

JOB SATISFACTION AND WORK PRODUCTIVITY: THE ROLE OF CONFLICT-MANAGEMENT CULTURE

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Conflict-management culture is an important factor affecting job satisfaction and productivity in the workplace. We examined the effect of conflict-management culture on individual-level job satisfaction and productivity at work by analyzing data collected from bank tellers in the USA and Korea with multigroup path analysis using Mplus. Results suggested that a collaborative conflict-management culture had a positive effect, and a dominant conflict-management culture had a negative effect on job satisfaction in both USA and Korea. Results differed between the two countries in that in Korea (a) a dominant conflict-management culture was positively associated with productivity, and (b) an avoidant conflict-management culture was positively related to job satisfaction, but no significant effects for either of these were found in the USA. These findings suggest that cultural differences should be considered when exploring the effects of conflict-management styles on individual-level job satisfaction and productivity.

Keywords: conflict-management culture, work productivity, job satisfaction, cultural difference.

Conflict-management culture has been reported to be an important element for understanding the workplace environment (e.g., De Dreu & Van Vianen, 2001; Rahim, 1983, 1986, 2002). Most previous studies have focused on the effect of conflict-management culture on group-level outcomes, such as team productivity, group achievement, teamwork effectiveness, and turnover (Chen,

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Liu, & Tjosvold, 2005; DeChurch & Marks, 2001; De Dreu & Van Vianen 2001). These researchers have found that a dominant conflict-management culture is more likely to have a negative effect on team functioning, team effectiveness, creativity, and performance (Pruitt & Carnevale, 1993), whereas a collaborative conflict-management culture is associated with positive workplace performance (e.g., De Dreu & Van Vianen, 2001). Some researchers have paid attention to the effect of organizational culture on individual-level outcomes such as depression, anxiety, psychological well-being, job satisfaction, and perceived work productivity (Brown & Peterson, 1993; Choi, 2013). These individual-level outcomes are associated with positive or negative attitudes toward jobs, which can eventually affect organizational commitment and lower turnover rate (Brown & Peterson, 1993; Wang & Feng, 2003; Wright & Bonett, 2007). Yet, the influence of conflict-management culture on an individual's perceived work productivity and job satisfaction has not been fully investigated. Further, although cultural differences are becoming increasingly significant because of the increasing number of international alliances and multinational companies, cross-cultural studies in the area of conflict management are very limited. Therefore, we conducted this study cross-nationally in order to explore cultural effects on the relationship between conflict-management culture, job satisfaction, and perceived work productivity.

Cultural Differences Among Conflict-Management Culture, Job Satisfaction, and Work Productivity

Previous researchers have conceptualized different conflict-management styles in terms of being agreeable, cooperative, or competitive (Rahim, 1983), and cooperative or competitive (De Dreu & Van Vianen, 2001). Although the previous studies have contributed to understanding the effect of conflict-management style on organizational climate, few researchers have investigated the concepts of conflict-management culture and the influence of individual-level outcomes. In this study, we focused on organizational climate in terms of psychological atmosphere rather than simple conflict-management style (Pritchard & Karasick, 1973). Three types of conflict-management culture (i.e., dominant, collaborative, and avoidant) play different roles in predicting whether or not an employee will be satisfied in his or her job (Choi, 2013). A *dominant conflict-management culture* is characterized by active confrontation as the normal behavioral strategy used for publicly resolving conflicts; hence, individual competitive behaviors with respect to resolving disagreements are appropriate within this environment. In contrast, a *collaborative conflict-management culture* is characterized by cooperation as the normal behavioral strategy used to resolve conflicts; therefore, cooperative behavior and actions are appropriate within this environment. Finally, an *avoidant conflict-management culture* is characterized by passive

withdrawal from conflict as a normal behavioral strategy, considered appropriate to preserve group harmony (Choi, 2013).

As conflict is observed in everyday interpersonal interactions in the workplace, the organizational culture for conflict management substantially influences individual feelings, attitudes, and psychological outcomes (De Dreu & Van de Vliert, 1997). Previously, it has been reported that different conflict-management cultures have significant effects on individual job satisfaction levels (Anderson & West, 1998; Choi, 2013; Pritchard & Karasick, 1973). Because job satisfaction represents work satisfaction, enthusiasm, and enjoyment, it has been considered as one of the most significant factors for determining workplace outcomes such as increased organizational commitment and decreased turnover rate (Brown & Peterson, 1993; Wang & Feng, 2003; Wright & Bonett, 2007). In sum, previous studies have indicated that a dominant conflict-management culture was negatively associated with job satisfaction, whereas a collaborative conflict-management culture was positively associated with job satisfaction. No consistent results have been reported in terms of an avoidant conflict-management culture.

In addition to affecting individual satisfaction and psychological feelings, the culture and atmosphere of conflict management in workplaces can also influence individual work effectiveness and productivity. Specifically, lethargy, delay, and withdrawal in workplaces are highly associated with individual psychological conditions and workplace culture (Madrid, Totterdell, Niven, & Barros, 2016; Siegle, McCoach, & Shea, 2014). For example, employees can produce creative and innovative outcomes in collaborative conflict-management cultures because they can more openly express their ideas. Therefore, how individually perceived work productivity is influenced by conflict-management culture creates an interesting question in the study of the workplace.

As a result of the increasing number of international alliances and multinational companies, cross-cultural studies assessing the effects of conflict-management style have received attention. For example, the findings of previous studies have indicated that differences in conflict-management culture exist in different countries (Lee & Rogan, 1991; Tinsley & Brett, 2001). Although these studies found some significant results, they paid little attention to the influence of these different conflict-management cultures on job satisfaction and work productivity. Appropriate and required actions and behaviors in a workplace can vary in different countries, as can familiarity of conflict-management culture, such as whether it is dominant, collaborative, or avoidant. Furthermore, conflict management that takes into account cultural differences can reduce the need for training and support related to the organizational environment and culture by providing a work-friendly experience. Therefore, our main purpose in this study was to investigate cultural differences with respect to how conflict-management culture influences job satisfaction and work productivity in two different

countries. Previously, most researchers have used path analysis or regression analysis as an analytic method; however, we used multigroup path analysis in order to compare the two countries.

Research Questions

Accordingly, our aim was to answer the following questions: (a) What are the relationships between different conflict-management cultures and job satisfaction? (b) What are the relationships between different conflict-management cultures and work productivity? (c) Are there any differences between the USA and Korea with respect to Questions 1 and 2?

Method

Participants

We collected data from bank tellers working in West Virginia and Washington DC, USA, and in Seoul, Korea. The U.S. sample included data from 640 participants whose age ranged from 18 to 40 years ($M = 24.61$, $SD = 7.24$); 21% were men and 79% were women. In terms of ethnicity of the U.S. participants, 51% were Whites, 16% were Asians, 10% were African Americans, 7% classified themselves as international. The Korean sample included data from 478 participants whose age ranged from 21 to 39 years ($M = 26.72$, $SD = 4.31$); 29% were men and 71% were women. In terms of ethnicity, all participants were Korean. Responses with missing data or in which participants recorded more than one option were not used for the study.

Measures

Conflict-management culture. The survey for measuring conflict-management culture had three components to assess dominant conflict-management culture, collaborative conflict-management culture, and avoidant conflict-culture and used 13 items based on Rahim and Magner's (1995) scale. The items had previously been utilized by the first author to assess conflict management styles and cultures (Choi, 2013). For the dominant conflict-management culture, where competitive behaviors are appropriate, there were five items (Cronbach's $\alpha = .86$ in this study); for the collaborative conflict-management culture, where cooperative behaviors and actions are necessary, there were four items (Cronbach's $\alpha = .76$ in this study); and for the avoidant conflict-management culture, characterized by passive withdrawal from conflict as appropriate for group harmony, there were four items (Cronbach's $\alpha = .79$ in this study).

Job satisfaction and work productivity. We utilized the scale for measuring individual job satisfaction developed by Spector (1985) and previously used by Choi (2013). It consisted of five items (Cronbach's $\alpha = .87$ in this study). Work productivity was measured by perceived productivity, that is, productivity

based on individual self-report rather than objective measures. The score of the items indicated the degree to which subjective feelings or attitudes were likely to reduce productivity and efficiency in the workplace (Endicott & Nee, 1997). The five productivity items are “During the past several months, how frequently did you work more slowly or take longer than expected to complete tasks?” “How frequently did you fail to finish planned tasks?” “How frequently did you suggest new ideas and implement new works?” “How frequently did you find you had forgotten to respond to a request?” and “How frequently did you find it difficult to concentrate on the task at hand?” (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .85$ in this study). Items were rated on a 5-point scale indicating how often the feeling and attitude manifested during the past week: 0 = *never*, 1 = *rarely*, 2 = *sometimes*, 3 = *often*, and 4 = *almost always*.

Data Analysis

The reliability of each domain was computed with Cronbach’s α . Two independent sample *t* tests were conducted to examine differences among the three conflict-management culture types, job satisfaction, and work productivity in the two countries. Multigroup structural equation modeling (SEM) was conducted to investigate country differences in relationships among the three conflict-management cultures, job satisfaction, and work productivity. All analyses were conducted with SPSS 21.0 and Mplus 7.0 (Muthén & Muthén, 2015).

Results

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations of Main Variables

	USA sample <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	Korea sample <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Collaborative conflict-management culture	14.14 (1.21)	10.72 (1.72)	39.01	0.001
Dominant conflict-management culture	12.72 (2.17)	13.78 (1.53)	9.12	0.001
Avoidant conflict-management culture	11.08 (5.21)	11.69 (6.12)	1.72	0.085
Job satisfaction	16.82 (5.67)	15.72 (6.08)	3.11	0.001
Work productivity	15.21 (5.12)	15.82 (5.78)	1.86	0.062

First, we conducted two independent sample *t* tests in each domain to examine the mean difference between the two samples (see Table 1). In terms of conflict-management culture, the U.S. mean was significantly higher than the Korean mean for collaborative conflict-management culture, and the Korean mean was significantly higher than the U.S. mean for the dominant conflict-management culture. However, the mean for the avoidant conflict-management culture was not statistically significantly different between the two countries. For job satisfaction, the U.S. mean was significantly higher than the Korean mean.

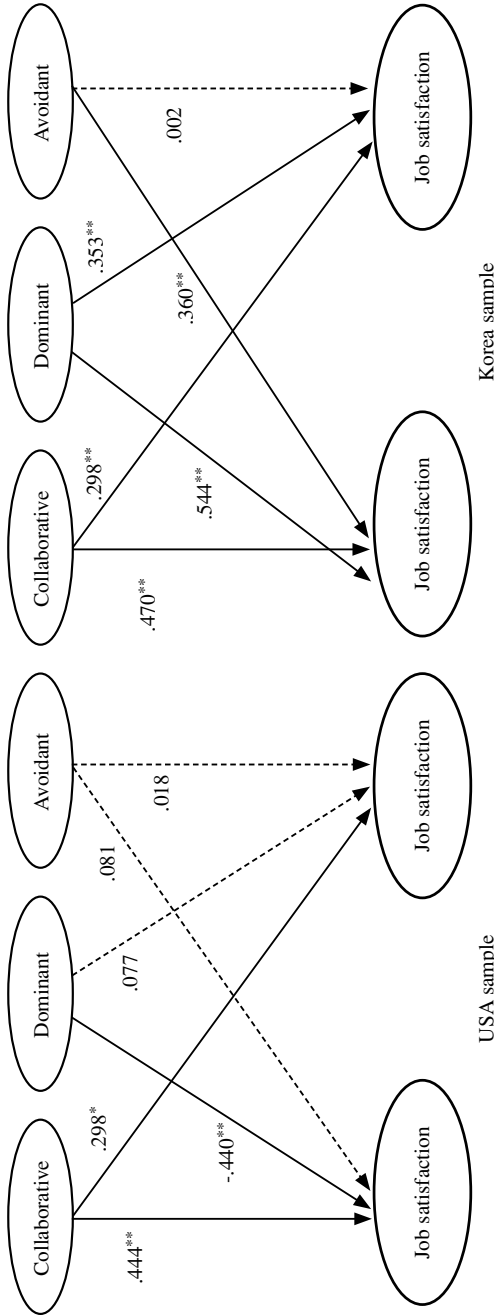


Figure 1. Path coefficients in the model.
** $p < .01$.

However, no statistically significant difference was found between the two countries for work productivity.

In the next step, we computed the zero-order correlation values between conflict-management cultures and the main variables. The collaborative conflict-management culture was positively related to job satisfaction and to work productivity and negatively associated with the dominant conflict-management culture. In contrast, the dominant conflict-management culture was negatively related to job satisfaction. The avoidant conflict-management culture was positively related to job satisfaction, but not significantly related to work productivity and no significant associations were found with other conflict-management cultures. Lastly, job satisfaction was positively related to work productivity (see Table 2).

Table 2. *Correlation Analysis of Main Variables*

	1	2	3	4	5
Collaborative conflict-management culture	1				
Dominant conflict-management culture	0.12	1			
Avoidant conflict-management culture	0.19	0.17	1		
Job satisfaction	0.45	-0.38	0.21	1	
Work productivity	0.41	0.26	0.12	0.29	1

Before examining the significance of each path between two variables through SEM analysis, model fit statistics for configural invariance and measurement invariance were evaluated. Once the model fit statistics for configural invariance and measurement invariance were acceptable, the coefficient of each path for the two samples was compared. Hooper, Coughlan, and Mullen (2008) reported the guidelines for determining model fit, and they considered comparative fit index (CFI) and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) in the range of .05 to .10 to indicate fair and good fit. In this study, two model fit statistics were appropriate, U.S. data: chi-squared = 859.02 (7), CFI = .982, TLI = .991, RMSEA < .001; Korean data: chi-squared = 641.58 (7), CFI = .972, TLI = .983, RMSEA < .001. Therefore, a comparison study of the coefficients between the two samples through SEM was acceptable.

As shown in Figure 1, in the U.S. sample, the collaborative conflict-management culture was positively related to job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.444$, $p < .001$) and to work productivity ($\beta = 0.298$, $p < .001$), but the dominant conflict-management culture was negatively related to job satisfaction ($\beta = -0.440$, $p < .001$). No significant effect was found on work productivity ($\beta = 0.077$, $p < .051$). The avoidant conflict-management culture was not statistically significantly related to job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.081$, $p < .051$) or work productivity ($\beta = 0.018$, $p < .631$). Similarly, in the Korean sample,

the collaborative conflict-management culture was positively related to job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.470, p < .001$) and to work productivity ($\beta = 0.298, p < .001$), but the dominant conflict-management culture was negatively related to job satisfaction ($\beta = -0.544, p < .001$). However, interestingly to us, the dominant conflict-management culture was positively related to work productivity in the Korean sample ($\beta = 0.360, p < .001$) and the avoidant conflict-management culture was significantly positively related to job satisfaction in the Korean sample ($\beta = 0.353, p < .001$).

Discussion

Our study extends research on the concept of conflict-management culture from an employee's subjective perspective in the workplace. We investigated cultural differences in the effect of conflict-management cultures on job satisfaction and work productivity by comparing U.S. data and Korean data. In summary, our results showed that a collaborative conflict-management culture positively influenced job satisfaction and perceived work productivity; however, a dominant conflict-management culture negatively influenced job satisfaction in the USA. These findings are consistent with those of previous studies that suggested organizational climate can influence information sharing and implementation of creativity (Anderson & West, 1998; Yu, Yu, & Yu, 2013). Further, because workers spend a significant proportion of their lives at work, feelings and satisfaction about their workplaces have a substantial impact on work productivity and psychological well-being (Desrumaux et al., 2015). In a dominant conflict-management culture, active displays of competition and self-interest are encouraged, leading to less cooperation and coordination while limiting the discussion of ideas needed to create innovative solutions. This culture may lead to lower psychological well-being and lower perceived work productivity.

In the Korean sample, the results suggest that the collaborative conflict-management culture also had a positive effect on job satisfaction and work productivity. That is, in the collaborative management-conflict culture, differences are discussed openly in a supportive environment, leading to greater discussion of ideas and coordination needed for creative and strong performance. However, compared to the U.S. sample, slightly different results were found, in that a dominant conflict-management culture positively influenced work productivity, and an avoidant conflict-management culture had a positive effect on job satisfaction. These findings are supported by previous studies, for example, that individual disagreements and competitive behaviors may yield higher work productivity in the short run within task-oriented workplaces (Babin & Boles, 1996). Further, avoidant conflict-management culture may make workers feel more comfortable with their jobs because they do not need to discuss differences

of opinion. Similarly, De Dreu and Van Vianen (2001) found that avoidant responses are associated with high team functioning and effectiveness. Finally, the findings in this study imply that the influence of conflict-management cultures on job satisfaction and work productivity are related specifically to job environment context, job type, and cross-cultural differences, as also reported by Rahim (2002). Although the desirability of working within some conflict-management cultures is obvious, it should be noted that they might not necessarily have the same impact on all jobs and in all countries.

Although this study makes a useful contribution by providing insight into basic cultural differences underlying relationships among conflict-management cultures, job satisfaction, and work productivity, and offering information to aid effective conflict management, it also has some limitations. First, the data were collected in a service industry context and we did not fully investigate different contexts and job types. Second, we did not fully survey the participants' workplace environment variables, such as supervisor or leader characteristics, communication styles between workers, or workload and work stress levels. Finally, we did not consider that conflict-management culture could longitudinally influence the level of job satisfaction and work productivity. Despite these limitations, the findings of this study may contribute by providing empirical evidence that different conflict-management cultures can play a significant role in determining worker level of job satisfaction and work productivity, and, further, that this relationship can be different in different countries. Understanding different workplace environments and examining individual-level outcomes related to conflict-management culture can provide information for effective conflict management. We expect that conflict management that takes into account cultural differences would be more effective than if cultural differences were ignored and could positively affect the relationships among subordinates, supervisors, and coworkers in the work environment.

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