<br><br>    Relationship conflict<br><br>    Process conflict | -Task conflict involves differences between team members about the content of the task, including differences in viewpoints and opinions about the task.<br><br>-Relationship conflict is interpersonal conflict between members in a team.<br><br>-Process conflict is a kind of conflict regarding the way in which a task should be completed, including the actual process and allocation of resources for the task. |
| Styles of managing conflict<br><br>    Integrating<br><br>    Obliging<br><br>    Dominating<br><br>    Avoiding<br><br>    Compromising | -Integrating: collaboration between the parties who are willing to reach a mutual and acceptable solution.<br><br>-Obliging: a party sacrifices personal concern in order to satisfy the concern of the other party.<br><br>-Dominating: a party maintains personal rights and ignores the concern of the other party.<br><br>-Avoiding: the parties reject to admit or deny a conflict in public.<br><br>-Compromising: both sides are willing to accept or share solutions, and both sides are willing to give up something to make acceptable decisions. |
| Orientation to conflict<br><br>    Constructive<br><br>    Destructive | -If a conflict is positive for team dynamics, the orientation is constructive.<br><br>-If a conflict is negative for team dynamics, the orientation is destructive. |

## 4.7 Goodness and trustworthiness

Goodness and trustworthiness of qualitative study are known as the confidence of data, interpretation and methods the researcher used to ensure the quality of research. Trustworthiness is an important area that readers should examine when reading a research report (Connelly, 2016; Pilot & Beck, 2014).

Shenton (2004) presents the strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects, which is on the basis of Guba's (1981) four criteria for trustworthiness. Thus, in this thesis, the author followed four of the Shenton's (2004) strategies.

First, the credibility, the interviews allowed the researcher to collect rich descriptions of incidents and experience of the researcher was provided to ensure the honesty of the study. In addition, the author paid attention to the diversity of the sample, that is, teams from different types of companies were interviewed with permission. Second, transferability, detailed interview transcriptions were provided to allow comparisons to be made. Third, dependability, in-depth description of research method had been provided in this chapter. Last, conformability, where the author had provide a detailed description of research methods and procedures adopted in the steps of gathering and analyzing data, in order to allow the readers to be able to check how research method can matches the research context.

To sum up, this chapter presents the methodology of the thesis, including research strategy, research setting, data generation, interview participants, the nature of individual interviews, interpretation of the data and goodness and trustworthiness.

# Chapter Ⅴ Findings

This chapter presents the research findings from a content analysis of semi-structured interviews. This chapter has 9 sections. In the first eight sections, data were gathered from employees, who belong to 7 work teams. The main purpose is to advance some knowledge about the incidents following the categories presented in the methodology chapter. Therefore, the analysis of each incident will follow the following structure:

(1) A brief description of incident;

(2) Identification of the type of conflict (task conflict, relationship conflict or process conflict);

(3) Identification of the style to manage conflict adopted (integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding or compromising);

(4) Identification of the orientation of conflict (constructive or destructive).

The last section presents a summary of other incidents in other teams following the above framework.

## 5.1 Incident A

### 5.1.1 Description

The incident A was generated in team 13[1] in a property agency company in Guangzhou city in China. This team was from the business consultant department, which was composed of 6 members, including 1 manager and 5 office clerks. In fact, the manager and 3 office clerks were interviewed with permission. This incident was recalled by two female office clerks, one was called Jenny who has been working in the team for 5 years and the other was called Lisa who has been working in the team for 3 years. The team was running a project about trademark consultant, that is, to

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[1] Note: the team number in each incident is from table 3 presented in Methodology chapter

provide intellectual property services to customers, to achieve trademark transfer transactions and operational investment.

There was a conflict between two employees called Krystal and Lily. Krystal was a fresh woman in the company, and Lily was a manager assistant who had higher position than Krystal. Lily was afraid of being replaced by Krystal because Krystal did a good job in her work and she may be promoted to a higher position. So Lily did something to let Lily make mistakes at work. The manager asked her assistant Lily to tell Krystal to send an important email to our customer as soon as possible, but Lily told Krystal that she should send an email two days later, not as soon as possible. And Krystal believed what Lily said. Unfortunately, what Krystal did affected the company's work performance. Our manager was very angry and gave Krystal some punishments which included cutting her bonus and giving her a bad performance appraisal. But, when the manager asked other team members to speak about the incidents, everybody kept quiet about this incident, and no one wanted to speak about it. Finally, Krystal felt depressed and decided to resign and left the company.

## 5.1.2 Type of conflict

The conflict between Krystal and Lily seems to be a relationship conflict, since the beginning Lily tried to damage Krystal. Lily has higher position than Krystal. Once, Lily did something to let Krystal make mistakes at work. As Jenny said:

*"Our former manager's assistant, her name was Lily. In addition to our manager, Lily was our supervisor, too. (…) At that time, Krystal usually did a good job in her work performance, and our former manager usually praised her at the meeting. And there was a signal to say, if our manager praised someone, he or she would be promoted quickly. Besides, we all know that her uncle was one of senior managers in our company, so there was a rumor in our department that she would replace Lily as a manager assistant. (…)Once, our former manager asked her assistant Lily to tell Krystal that Krystal should send an important email to our customer as soon as*

*possible, but Lily told Krystal that she should send an important email two days later, not as soon as possible. And Krystal believed what Lily said. So unfortunately, what Krystal did affected the company's work performance, our manager was very angry and gave Krystal punishment that cutting her bonus and giving her a bad performance appraisal."*

After that, the bad relationships between the two team members escalated for a serious dimension and Krystal resigned and left the company. As Jenny said:

*"Later, Krystal found that Lily deliberately hurt her, Krystal told the fact to our manager, but our manager did not believe that Lily would behave like that, and we all knew that Lily didn't like Krystal, and later, Lily didn't admit her mistake, so Krystal was very sad and depressed, (...) Krystal told me that maybe Lily didn't like her, Lily didn't want to work with her. So I think it is the reason why Krystal left our company."*

From what Jenny said, the conflict between Krystal and Lily was a relationship conflict, because Lily tried to prejudice Krystal without work reasons. It seems that Lily didn't like to work with Krystal and Lily did something to let Krystal make mistakes at work.

## 5.1.3 Styles to manage conflict

Other team members kept quiet about the conflict between Krystal and Lily. As Jenny said:

*"(...)Actually, no one believed Krystal and helped her, because Krystal didn't have any evidence to support what she said, although our manager held a meeting with all employees in our department to discuss this issue, but we all said that we didn't know what happened(...)"*

*"(...)you know, if we discussed their conflicts at the meeting, we may feel very embarrassed, because we didn't want to stand on either side and offend anyone, we should protect ourselves, you know, we work together every day(...)".*

Lisa also kept quiet about this issue. As Lisa said:

*"(...) Actually, I didn't want to discuss this issue at the meeting, it's none of my business, and we were not very familiar with her. Besides, we'd better not comment on others' issues at the meeting, especially others' conflicts, if we offended our colleagues, it was not very good. So no one helped her, the reason was that we were afraid of upsetting Lily, you know, she was our supervisor, if we helped Krystal, it would affect our relationship with Lily, because we all knew that Lily didn't like Krystal, and later, Lily didn't admit her mistake, so Krystal was very sad and depressed(...)".*

From what these two informant's narrative, it is possible to conclude that other team members chose the avoiding strategy to deal with the conflict between Krystal and Lily, because when the manager asked other members to talk about this issue, everybody kept quiet and no one wanted to talk about it. Consequently, the conflict was not well resolved.

## 5.1.4 Orientation of conflict

From the interviews, it is obvious that the orientation of conflict is destructive. As Jenny said:

*"Lily didn't admit her mistake, so Krystal was very sad and depressed. Later, Krystal resigned and left our company (...) As I said before, Krystal's uncle was a senior manager of our company. I heard that he tried to help Krystal, but he didn't have any evidence to help Krystal, so he could do nothing about it. Although Krystal's uncle persuaded her to stay in the company, she made her mind to leave, because she said that if she continued to work in our company, she would not be happy anymore."*

From Jenny's discourse, we understand that Krystal resigned and left the company. It means that the team lost a member. Their conflict couldn't be resolved because other

team members kept quiet about this issue. Thus, the outcome of conflict is destructive because the conflict is negative to team dynamics.

## 5.2 Incident B

### 5.2.1 Description

The incident B happened in a tourist company, which is located in Bozhou city of Anhui province in China. The author interviewed 2 employees in the business consultant department who belonged to team 5. They are consultants. This department has 5 employees, and they were responsible for tourist contract and consultant services. This incident was recalled by Daisy.

There was a conflict between Daisy and her colleague. They were working together. Daisy met a customer and signed the contact together in the morning. If she signed a contract, she would receive some bonus. But, in the afternoon, Daisy's colleague said that it was "her hard work". So Daisy didn't receive any bonus. But, Daisy kept quiet and didn't say anything about this issue. She chose to lose the bonus in favor of her colleague.

### 5.2.2 Type of conflict

There was a conflict between Daisy and her colleague. The conflict can be classified as a process conflict. As Daisy said:

*"(...) At that time, my wage was composed of a basic salary and bonus. When I signed a contract with a customer, I will receive some bonus. For example, like this receipt, bonus was based on the receipt of business people who was responsible for accounting the money. I give you an example, at that time, I had early shifts and night shifts, I met customer A and we signed a contract in the morning, but in the afternoon when my colleagues came to work, she told to our leader that she contacted that customer and met that customer in the morning, they signed the contract together, and*

*our leader believed on what my colleague said. When the customer came to our company and paid, our accountant gave the bonus to my colleague, so my colleague received my bonus (…)”.*

This narrative describes a conflict which is related with work process, that is, a conflict happened when two employees complete their task. Daisy works in the morning and her colleague works in the afternoon, they should work with the same customer and project. This conflict is a process conflict and remained as process conflict. It means that it was not transformed into another type of conflict.

## 5.2.3 Styles to manage conflict

To resolve the conflict, Daisy chose the obliging strategy to deal with the conflict. As Daisy said:

*“That issue really made me feel very angry and confused. I was very angry, but in order to avoid conflicts of interests with my colleague, I did not say anything and directly changed the name of business people into my colleague's name, and I also told the accountant that the business people was my colleague.(…)”*

*“(…) The reason why I made that decision was to avoid conflicts with my colleagues. In fact, that bonus was not too much money which is not more than 100 yuan[2]. I do not need to care about this money and had conflict with my colleague who got along with me every day. If we had conflicts, we would be very embarrassed. And this was the first time I experienced this sort of thing, so I forgave her. (…)”*

*“(…) I didn't talk to her because I was not very familiar with her at that time. Actually she worked for a long time in the company and I was a fresh man at that time. I was not willing to make her feel embarrassed, so I didn't tell her anything. (…)”*

Daisy chose the obliging strategy to manage their conflict. The reason was that she didn't want to have conflict of interest with her colleague, because they had to work

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[2] Note: "yuan" is the name of Chinese currency

together every day. If she chose to talk with her colleague about this issue, they may feel embarrassed at work. Thus, Daisy thought that scarifying a bonus in favor of her colleague was the best strategy for dealing with the incident.

### 5.2.4 Orientation of conflict

The orientation of conflict is constructive. As Daisy said:

*"(…) Later, I usually work with her, I was polite to her and tried to get along well with her as I did before, I often focused on my work and tried to make greater progress, not always thinking about that thing. (…)"*

*"(…) From then on, I tried to work harder and my leader appreciated my work performance. (…)"*

*"(…) Well, after all, we are colleagues, and there are no perfect people in the world, sometimes the conflict is inevitable. We should accept different people. It is not easy to earn money for everyone, so we don't need to have conflicts with our colleagues for such a little amount of money, it is not worth to do so.(…)"*

Based on Daisy's words, we can conclude that the orientation of conflict was constructive. Daisy preferred to have lower concern for herself and higher concern for her colleague to keep a good relationship in the daily work. To put it in another way, Daisy tried to look at her colleague as a "normal" human being, who sometimes does mistakes as everyone else. In that case, she had forgiven the colleague and the incident did not have a negative impact on their relationship.

## 5.3 Incident C

### 5.3.1 Description

The author went to a technology company in Bozhou city of Anhui province in China. The author interviewed 3 employees in sales department who belonged to team 2, they were shopping guides. This department has 5 employees. They were responsible

for selling mobile phones in the store. The incident C was remembered by Connie, she was a shopping guide.

There was a conflict between Connie and her colleague. Connie was a shopping guide who was responsible for selling mobile phones. One day Connie met a customer and the customer decided to buy a mobile phone, but next day when the customer came to do the payment, Connie's colleague told that it was "her hard work", because she wanted to receive the bonus, too. But Connie insisted that she should receive the bonus. Later, both of them were angry.

## 5.3.2 Type of conflict

Initially, the conflict between Connie and her colleague was process conflict. As Connie said:

*"(...) One day, I came to our company in the morning and introduce our mobile phones to a customer. We talked for a long time, I got thirsty and tired. Fortunately, the customer decided to buy our product. But that customer chose installment payment, that is, every month the customer paid fixed amount of money, not too much money, and he should do all payment in 6 months. But from morning to noon the process did not finished, the customer felt impatient and said that he wanted to come to our store the next day and take the mobile phone. Next day the customer came here and paid for it, but at that time, my colleague served that customer. But it was my effort to persuade the customer to buy our product, I should accept the bonus. But my colleague said that it was her "hard work". I said that it was mine, but she didn't agree, I felt angry and quarreled with her. (...)"*

From what Connie said, to begin with, the conflict was related with work process. Connie and her colleague served the same customer to finish the payment process, but they met with the customer separately. Apparently it was Connie's hard work to persuade the customer to buy that cell phone, but Connie's colleague said that it was

her hard work and she wanted to receive the bonus. Finally, Connie received the bonus. Her colleague was very angry and they quarreled with each other at office.

### 5.3.3 Styles to manage conflict

Connie chose the dominating strategy to deal with their conflict. As Connie said:
*"Finally, our leader gave the bonus to me. From then on, my colleague didn't talk to me anymore. I didn't want to talk with her, too, because I think we were not friends anymore. After all, I didn't want my effort in vain, and no one wanted to give his/her achievement to others."*

As we can see, both parties adopted a win-lose strategy and the outcome was negative: later on, they didn't want to talk with each other.

### 5.3.4 Orientation of conflict

The orientation of conflict is destructive. As Connie said:
*"Although we were working together every day, we didn't want to talk with each other. (…) So the problem was not solved, to tell you the truth, when I work with her, I still feel unhappy. (…)"*

Thus, their conflict was not resolved and they felt unhappy when they worked together. The incident damaged the interpersonal relationships between Connie and her colleague.

## 5.4 Incident D

### 5.4.1 Description

The author went to Shenzhen city of Guangdong province in China and interviewed several employees who belonged to team 26 in a mechanical and electrical equipment

company. This company is an international company which is running a marketing development project in Guangdong province. The marketing department has 8 employees and 3 employees were interviewed, including 1 director, 1 manager and 1 clerk. The incident D was recalled by Jeff, the director of the department.

There was a conflict between Nick and their colleagues. But Jeff, the director, resolved their conflict. Nick was promoted as a district manager. But his colleagues didn't accept him and no one wanted to work and cooperate with him, because Nick's education level was lower than their colleagues. Later, the director, Jeff, developed a "promotion through competition" rule and applied it in the department, which resolved the conflicts.

## 5.4.2 Type of conflict

The type of conflict was a relationship conflict. As Jeff said:

*"(…) Well, I can tell you something about a conflict between my employees. One year ago, there was an employee called Nick. Although Nick graduated from the secondary school, he is very clever and hard-working, so he usually did excellent sales performance. Then after two months, Nick was promoted as a district sales manager. "*

*"(…) But Nick's colleagues had higher education degree, most of them graduated from famous universities. Actually, some employees didn't accept Nick as a supervisor."*

*"And I noticed that his colleagues didn't like him and were unwilling to talk with him. Once, when he wanted to do a marketing investigation plan with a colleague, that guy told me that he didn't want to work with Nick. Nick felt upset and unhappy. He came to my office and asked me how to deal with it."*

From what Jeff said, we can know that there was a relationship conflict between Nick and his colleague. Nick was promoted as a district manager, but Nick has lower

education level than his colleagues, thus, some employees didn't accept Nick as a manager, an employee even didn't want to work with Nick. So it was an interpersonal conflict between employees, we can define it as relationship conflict.

### 5.4.3 Styles to manage conflict

As a director, Jeff used the integrating strategy to manage the conflict between Nick and other employees. As Jeff said:

*"After talking with Nick, I asked Nick and his colleagues to talk about this issue, I learned that Nick liked his job very much, but he was confused that why his colleagues didn't like to work with him. And Nick's colleagues said that Nick's management ability, sales ability was excellent, but they felt very embarrassed and awkward because they have higher education level than Nick, they believed that they can do better than Nick, so they didn't accept Nick as their supervisor."*

*"As a director, I think I should resolve their conflict. So I organized everyone to have a meeting together. The topic of that meeting was about a new strategy for employees, called job promotion through competition, I think it should be applied in our company. This new strategy was, the first requirement of a sales manager was the sales ability, after that, you should have good management skills, we should not emphasize too much about education level. Because at that time no one did better job in sales skills than Nick, so Nick still could be a sales manager. In addition, our HR department would do the work assessment and performance appraisal once a year, promotion through competition would be applied in our company. So every employee has opportunities to be a manager.*

*"Then, I asked all employees in my department whether they would accept it or not and listened to their opinions. Finally, everyone agreed with my suggestion."*

From how Jeff managed conflict between Nick and his colleagues, we can conclude that the style of managing conflict is integrating. Because Jeff organized all employees to have a meeting, finally, they reached an acceptable solution, applying

"job promotion through competition" rule at work. Thus, the conflict was well resolved.

### 5.4.4 Orientation of conflict

The orientation of conflict was constructive. As Jeff said:

*"After the meeting, I talked with Nick and told him that I believe he could do better and better, as time went by, he got along well with his colleagues. (…) Later, Nick became the sales champion in our department. After that, other employees admired him and accepted him as a manager, because I noticed that nobody came to me and said that he or she didn't accept Nick as a manager, and they worked well together. Later, I gave Nick some university enrollment brochures and encouraged him to get a MBA degree, and Nick will go to study next year. From my point of view, it is better that Nick should get a higher education degree so that other team members will accept him. It is good for him and our team work. (…)Now, our team has become more motivated because everyone wants to work with Nick and accept him as a manager".*

From what Jeff said, we know that Nick became the sales champion and he will study MBA degree next year. It means that Nick could have the same education level as his colleagues later. And nobody said to Jeff that he or she didn't want to work with Nick. To conclude, due to Nick's effort and Jeff's new rule of "promotion through competition", other team members wanted to work with Nick and accepted him as a manager. Thus, the orientation of conflict was constructive.

## 5.5 Incident E

### 5.5.1 Description

The incident E was also generated from team 26. The interview transcription was also from Jeff's narrative.

There was a conflict between Jeff and his employees. But Jeff developed a strategy and resolved it. Jeff's employees complained that every day they had so many works to do, so they felt tired and didn't want to work with Jeff. But they didn't want to talk with Jeff about what was happening. Later, Jeff asked his employee Mario to behave as a union chairman and he could listen to employees' feelings and ideas. So Jeff could know what was happening in his team and he could change his strategies timely. At the end, the conflict was resolved. The team became motivated.

## 5.5.2 Type of conflict

The conflict between Jeff and his employees was a process conflict. As Jeff said:

*"Let me tell you an incident happened two years ago. At that time, I was just a sales manager, not a director. As a team leader, assigning sales tasks to employees was my job. For example, you have completed 1 million yuan[3] of sales tasks this year, next year I have to give you the provision of the completion of 1.5 million yuan. (...)"*

*"(...) If you completed your task, you will have the reward, conversely, if you didn't complete your task, your bonus will be deducted, furthermore, you may be dismissed. These are some "rules" in the sales department. This requires the leader to be strict, rigorous. (...)"*

*"(...) But after two months, I found that my team members were tired every day, and they didn't want to express their opinions at the meeting, sometimes they felt embarrassed when we meet each other. Unfortunately, during that month, we did a poor work performance, we all felt very depressed and worried, but they didn't want to have a meeting to discuss this issue, they said that they would do better, sometimes they even avoided to discuss our relationship. Once, I heard that some employees said that I was too strict, I was not a nice leader, they felt unhappy because they had so many work to do, two employees even wanted to resign...so I felt very upset and worried"(...)".*

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[3] Note: "yuan" is the name of Chinese currency

From what Jeff said, the incident shows that their conflict was process conflict, because the conflict was about a lot of tasks at work. Jeff used to be a sales manager, he gave too many tasks to his employees and it made all team members feel tired. Later, they did a poor work performance, which was negative to team dynamics. After that, everybody avoided discussing this issue and some employees didn't like to work with Jeff.

### 5.5.3 Styles to manage conflict

Jeff used the integrating strategy to manage the conflict. As Jeff said:

*"(...) I noticed that there was an oldest employee in our team, his name was Mario, Mario was very nice and easy-going, our team members liked and respected him very much, they usually called him "elder brother", and colleagues all like to communicate with him. Then I asked him for help, I gave him a union chairman position. That is, Mario should concern about the member's emotions and feelings. If they did not want to explain their opinions or complaints to me, Mario could listen to him and then told me what happened in our team, and then I could change my strategies at work. After that, our team was like… we had two people with two different characteristics, I was strict, and Mario was easy-going (...)".*

*"Of course, I gave Mario some bonus and awards. (...) After that, our team became more energetic."*

From what Jeff said, we can conclude that Jeff uses compromising and integrating strategy for managing conflict. On one side, Jeff chose the compromising strategy to resolve the conflict. Jeff gave Mario a "union chairman" position, because Jeff is strict, whereas Mario is easy-going and Mario could help Jeff know employees' feelings and what happened in his team. On the other side, after knowing what happened in the team, Jeff could change his strategies at work. This strategy is integrating, because it is the outcome of collaboration between Mario and Jeff and they resolved the conflict.

### 5.5.4 Orientation of conflict

The orientation of conflict is constructive. As Jeff said:

*"Fortunately, I successfully resolved the conflict between our team members and me. Our team became motivated since we can work well together."*

Finally, Jeff resolved the conflict between his team members and him and his team became motivated. Thus, the orientation of conflict is constructive.

## 5.6 Incident F

### 5.6.1 Description

The author went to a house property company located in Fuyang city of Anhui province in China. The author interviewed 3 employees who belonged to team 19 in quality testing department. This department had 6 employees, and they were running a house property measurement project. The incident F was generated from an interview of an employee, his name was Henry. Henry was a quality inspector.

There was a conflict between Henry and his colleague called Jack. And the conflict was resolved by their manager.

Henry was a freshman, Jack had higher education level and seniority than Henry. Once, at the meeting, Henry pointed out that Jack's calculation method was wrong in the presence of all employees, which made Jack feel angry and embarrassed. In fact, in China, confrontation in public place is an impolite behavior. Then, they quarreled with each other and Jack left the meeting room. After that, they didn't talk with each other for a week.

Later, the manager hold a meeting to discuss this issue, finally, Jack apologized to

Henry and their conflict was resolved.

## 5.6.2 Type of conflict

Initially, the conflict between Henry and Jack was task conflict, but later, the conflict became relationship conflict. As Henry said:

*"(...) For example, when we do the real estate measurement in the construction site, it is inevitable that we usually have different views on the calculation of housing area, once, during our meeting, I found that the our colleague's calculation method was wrong. Let me introduce that colleague, his name was Jack. Jack took responsibility of calculation, because he graduated from a famous university and has been working on our company for 10 years. We all respected and admired him. He made a lot of contributions for our company. At first, I couldn't believe that his calculation was wrong, but I did a lot of calculation and the result showed that his method was wrong. So during that meeting, I said that Jack's calculate method was wrong. But Jack was so angry and, immediately, he said to me, 'you are a freshman in our company, why you make me so embarrassed in presence of all employees in our department?' I have been working here for a long time, my calculation method was definitely right! (...)Then I said to him, 'sir, I know you are very excellent, but please let me explain my thought, I think your calculation method was wrong, because I think that we should use another method to calculate...What I said doesn't mean that I don't like you.' But he was so angry that he left our meeting room immediately. I felt very upset, I just wanted to tell him the correct calculation method, even though I was a fresh man at that time, and I thought everyone was free to explain his /her own ideas at the meeting."*

*"(...) Then we didn't talk with each other for a week."*

From Henry's narrative, we can see that the conflict between Henry and Jack was task conflict, since the beginning they have different ideas about their task at the meeting. Later, their conflict became relationship conflict. They quarreled with each other at

the meeting and Jack believed that Henry didn't like him.

### 5.6.3 Styles to manage conflict

Henry and Jack kept quiet about their conflict. As Henry said:

*"After that meeting, we didn't talk with each other for a week."*

Later, because of the manager's intervention, the conflict was resolved well. As Henry said:

*"Later, our manager knew this incident and he organized all people in our department to have a meeting to discuss this issue. Our manager said to Jack: 'when people have different point of views, it's very common. We should listen to other's ideas so that we can make more progress at work. We are a team, we have to work together, and I hope you can apologize for your behavior.' Jack said that actually he regretted to treat me like that, but he didn't talk to me last week because he felt embarrassed. And he admitted that his calculation method was wrong. He apologized to me and we were still friends from then on."*

*"Actually our department colleagues have the habit of timely communication, so it is easy to solve such communication problem quickly."*

At the beginning, Henry and Jack chose avoiding the conflict, because they didn't talk with each other for a week. Later, the manager chose the integrating strategy to manage their conflict and brought all team members together to discuss that issue. After talking, Jack apologized to Henry and resolved their conflict. Furthermore, actually people feel free to discuss ideas and find solutions for problems. It may mean that the recalled episode would transform or reinforce an implicate norm that emphasizes the goodness of communication for successfully problem-solving activities.

### 5.6.4 Orientation of conflict

The orientation of conflict was constructive. As Henry said:

*"Finally, Jack admitted that his calculation method was wrong. He apologized to me and we were still friends from then on. Then we got together to discuss about the new calculation method, and our manager also unified our point of views, and do the relevant meeting notes for the future work."*

Thus, we can conclude that the orientation of conflict was constructive, because Jack admitted that he was wrong and apologized to Henry. Their conflict was well resolved.

# 5.7 Incident G

## 5.7.1 Description

The author went to a Telecom Company located in Fuyang city of Anhui province in China. The author interviewed 10 employees who belonged to team 23 in government and enterprises client department, including 1 director, 4 managers and 5 office clerks. This team had 20 employees, and they were responsible for a client consultant project. The incident G was generated from the interview with an office clerk, her name was Jessica.

The transcription showed that there was a conflict between Jessica and her colleague Emily. But the conflict wasn't resolved because Jessica kept quiet about their conflict. At first, Jessica and Emily were good friends. One day Jessica told Emily that she was unsatisfied with their supervisors and some strict rules of the company. Then, when they competed for the same position, Emily let someone to tell their manager that Jessica didn't like her supervisors. So Emily won the position. But Jessica kept quiet about this issue, because Emily was her supervisor at that time. Thus, their conflict was not resolved.

## 5.7.2 Type of conflict

At first, the conflict between Jessica and Emily was relationship conflict. As Jessica said:

*"I'd like to tell you an incident happened 6 months ago. I had conflict with my colleague."*

*"I have been working in our company for 3 years. When I entered the company, I worked in the sales department. At that time, I met a nice colleague, her name is Emily. We worked in the same department, our relationship was very good. We usually hanged out together and shared our feelings with each other. As time went by, we became good friends. But I never expected that our friendship would be broken by an incident. "*

*"Six months ago, when we had a dinner together, I told her that actually I didn't like our company, because I thought that our working schedules was very busy, and our manager was not very nice, because she didn't care our feelings, she always gave us too much work to do. At that time, I regarded Emily as my best friend in the company, so I believed that she would not tell my secrets or feelings to others. Later, our supervisor resigned and left our company, so our manager decided to choose one person between Emily and me to take over this position. About work abilities and strengths, I was better than Emily. However, finally, I lost, Emily won the position. I was so confused because in my department, more people support me to take over this position. And later I knew that Emily found some employees to tell my secrets to our manager, that was, I was not satisfied with our manager, and I was unsatisfied with the company."*

*"So I was very angry, I think Emily didn't like me, I couldn't make friend with her anymore."*

The conflict between Jessica and Emily was relationship conflict, because the conflict happened in the process when they competed for the same position. Although Jessica did a better job than Emily, Emily let some employees tell the manager that Jessica

didn't like the manager and the company. Finally, Jessica lost and Emily won the position.

### 5.7.3 Styles to manage conflict

Jessica chose to avoid their conflict. As Jessica said:

*"Actually, I was very angry after that incident. Although I wanted to talk with Emily, I persuaded myself to give up. Because at that time, Emily was my supervisor, on one hand, it would be better not to have conflict with Emily, because we were working together every day. On the other hand, even though I would tell the truth to our manager, no one would believe me (…) because all people thought that Emily and I were good friends. So I chose to keep away from Emily. From then on, I didn't hang out with her anymore."*

From what Jessica said, we can conclude that Jessica chose the avoiding strategy to deal with the conflict, because Jessica kept quiet about that incident. Consequently, the conflict was not resolved.

### 5.7.4 Orientation of conflict

The orientation of conflict was destructive. As Jessica said:

*"Later, I met Emily only when we were working together. Actually our bad relationship didn't have any influence on our work performance, because there were a lot of employees in our department…20 people, and you know, as a saleswoman, we usually spend a lot of time working with our customers."*
*"Last month, I was transferred to the client department and that's where I am working now, because of my good work performance. So I don't meet her at work."*

From what Jessica said, we realize that the orientation of their conflict was destructive, because they are not friends anymore. Their bad relationship didn't influence their work. But, they are only together when the work requires it.

## 5.8 Incident H

### 5.8.1 Description

The author went to a real estate property management company in Fuyang city of Anhui province in the middle part of China, interviewed 3 employees who belonged to team 14 in customer service department, including 1 manager and 2 office clerks. This department had 6 members, and they were responsible for the customer consultant project. The incident H was generated from an interview of a manager, his name is Frank.

There was a conflict between Frank and his colleague Jason. Later, Frank used the compromising strategy and resolved their conflict.

One day, Jason was impolite to his customer, and Frank saw the whole incident. On the next day, the customer came to the company and complained this incident to the manager. At that time, Frank pointed out that it was Jason's mistake in presence of all people in our office, which made Jason feel angry and embarrassed. They quarreled with each other. Later, Frank talked with Jason and they apologized to each other.

### 5.8.2 Type of conflict

The conflict between Frank and Jason was a process conflict. As Frank said:

*"My colleague, his name was Jason. One day, when he received his customer, he didn't pay attention to his attitude when he was talking to the customer. Actually it was due to his personal reasons, his bad mood. He was not very happy at that time and couldn't control his feeling, and he was very impolite to the customer. So the customer didn't like Jason and our manager received the customer's complaint, and Jason didn't apologize to the customer. Then, on the next day, when the customer came to our office, as a supervisor, I immediately apologized to the customer and*

*pointed out that it is Jason's fault in the presence of all people in our office. Jason was in the office, too. Then Jason said that I purposely made him embarrassed. So he quarreled with me and then he didn't talk to me for a week."*

The conflict between Jason and Frank was process conflict, because Frank did not adopt an acceptable way to deal with the customer. Jason was impolite to the customer, and the customer complained this issue to the manager. Then, when the customer came to the office, Frank apologized to the customer and pointed out that it was Jason's fault in the presence of all employees, which made Jason embarrassed, and they quarreled with each other.

## 5.8.3 Styles to manage conflict

As a manager, Frank chose the compromising strategy to manage their conflict. As Frank said:

*"I felt upset, too, but I controlled my bad feelings and later, I invited Jason to talk about this issue in the restaurant. Firstly, I apologized to him, because I should not point out his fault in front of others and made him feel embarrassed, and then I patiently explained to Jason we should control our bad feelings and should be nice and patient to our customer. I also asked his hobbies and tried to make friend with him, we also shared our work experience with each other."*

*"Finally, Jason admitted that it was his fault to treat the customer like that, and he decided to control his personal feelings and didn't let bad moods affect his work in the future. After talking, we became good friends."*

From what Frank said, we can conclude that Frank chose the compromising strategy to deal with the conflict. Frank invited Jason to talk about their conflict. Finally, they reached an acceptable solution that they apologized to each other and Jason admitted his fault. Thus, the conflict was resolved well.

## 5.8.4 Orientation of conflict

The orientation of their conflict was constructive. As Frank said:

*"Finally, Jason admitted that it was his fault to treat his customer like that, and he decided to control his personal feelings and didn't let bad moods affect his work in the future, then, he apologized to me. After talking, our conflict was resolved well."*

From what Frank said, it seems that Jason admitted his fault and apologized to Frank, their conflict was resolved well, it is positive for team dynamics. Thus, the orientation of the conflict is constructive.

As it can be seen from 8 incidents, table 6 illustrates a summary about these different types of conflict, orientations of conflict and styles to manage conflict.

**Table 6: A Summary of 8 Incidents in Teams**

| Incident | Team number | Type of conflict | Styles to manage conflict | Orientation of conflict |
|:---:|:---:|:---:|:---:|:---:|
| A | Team 13 | Relationship | Avoiding(employees) | Destructive |
| B | Team 5 | Process | Obliging(an employee gives bonus to colleague) | Constructive |
| C | Team 2 | Process | Dominating(an employee does not give bonus to colleague) | Destructive |
| D | Team 26 | Relationship | Integrating(manager) | Constructive |
| E | Team 26 | Process | Compromising/Integrating (director) | Constructive |
| F | Team 19 | Task---Relationship | Avoiding(employees): Integrating(manager's intervention) | Constructive |
| G | Team 23 | Relationship | Avoiding(employees) | Destructive |
| H | Team 14 | Process | Compromising(manager) | Constructive |

In summary, this chapter shows the rich description of analysis of 8 incidents generated from interviews. There are 3 incidents shows that employees avoid conflict at work. Thus, the findings indicate that avoiding is the most common strategy for dealing with conflict in these small groups that been interviewed.

## 5.9 Summary of other incidents in other teams

As it has been mentioned in the Methodology chapter, the researcher interviewed 26 Chinese work teams. In spite of 8 incidents presented in the Findings section, table 7 shows a summary of incidents in other teams.

**Table 7: A Summary of Incidents in Other Teams**

| Incident | Team number[4] | Type of conflict | Style to manage conflict | Orientation |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| I | Team 1 | Relationship (with customer) | Integrating (manager's intervention) | Constructive |
| J | Team 3 | Relationship (with colleague) | Avoiding (employees) | Destructive |
| K | Team 4 | Task (with colleague) | Avoiding (employees) | Destructive |
| L | Team 6 | Relationship (with colleague) | Avoiding (employees) | Destructive |
| M | Team 6 | Relationship (with colleague) | Avoiding (employees) | Destructive |
| N | Team 7 | Task (with manager) | Dominating (employee) | Destructive |
| O | Team 9 | Relationship (with customer) | Compromising (manager's intervention) | Constructive |
| P | Team 10 | Relationship (with colleague) | Avoiding (employees) | Destructive |
| Q | Team 11 | Relationship (with customer) | Compromising (manager's intervention) | Constructive |
| R | Team 14 | Relationship (with customer) | Integrating (manager's intervention) | Constructive |
| S | Team 18 | Task (with colleague) | Obliging (employees) | Constructive |
| T | Team 21 | Process (with colleague) | Compromising (manager's intervention) | Constructive |
| U | Team 22 | Process (with another manager) | Integrating (managers) | Constructive |
| V | Team 25 | Task (with other managers) | Integrating (managers) | Constructive |

In spite of 8 incidents described previously, 14 incidents were gathered from other Chinese work teams. Interviewees are working in different sectors, such as hotel, retail industry, telecom, electronic products, cosmetics, skin care products, real estate management, education & training and advertisement & media. Interviewers were from different departments, such as front office, sales, customer service, order maintenance, marketing, engineering and business & planning. As it can be seen from

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[4]  Note: the team number is from table 3 presented in the Methodology chapter

the table, there are 14 incidents. In terms of types of conflict, it was possible to identify 8 relationship conflicts, 4 task conflicts and 2 process conflicts. Concerning the styles to manage conflicts, the findings show 5 avoiding styles, 4 integrating styles, 3 compromising styles, 1 dominating style and 1 obliging style; relatively to the orientations to conflict, there are 8 constructive orientations and 6 destructive orientations.

To sum up, table 6 and table 7 show 12 relationship conflict, 6 process conflict and 5 task conflict; 8 avoiding styles, 7 integrating styles, 5 compromising styles, 2 dominating styles and 2 obliging styles; 13 constructive orientations and 9 destructive orientations. Hence, in this chapter, results suggests that the majority of conflict emerged in the interviews are relationship conflicts, the most common styles to manage conflicts are avoiding styles and the most frequent orientations of conflicts are constructive.

# Chapter VI Discussion

The purpose of this chapter is to answer three research questions presented in the introduction chapter, which will return to the main objective of the study and discuss explanations of research questions in regard to Chinese cultural dimensions.

## I. Which type of conflict did emerge in the interviews?

According to Jehn (1997), three types of conflict in organizations were defined as task conflict, relationship conflict and process conflict. As it has been seen in table 6, in terms of types of conflict, there are 4 process conflicts, 4 relationship conflicts and 1 task conflict. Besides, table 7 shows 8 relationship conflicts, 4 task conflicts and 2 process conflicts. In total, table 6 and table 7 illustrate that12 relationship conflicts, 6 process conflicts and 5 task conflicts emerged in the interviews.

In this study, results provide the evidence that relationship conflicts are the most common type of conflict emerged in 26 Chinese small work teams. These findings corroborate Liang, Adair and Hideg' s (2014) study, which supports the idea that East Asian teams have more relationship conflict in the late stages of the team than North American teams. As a matter of fact, scholars found that relationship conflicts are inevitable in organizations, especially in the context of Chinese culture which is based on relationship and connections (Wei, Liu & Che, 2015; Huang, 2012).

## II. What type of strategy did people adopt to deal with the conflict?

Table 6 illustrates 3 avoiding strategies (see incident A, F and G) and 2 integrating strategies (see incident D and F), 2 compromising strategies (see incident E and H), 1 obliging strategy (see incident B) and 1 dominating strategy (see incident C) that people adopted to deal with the conflict. Hence, the avoiding strategy is the most common strategy which were adopted by Chinese work teams in analysis of 8 incidents. Furthermore, table 7 presents 5 avoiding strategies (see incident J, K, L, M

and P), 4 integrating strategies (see incident I, R, U and V), 3 compromising strategies (see incident O, Q and T), 1 dominating strategies (see incident N) and 1 obliging strategy (see incident S) that people adopted for handling their conflicts. Therefore, in table 7, team members adopt more often avoiding strategies than other types of strategy to manage conflicts. Overall, the first notable finding is that avoiding strategies are more adopted by 26 Chinese work teams for dealing with the conflict.

Moreover, concerning job descriptions of interviewees, the second surprising finding relates to different types of strategies for dealing with the conflict adopted by people with different positions. From analysis of all incidents gathered from interviews, the findings suggest two links between conflict management styles and positions. As it can be seen from table 6 and table 7, results indicate the same trend. On one side, integrating and compromising strategies are more frequently adopted by middle managers or directors (see incident D, E, H, I, O, Q, R, T, U and V); on the other side, avoiding, obliging and dominating strategies are more frequently adopted by subordinates to deal with the conflicts (see incident A, B, C, F, G, J, K, L, M, N, P, and S).

**Manager's interventions in handling intragroup conflicts**
It seems that middle managers and directors can manage conflicts better than subordinates. It is true that not everyone can be a manager. Manager is an outstanding person who can deal with conflicts or culture dimensions better than others. For example, incident D and incident E suggest the importance of effective leadership in handling team conflicts. Research on Chinese team leaders suggests that leaders can be helpful to maintain the team's internal relations and team cohesion. Effective leadership can reduce the negative effects of conflicts (Lang, Xi & Guo, 2007). Some Chinese scholars believed that team leaders play an irreplaceable role in managing team conflicts. Team leaders should identify types of conflicts and resolve conflicts effectively in order to improve team cohesiveness (Wan & Zhao, 2012). Studies on Chinese employees confirmed that integrating styles used by Chinese managers to

manage team conflicts can lead to positive results in the workplace (Chan, Huang & Ng, 2008).

Scholars found that dominating and obliging styles, which may be adopted by managers, have no significant positive effects for resolving conflicts. This may confirm that the Chinese people advocate "moderate" values proposed by Confucius. Moderate values advocate unbiased and compromised styles. For example, adopting dominating styles are only focus on interests of themselves, whereas obliging styles only meet the requirements of others. Hence, these two conflict management styles did not show positive effects on task conflicts and relationship conflicts in Chinese culture context. From the managers' perspective, integrating approach which meets satisfaction of both parties can be a perfect solution to handle conflicts. Besides, compromise style which seeks to balance concerns of both parties can have a significant effect in reducing the negative effects of relationship conflict (Liu & Liu, 2008). Furthermore, Chinese managers rarely use the dominating style to manage conflicts because dominating style will be opposed by the majority of employees. Thus, managers prefer intervention on compromising styles to deal with the conflict in China (Tian, 2007). Yu, Jiang and Zhao (2015) states that managers who adopt integrating styles to manage conflict emphasize cooperation goals and leads to a common exchange of information and open discussion, which will help to find new and mutually beneficial solutions. Integrating styles allow the parties to directly express their thoughts and feelings in order to integrate all views together to find a new solution.

**Subordinate's interventions in handling intra-group conflicts**
In order to understand the reasons why subordinates prefer avoiding, obliging and dominating strategies to manage conflicts in teams, we need to understand Chinese business culture. Based on Hofstede' s (2011) five cultural dimensions, the findings indicate that some styles of dealing with conflict are related with high power distance in Chinese cultural dimensions (Yao, 2014), such as in incident A, B, D, E, G and H.

Incident A suggests that other team members kept silent about the relationship conflict between Krystal and Lily. As **Lisa** said, *"we were afraid of upsetting Lily, you know, she was our supervisor, if we helped Krystal, it would affect our relationship with Lily"*. It may be explained by the power distance that exists between the young lady and the person in the higher position, the supervisor. In the Chinese context, it seems that sometimes subordinates don't want to face the supervisor, to say you were wrong, you made some mistakes. Besides, according to incident G, there was a relationship conflict between Jessica and Emily, but Jessica kept quiet about their conflict. As **Jessica** said: *"Actually, I was very angry after that incident. Although I wanted to talk with Emily, I persuaded myself to give up. Because at that time, Emily was my supervisor, on one hand, I'd better not have conflict with Emily, because we were working together every day."* Because of power distance, Jessica chose to avoid speaking about the conflict. It seems that Jessica didn't want to confront Emily who is in a higher position.

Researches indicate that Chinese supervisors are admired and respected by their subordinates, because team leaders play a pivotal role in team cohesiveness (Yang & Chu, 2012). Besides, what Lisa said indicate that other team members have long-term orientation when dealing with the conflict between Krystal and Lily. It seems that they want to maintain their relationship with Lily who is the supervisor. Buck, Liu and Ott (2010) found that high long-term orientation has great influence on Chinese HRM strategies. Further, China is a country with large power distance, which means that people who have less power are more concerned about possible negative effects if they cannot properly handle conflicts with people who have higher status. In that case, people may avoid conflict with people at higher positions in the hierarchy, because their relationship is vertical (Ji, 2012).

According to incident B, Daisy chose the obliging strategy to deal with the conflict, which shows lower concern for herself and higher concern for her colleague. As

**Daisy** said: *"I didn't talk to her about what I did because actually she worked for a long time in the company, and I was a fresh man at that time"*. This incident shows that Daisy respects her colleague who has longer working time than hers. Thus, she gave her bonus to her colleague and sacrificed her interests.

Researchers found that Chinese employees respect people who are older or have a higher position when solving conflicts (Wang, Jiang & Pretorius, 2016). Given to the harmony of Chinese traditional culture, employees usually tend to scarify their own interests, especially when conflicts involve team members (Zhang & Zhang, 2012; Yu, 1997).

As it has been seen from those incidents above, we found some reasons why most Chinese team members prefer avoiding or obliging strategies to manage their conflict. First, Chinese work teams respect hierarchies and high power distance. Yao (2014) found that Chinese social groups has higher score in power distance than their Western partners, people respect hierarchies in organizations, people's behaviors should be within their social ranks, which are influenced by authorities and rules. Dai (2007) stated that western countries advocate individuality and self-worth. Therefore, the power distance of western countries is small. By contrast, China is a collectivism country with higher power distance. Most of the organizational structure of Chinese enterprises is similar to the Chinese government departments, which is a pyramid-style organizational structure with many layers. Second, the reason why people prefer avoiding or obliging strategies is that harmony plays an important role in Chinese social relations. Chen (2002) found that Chinese people prefer non-confrontational, avoiding and obliging styles in the process of conflict resolution. In China, people prefer avoiding conflicts in order to further their self-interests and avoid potential interpersonal problems with others (Tjosvold & Sun, 2002; Hwang, 1996).

**Chinese Guanxi culture**

These incidents also reflect that Chinese unique *guanxi* culture has great impact on Chinese work teams. *Guanxi* (connections) is developed in Chinese business networks when employees work with authorities, suppliers, customers and associates (Ooi, 2007). Hence, Chinese people prefer cultivating trust and long-term relationships in their business practices. For example, in incident A, as Jenny said: "*although our manager held a meeting with all employees in our department to discuss this issue, but we all said that we didn't know what happened. (...) if we discussed their conflicts at the meeting, we may feel very embarrassed, because we didn't want to stand on either side and offend anyone, we should protect ourselves, you know, we work together every day*". It indicates that other team members chose to keep silent because they want to maintain the relationship with both, their supervisor and the colleague.

**Chinese high context culture**

In order to understand the deep reasons why Chinese subordinates usually adopt avoiding styles to deal with conflict in this study, we should also understand other Chinese cultural characteristics. Hall (1976) argued that culture is contextual and divided culture into high-context culture and low-context culture. China is a typical high context culture country where relationship between people is strong and information is widely shared by people. High context culture emphasizes "*group-identity orientation, covert communication codes, and maintain a homogeneous normative structure with high cultural demand/high cultural constraint characteristics*" (Ting-Toomey, 1985: 76). In this cultural context, Chinese people usually act as nothing happened when they are in troublesome situations or conflicts with others. If a person admits something happened, he or she must seriously take actions in time. Hence, people in high-context culture have to think twice and foresee what happens in the future before they take actions. Hence, people in high-context cultural situations often adopt non-confrontational, indirect approaches to deal with conflicts (Chen, Ryan & Chen, 2000; Ting-Toomey, 1985). Researchers found that people in high-context countries prefer more conflict avoidance than those in low-context nations (Croucher *et al.*, 2012).

**III. What kind of orientations did people adopt to handle conflicts? If the conflict is constructive, to what extent does the incident help team members to improve work performance or connect with each other? If the conflict is destructive, how do team members keep focus on performing the work at hands?**

In terms of orientations of conflict, table 6 shows that there are 5 constructive and 3 destructive orientations of conflicts. Table 7 illustrates that there are 12 constructive and 6 destructive orientations of conflicts. Furthermore, in this study, it is visible that integrating, obliging and compromising styles are positive for managing the conflict, whereas avoiding and dominating are negative for dealing with the conflict in Chinese work teams.

According to the first 8 incidents presented in the Findings chapter, regarding orientations of conflicts, 5 incidents including incident B, D, E, F and H show constructive orientations. For example, in incident D, as Jeff said: *"Later, Nick became the sales champion in our department. After that, other employees admired him and accepted him as a manager, because I noticed that nobody came to me and said that he or she didn't accept Nick as a manager, and they worked well together."* It seems that other team members accept Nick as a team leader. It is beneficial for their cooperation at work and maintaining good intra-group relationships. Besides, in incident F, as Henry said: *"Finally, Jack admitted that his calculation method was wrong. He apologized to me and we were still friends from then on. Then we got together to discuss about the new calculation method, and our manager also unified our point of views, and do the relevant meeting notes for the future work."* After they resolved their conflicts, they discussed the new calculation method which improved the team work. In addition, in incident H, as Frank said: *"Finally, Jason admitted that it was his fault to treat his customer like that, and he decided to control his personal feelings and didn't let bad moods affect his work in the future, then, he apologized to me. After talking, our conflict was resolved well."* They apologized with each other and resolved the conflict, which is beneficial for maintaining their good relationships

and team dynamics.

Li (2012) states that the superior's intervention strategy is mainly to deal with high power distance in Chinese cultural context. Respectful supervisors are suitable for dealing with various types of conflicts in organizations, especially when the involved parties in the conflict need to maintain good interpersonal relationships. If the supervisor adopts a mediator role in a conflict between the two sides, in a context of authority of the pressure and the traditional sense of fear, the instructions and solutions provided by the supervisor will be widely acceptable.

However, 3 incidents (incident A, C and G) indicate destructive orientations of conflict. For example, in incident A, as Jenny said: *"Lily didn't admit her mistake, so Krystal was very sad and depressed. Later, Krystal resigned and left our company."* It means that the team lost a team member and the conflict was not resolved. This bad result is negative for team dynamics. But it seems that they can work together well as nothing happened. As Jenny said *"This incident did not have any effect on our daily work. We work together well every day. As I said before, Krystal is a shy lady who seldom participated in our team activities. So, I wasn't familiar with her and her issue is none of our business. Besides, we should focus on our work rather than other member's conflicts."* Besides, in incident C, as Connie said: *"Although we were working together every day, we didn't want to talk with each other. (...) So the problem was not solved, to tell you the truth, when I work with her, I still feel unhappy. "* It seems that the incident damaged the interpersonal relationships between Connie and her colleague, which is negative for team work.

In fact, in terms of conflict avoidance, some Chinese scholars found that conflict avoidance is very harmful to solving relationship conflicts in China (Liu & Liu, 2008). Conflict avoidance approaches may have negative effects on conflict resolution when relationships between people are weak (Tjosvold & Sun, 2002).

Furthermore, the evidences found in table 6 are similar to those found in table 7. Hence, table 7 supports the conclusions made in table 6.

In conclusion, this chapter presents the discussions of three research questions and provides explanations from Chinese cultural dimensions.

# Chapter Ⅶ Conclusion

In this study, a case study about team dynamics was conducted in some Chinese work teams, the author went to four cities in China, including Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Bozhou and Fuyang. In total, 26 teams in different types of companies were investigated and 74 team members participated in the interviews. The objective of the interviews is to ask people to recall events or stories happened in their teams and to understand conflict management styles adopted in those teams. Specifically, the aim is to investigate the types of conflict people experienced in their teams, the orientations behind the conflicts and strategies people adopted to deal with the conflict. Based on the contents of interview transcriptions, the data analysis was focused on incidents. All the results were presented in a narrative form.

Results suggest that different types of conflicts can be identified, and the majority types of conflict are relationship conflict. Concerning conflict management styles, results suggest that integrating and compromising styles are more frequently adopted by managers, whereas avoiding, obliging and dominating styles are more frequently adopted by subordinates. The findings could be explained by high power distance, long-term orientations, Chinese high-context culture, *guanxi* culture and some Chinese traditional cultural dimensions.

## 7.1 Practical implications

Overall the results highlighted in this study provide new insights about conflict management styles in Chinese small work teams. For example, some positive incidents provide suggestions for conflict management in small teams, which can be given to the companies that participated in this study. Furthermore, concerning the unique aspect of this study, all data were collected in Chinese work teams. Hence, the findings can help Western or international companies to better manage conflicts and

cultural differences when they cooperate with Chinese work teams.

## 7.2 Limitations

Two limitations should be mentioned in this study. First, data were sometimes not very rich, which did not allow the author to draw precise conclusions. For example, in the findings chapter, the transcriptions of incident E were not very rich, in terms of styles to manage conflict. The results show that the director used integrating or compromising styles to deal with the conflict. Therefore, the researcher sometimes could not ensure a precise conclusion. Second, incidents were rarely recalled by different team members, the majority of incidents were recalled by less than three members in each team.

Considering further studies, researchers can fill in the gaps of limitations in the future. Richer interview data should be provided to ensure the abundance and preciseness of the study.

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