

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

Conflict situations are inevitable in human's social life. Conflict occurs when two or more parties have an incompatibility of values or beliefs and needs (Tillett & French, 2007) or when they want the same goal and the same result (Lewicki, Barry, Saunders, & Minton, 2003), especially in the workplace where people have to work together and communicate with each other. Workplace conflict is perceived when people are interdependent, when they blame each other, when they feel upset and when their behaviors cause a business problem (Dana, 2001).

In terms of workplace conflict, Lewicki et al. (2003) suggest that interpersonal conflict can create both destructive and constructive consequences. They cite Deutsch (1993, as cited in Lewicki et al., 2003) and others (Folger, Poole, & Stutman, 1993; Hocker & Wilmot, 1985, as cited in Lewicki et al., 2003) to reveal the finding of elements resulting in conflict's destructive image such as competitive processes, misperceptions, bias and emotionality. In terms of constructive conflict, they refer to Coser (1956, as cited in Lewicki et al., 2003), Deutsch (1973, as cited in Lewicki et al., 2003) and Dean (1988, as cited in Lewicki et al., 2003) to show that there are benefits of conflict for organizational members by explaining that the crucial objective of conflict is to learn how to control the destructive factors and how to create productive conflict instead of eliminating conflict. Moreover, the good opportunities stemming from conflict lead to self-improvement and job advancement. This is described by Cloke and Goldsmith (2000). One of the strategies to manage conflict productively is negotiation which commonly focuses on using five major styles identified by Kenneth W. Thomas and Ralph H. Kilmann's (1977, as cited in Lewicki et al., 2003) research: competition, collaboration, avoidance, accommodation and compromise. Each of these conflict management styles provides both advantageous outcomes and disadvantageous outcomes. As a result, selecting an effective style depends on whether the primary concern is people or results (Cloke & Goldsmith, 2000), the conflict types and the situation where the disagreement exists.

Most importantly, it is necessary for skilled negotiators to know the situations which are appropriate and inappropriate in selecting conflict management styles (Lewicki et al., 2003).

In a large Japanese company that distributes finished automobile and motorcycle products and spare parts to the Asia-Oceania area, there are 533 employees, 106 (20%) of whom are Japanese employees and 427 (80%) being Thai employees in 16 departments. Communication is required across departments and within departments. The communication occurs both between subordinates and supervisors and among coworkers to achieve the company target. As the employees are interdependent with each other communicate regularly, this leads to conflict and deadlock situations, especially when they have disagreement and arguments with representatives of other departments during meetings such as, meetings held to seek the solution of the problem or to assign responsibility to related departments. The conflicts during some of these meetings turned out unsuccessful and with an unsatisfactory consequence with frustration among the attendees after the meetings are finished. Even within a department, there were disputes between subordinates and supervisors for example when supervisors blame subordinates or try to change subordinates' attitudes and ideas while subordinates do not conform to supervisors' instructions. Finally, they have tried to avoid talking to each other and ignore to reach the department's target. Obviously, the outcomes of conflicts can obstruct the organization's growth and reduce the job satisfaction of employees if management leaders do not make an effort to resolve conflicts within the organization. One of the ways to improve workplace environment is to understand the conflict management styles of employees and to evaluate and educate them to wisely select the appropriate styles for the situation they are facing in order to make the conflict productive.

In the past decade, there have been various studies conducted to understand and identify the conflict management styles categorized by Thomas and Kilmann's survey mode instrument for employees in organizations. The certain findings of these studies show that the preferred conflict management styles of Thai staff in any organizations are influenced by gender, years of work experience and the national culture of the country in which the head office of the company is located, as called organizational culture (Rudd & Lawson, 2007).

Gender is one of the dimensions studied to find out the impact of it on conflict management styles. Thanida Thuyawat (2008), Leonard and Joan (1989), Thomas W. K., Thomas F. G., and Schaubhut (2008) and Brahnem, Margavio, Hignite, Barrier, Chin (2005) conclude that the gender prominently influences conflict management styles because women are likely to perform different conflict management styles from men. Thanida Thuyawat's (2008) finding reveals that men and women are likely to differently perform conflict management on collaboration style. Chusmir and Mills (1989) point out that low-level women managers tend to collaborate and avoid conflict less at home than at work and men male managers generally tend to compromise less at home than at work. In addition, males were seen to more likely prefer competition styles in the research study of Thomas et al. (2008). Brahnem et al. (2005) also argues that men are more likely to avoid conflict and women prefer to use collaboration in conflict.

In the research of work experience, Sukanya Promkun (2549) carried out the impact of work experience on conflict management styles. Her study indicated that there is a difference in conflict resolution styles between workers with low work experience and those with high work experience and she also referred to the study of Kanya Suwansang (2536) and Sekrot Thuantawin (2540) to ascertain the theory mentioned that when people become more experienced and learn more by practicing conflict-handling, they will change their conflict management styles. Upon Chanasit (2549) stated that age and work experience probably can cause a difference in the preferred conflict management styles of staff. In an international study, Drory and Ritov (1997) suggested that inexperienced persons and experienced persons apply the conflict management choices differently when they investigated the effects of work experience and opponent's power on conflict management styles. However, the impact of work experience on preferred conflict resolution style is still questionable because of a contradictory study result of Konovsky, Jaster and McDonald (1989). They revealed that there were no significant differences for years of work experience with Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Survey.

In terms of organizational culture effect, Xie, Song and Sringfellow (1998) suggested that national culture influences the different conflict resolution methods. Furthermore, Thomas (2004) referred to the studies of Morris (1998) and Tjosvold

and Sun (2002) and indicated that conflict management styles have an influence on the national culture which also reflects organizational culture of the company that staff members are taught to follow. Thomas also investigated the influence of the national culture Thai companies that had their head office overseas companies to compare preferred conflict management styles because he questioned whether it was the national culture of the country in which the branch was located or the national culture of the manager and the company's head office that were applied. He covered, however, only a comparison between conflict management styles in European owned companies and Thai owned companies which were located in Thailand.

Consequently, this study is conducted to study conflict management styles of Thai staff categorized by gender and different years of work experience in a Japanese company in Chacheong Sao and an American company in Rayong to identify the conflict management styles applied by Thai staff of each company and to compare the difference in the conflict management styles categorized by gender, years of work experience and organizational culture. There are 3 hypotheses set for this study. The first hypothesis mentions that there is a difference in conflict management styles between female staff and male staff. The second hypothesis is that there is a difference among conflict management styles of Thai staff categorized by work experience, and the third hypothesis answering whether there is a difference between conflict management styles of Thai staff who work in a Japanese company and an American company. This finding is intended to be helpful for management in organizations to select the best appropriate communication styles and conflict management style in resolving conflict and in turning conflict to be productive for the staff.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study aims to answer the following main-questions and sub questions:

1.2.1 Main Question

What are the conflict management styles of staff categorized by gender, work experience, and organizational culture in a Japanese company and an American company?

1.2.2 Sub-Questions

1. What is the difference in conflict management styles of the female staff and the male staff?
2. What is the difference in conflict management styles of staff categorized by years of work experience?
3. What is the difference in conflict management styles of staff who work in a Japanese company and an American company?

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This research includes the above objectives:

1.3.1. Main Objective

To explore the conflict management styles of staff categorized by gender, years of work experience, and organizational culture in a Japanese company and an American company.

1.3.2 Sub-Objectives

1. To find out the difference in conflict management styles of the female staff and the male staff.
2. To compare conflict management styles of staff categorized by years of work experience.
3. To investigate the difference in conflict management styles of staff who work in a Japanese company and an American company.

1.4 HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

1.4.1. There is a difference between conflict management styles of female Thai staff and male Thai staff.

1.4.2. There is a difference in conflict management styles of Thai staff categorized by years of work experience.

1.4.3. There is a difference between conflict management styles of Thai staff who work in a Japanese company and an American company.

1.5 DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

The definitions of the terms of this study are shown as follows:

Conflict is a situation which occurs when Thai employees in a Japanese company and in an American company where this study is carried out perceive that there is an incompatibility of their values and needs during their verbal or non-verbal communication; in other words, when they are interdependent, when they blame each other, when they feel emotionally upset or when their behaviors cause a business problem.

Conflict management styles are the employees' behaviors to handle conflict situations by considering their own needs and the other's needs. The behaviors can be categorized into 5 styles based on Thomas-Kilmann's definition (1987, as cited in Patterson, 1996).

1. Accommodation Style is the behaviors of the employees in neglecting their own needs to satisfy and facilitate the concerns or needs of the other because they focus on people rather than their own needs. They try to ignore conflict to maintain a good relationship and view conflict as destructive.

2. Avoidance Style is practiced when the employees do not satisfy their needs or the other's needs. They give up their personal goals and relationships. They stay away physically or mentally from the issues over which the conflict is taking place and from the people they are in conflict with.

3. Collaboration Style is applied when the employees try to satisfy both sides by discussing the similarity and difference of needs of both sides. They are willing to spend a lot of time to discuss to achieve a group consensus. They view conflicts as problems to be solved and give equal consideration to relationship and to outcomes.

4. Competition Style is used when the employees stress their own needs without considering the other side's needs. Their goals are more highly important than the relationship. They attempt to reach a win-lose situation by using force to be the winner.

5. Compromise Style is the behavior of the employees to search for a middle agreement or accept to lose some of their own needs in order to give the other's needs. They seek a solution to conflicts where both sides gain something - the middle ground between two extreme positions.

Thai staff means Thai employees who work in a Japanese company located in Wellgrow Industrial Park, Chachoeng-Sao and the head office on Silom Road, Bangkok, which is the distributor company of automobile, motorcycle, power product and spare parts in the Asia-Oceania area and Thai employees who work in an American company located in Eastern Seaboard Industrial Park, Rayong, which produces compressors for air conditioners.

A Japanese company is an organization located in Wellgrow Industrial Park, Chachoeng-Sao and the head office on Silom Road, Bangkok, which is the distributor company of automobile, motorcycle, power product and spare parts in the Asia-Oceania area, and which has 100 % Japanese ownership.

An American company is an organization located in Eastern Seaboard Industrial Park, Rayong, which produces compressors for air conditioners, and which has 100% American ownership.

Gender means sex (female and male) of Thai staff in a Japanese company and in an American company.

Years of work experience is the number of years the employees have worked. There are 3 groups:

1. Less than 5 years, which is identified as low experience
2. 5-10 years, which is identified as moderate experience
3. More than 10 years, which is identified as high experience.

Organizational culture is employee's behaviors and attitudes which are influenced by values, attitudes and norms of the headquarter company located in Japan for the Japanese company and by values, attitudes and norms of the headquarter company located in USA for the American company.

1.6 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study is limited to interpersonal conflict and the Thomas- Kilmann conflict management styles of the samples from Thai staff in a Japanese company and an American company and focuses only on gender, years of work experience and organizational culture that influence the conflict management styles of the samples. The data collection was performed from October to December 2009. The scope can be categorized by the following topics.

1.6.1 The five-conflict management styles identified by Kenneth W. Thomas and Ralph H. Kilmann (1987, as cited in Patterson, 1996).

1. Accommodation
2. Avoidance
3. Collaboration
4. Competition
5. Compromise

1.6.2 Population

1. Thai employees of a Japanese company located in Wellgrow Industrial Park, Chachoeng-Sao and the head office on Silom Road, Bangkok, which is a distributor company of automobile, motorcycle, power product and spare parts in the Asia-Oceania area. The number of total employees consists of 427 Thai people and 106 Japanese people.

2. Thai employees who work in the office of an American company located in Eastern Seaboard Industrial Park, Rayong, which produces compressors for

air conditioners. The number of total employees consists of 82 Thai people and 4 American people.

1.6.3 Sample

The samples for this study were selected using the non-probability quota sampling design and purposive sampling design because samples were selected by their tendency to attend meetings, communicate with other coworkers and are willingness to provide their information for this research. There were 2 groups of samples from the Japanese company and the American company. According to Howell (1992, as cited in Dunbar, 1998), the minimum number of sample size was 49 of total samples for two-sample *t*-test and 16 per group for Analysis of variance (ANOVA). Therefore, this study is conducted by the sample size 50 of each group.

1.6.4 Variables of the Study:

1.6.4.1 Independent variables are composed of the below variables:

1.6.4.1.1 Gender

- a) Female
- b) Male

1.6.4.1.2 Years of work experience

- a) Less than 5 years
- b) 5-10 years
- c) More than 10 years

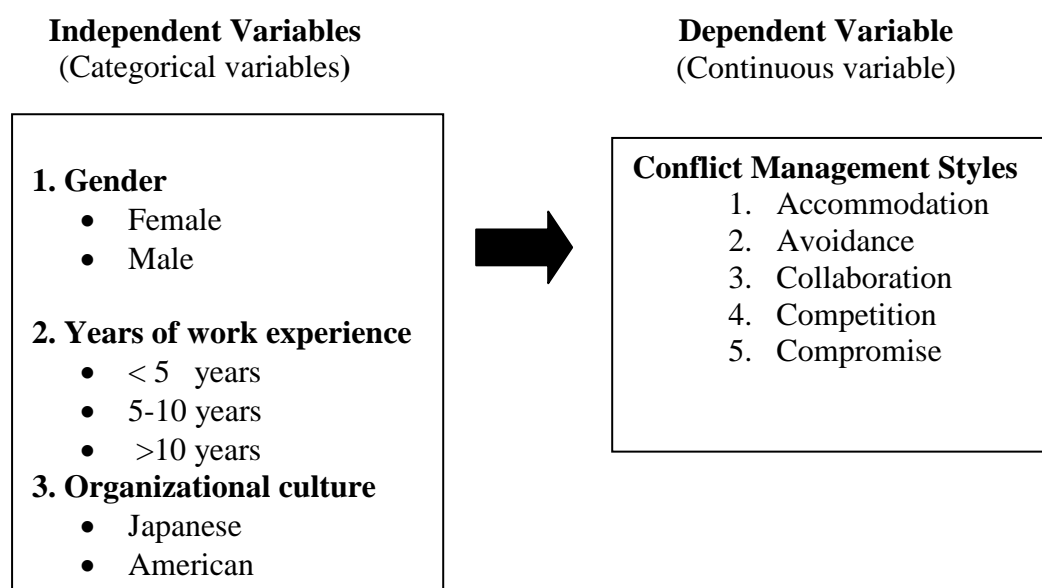
1.6.4.1.3 Organizational culture

- a) Japanese
- b) American

1.6.4.2 Dependent variable is conflict management styles

- 1) Accommodation
- 2) Avoidance
- 3) Collaboration
- 4) Competition
- 5) Compromise

1.7 FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY



1.8 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study of conflict management styles of staff in a Japanese company and an American company is significant in several respects as follows:

1.8.1. The finding of this study can be a guideline for management of both companies where this study is conducted in improving conflict management skills of their employees and working climate for job satisfaction of employees.

1.8.2. According to previous studies, managers spend nearly 20 percent of their time managing conflict in the workplace (Andre, 2008), this study can provide

the information to supervisors and managers of any Japanese companies and American companies to predict conflict management styles of subordinates and select the appropriate conflict management styles when conflict situations occur so that the conflict can be constructive and productive for the organization.

1.8.3. Company employees in any Japanese organization and any American organization can identify their conflict management styles and be aware of the possible conflict management styles of supervisors and co-workers to choose the appropriate approaches in dealing with conflict effectively. This practice can lead to self-improvement and leadership image for getting higher positions.

1.9 ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

The study of conflict management styles of staff in a Japanese company and an American company in this paper is divided into five chapters. The first chapter introduces the significance of the study, its objectives and scopes. The second chapter reviews the literature and research studies relevant to this study. The third chapter covers the method employed for this study. The empirical findings and the analysis of the results are presented in the fourth chapter. The last chapter sums up all the findings of this study, including conclusions and recommendations for further research.