

# The three-way interactions of gender, supervisor's gender, and country on the strategies for managing conflict of millennials: an exploratory study in 10 countries

Managing  
conflict of  
millennials

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – This field study aims to investigate the interactive relationships of millennial employee's gender, supervisor's gender and country culture on the conflict-management strategies (CMS) in ten countries (USA, China, Turkey, Germany, Bangladesh, Portugal, Pakistan, Italy, Thailand and Hong Kong).

**Design/methodology/approach** – This exploratory study extends past research by examining the interactive effects of gender  $\times$  supervisor's gender  $\times$  country on the CMS within a single generation of workers, millennials. The Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory-II, Form A was used to assess the use of the five CMS (integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding and compromising). Data analysis found CMS used in the workplace are associated with the interaction of worker and supervisor genders and the national context of their work.

**Findings** – Data analysis ( $N = 2,801$ ) was performed using the multivariate analysis of covariance with work experience as a covariate. The analysis provided support for the three-way interaction. This interaction suggests how one uses the CMS depends on self-gender, supervisor's gender and the country where the parties live. Also, the covariate – work experience – was significantly associated with CMS.

**Research limitations/implications** – One of the limitations of this study is that the authors collected data from a collegiate sample of employed management students in ten countries. There are significant implications for leading global teams and training programs for mid-level millennials.

**Practical implications** – There are various conflict situations where one conflict strategy may be more appropriate than others. Organizations may have to change their policies for recruiting employees who are more effective in conflict management.

**Social implications** – Conflict management is not only important for managers but it is also important for all human beings. Individuals handle conflict every day and it would be really good if they could handle it effectively and improve their gains.

**Originality/value** – To the best of the authors' knowledge, no study has tested a three-way interaction of variables on CMS. This study has a wealth of information on CMS for global managers.

**Keywords** Millennials, Conflict-management strategies, Cross-cultural study, MANCOVA analysis, Three-way interaction, Gender, Conflict management, Supervisor's gender

**Paper type** Research paper



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Interpersonal conflict is inevitable in organizations. One of the major sources of interpersonal conflict is the interdependence of workers to achieve the mission of their organization (Rahim, 2011). Conflict within organizations is not necessarily unproductive when it is properly managed. Recent research has examined the role of gender on the use of conflict-management strategies (CMS) with special emphasis on examining whether the choice of CMS varies among different generations of workers in the USA (Rahim and Katz, 2019). The value-added contribution of the present study is that it investigates the cross-cultural interactive relationships of gender, supervisors' gender and country (culture) to the CMS of the millennials. It is expected that the study will strengthen the literature in the areas of conflict management.

### Millennials

Recently, one generation of workers has drawn significant attention within the global business press and management practitioners: workers born between 1981 and 2000, or millennials (Cogin, 2012; Egri and Ralstom, 2004; Kundi and Badar, 2021; Taylor, 2015). More than 35% of the labor force are millennials, making them the largest generation in the labor force (Pew Research Center, US Census Bureau). This generation of workers is currently entering mid-career status with 62% indicating they are currently responsible for managing subordinates. Interestingly, millennials reportedly are not only managing their peers but also managing workers from their younger generation (Gen Z) and two older generations (Gen X and Baby boomers). As the future leaders are inclined to deal with workplace conflict effectively, this may lead to change in the selection, training and promotion policies in organizations. Another issue is the millennials' sense of entitlement is becoming critical to organizations (Brant and Castro, 2017). Millennials (also known as Gen Y) are more entitled than the previous three generations (Traditionalists, Baby boomers and Gen X).

#### *Positive characteristics*

Millennials purportedly are bringing to their work relationships a high regard for personal values and seeking consensus while serving as team-oriented leaders (Cogin, 2012; Culiberg and Mihelic, 2016; Perna, 2020). Their other positive characteristics include the following: they work well in teams, like frequent communication with their supervisors and want to bring about changes in their organizations. These characteristics indicate that some of them use the collaborative approach to conflict management. Some millennials have initiated conflict with older workers and supervisors because they felt bad about unfairness in their organizations. Under these situations conflict is inevitable:

While confronting their supervisors, they take an aggressive stand ('you are wrong, you should change) and learn that the organization is duplicitous and that they should initiate conflict with supervisors in the future to protect against unfairness. Jassawalla and Sashittal, 2017, p. 644)

#### *Negative characteristics*

It has been suggested that the millennials have "inflated self-esteem, unrealistic and grandiose expectations for prime work, promotions, and rewards, and a general lack of patience and willingness to grudge through unglamorous components of work" (Thompson and Gregory, 2012, p. 231). Stereotypes about this generation of workers are that they are self-centered, lacking in commitment to work, unmotivated and disrespectful. They have a tendency toward complexity avoidance. Also, this generation is associated with a rising

level of narcissism (Giambatista *et al.*, 2017). Recent reports suggest that the millennials “are not open to opinions other than their own, and it would seem that individuals with this mindset would prefer a controlling, self-oriented, conflict-management style” (McDaniel *et al.*, 2017, p. 1). These characteristics indicate that the millennials primarily use assertiveness in dealing with interpersonal conflict. There are concerns about how they will communicate with other organizational members. Millennials may enter an organization with attitudes and behaviors Gen X and Baby boomers find unacceptable.

In addition, recent conceptual research has suggested that the relationship between millennials and their supervisors, particularly with respect to better understanding conflict-management is an important area for investigation. Finally, limited empirical research examining the superior–subordinate relationship in a company reports that values and situational factors (personality, referent role, task and existing relationship of the worker and their supervisor) play important roles in understanding supervisor–subordinate conflict (Ismail *et al.*, 2012).

In the present study, we seek to better understand the CMS of the millennial employees who are influenced by their gender, their supervisor’s gender (genders) and their countries in which they live. In other words, we investigate the main and two- and three-way interactive relationships of these variables to the millennials’ CMS. To our knowledge, there is no study which has investigated the relationship between supervisor’s gender and CMS. Another important issue is that the majority of reported research on the use of CMS focuses on domestic samples of employees, primarily in the USA. The call to examine empirically how workers change their CMS in a global context has been cited in the relevant literature for more than 20 years (Kozan, 1997; Morris *et al.*, 1998; Rahim and Blum, 1994). Clearly, millennials are among the first generation of managers, particularly since the coronavirus pandemic has forced them to lead, manage and deal with conflict remotely. These millennials are expected to manage conflict effectively among a highly heterogeneous population of global workers within their organizations (Perna, 2020).

### **Conflict-management strategies**

There are various styles of behavior by which interpersonal conflict may be handled. Prior to Second World War, Follett (1940) found three main ways of dealing with conflict: domination, compromise, and integration. She also found other ways of handling conflict in organizations, such as avoidance and suppression. More than three decades later, Blake and Mouton (1964) first presented a conceptual scheme for classifying the modes (styles) for handling interpersonal conflicts into five types: forcing, withdrawing, smoothing, compromising and problem solving. They described the five modes of handling conflict on the basis of the attitudes of the manager: concern for production and concern for people. More than a decade later, Thomas (1976) reinterpreted their scheme. He considered the intentions of a party (cooperativeness, i.e. attempting to satisfy the other party’s concerns, and assertiveness, i.e. attempting to satisfy one’s own concerns) in classifying the modes of handling conflict into five types.

Three years later, Rahim and Bonoma (1979) differentiated the styles of handling conflict on two basic dimensions: concern for self and concern for others. The first dimension explains the degree (high or low) to which a person attempts to satisfy his or her own concern. The second dimension explains the degree (high or low) to which a person attempts to satisfy the concern of others. It should be pointed out that these dimensions portray the motivational orientations of a given individual during conflict. Studies by Ruble and Thomas (1976) and Van de Vliert and Kabanoff (1990) yielded general support for these dimensions. The combination of the two dimensions results in five specific styles of

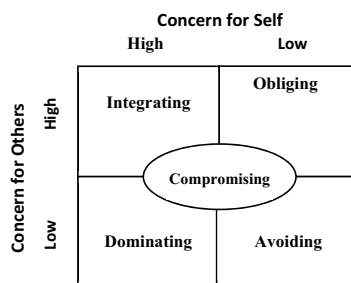
handling interpersonal conflict, as shown in [Figure 1](#) ([Rahim and Bonoma, 1979](#), p. 1327). How an organizational member handles his or her conflict depends on the relevant situation or state in which they find themselves. Specifically, [Rahim's \(2011, pp. 51–54\)](#) dual-concern model proposes a taxonomy of situations (states) where each strategy is appropriate or inappropriate.

According to this model, the five strategies for handling conflict are as follows:

- (1) Integrating (high concern for self and others) style is associated with problem solving, that is, the diagnosis of and intervention in the right problems. The use of this style involves openness, exchanging information, looking for alternatives and examination of differences to reach an effective solution acceptable to both parties. This is useful for effectively dealing with complex problems.
- (2) Obliging (low concern for self and high concern for others) style is associated with attempting to play down the differences and emphasizing commonalities to satisfy the concern of the other party. An obliging person neglects his or her own concern to satisfy the concern of the other party. This style is useful when a party is not familiar with the issues involved in a conflict or the other party is right and the issue is much more important to the other party.
- (3) Dominating (high concern for self and low concern for others) style has been identified with win–lose orientation or with forcing behavior to win one's position. A dominating or competing person goes all out to win his or her objective and, as a result, often ignores the needs and expectations of the other party. This style is appropriate when the issues involved in a conflict are important to the party or an unfavorable decision by the other party may be harmful to this party.

Two types of domination are respectful and exploitative. Respectful, not exploitative, domination can be used in organizations in certain situations.

- (4) Avoiding (low concern for self and others) style has been associated with withdrawal, buck-passing or sidestepping or “see no evil, hear no evil and speak no evil” situations. An avoiding person fails to satisfy his or her own concern as well as the concern of the other party. This style may be used when the potential dysfunctional effect of confronting the other party outweighs the benefits of the resolution of conflict. This may be used to deal with some trivial or minor issues or a cooling off period is needed before a complex problem can be effectively dealt with.
- (5) Compromising (intermediate concern for self and others) style involves give and take whereby both parties give up something to make a mutually acceptable



**Figure 1.**  
Dual-concern model:  
strategies for  
managing conflict

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decision. This style is useful when the goals of the conflicting parties are mutually exclusive or when both parties, for example, labor and management, are equally powerful and have reached an impasse in their negotiation process. This style can be used when consensus cannot be reached and/or the parties need a temporary solution to a complex problem.

### *Face negotiation theory*

Face negotiation theory suggests that “face” is an important framework for considering differences in CMS in organizations (Brew and Cairns, 2004; Zhang *et al.*, 2014). Self-face and other face are the two primary face concerns. Studies have suggested that men typically have higher levels of self-face and therefore seek to save face in their organizations, whereas women are more focused on the face of others. Consistent with the face negotiation theory, Rahim and Katz’s (2019) 40-year (from 1980 to 2000) study reported that female employees use more “nonforcing” strategies, such as integrating, obliging, compromising and avoiding strategies, than male employees, whereas male employees will generally use more forcing strategies, such as dominating to achieve their objectives.

### **Conflict-management strategies in a global setting**

The cross-sectional evaluation of gender on CMS yielded inconsistent results until examined in a generational context (Rahim and Katz, 2019). The impact of gender for self and gender of supervisor on the CMS can be further extended by assessing how employees use their conflict strategies in each of the ten countries. Prior studies have found promising results when assessing the use of CMS in different countries (Doucet *et al.*, 2009; Katz *et al.*, 1999; Ma *et al.*, 2010; Ting-Toomey *et al.*, 1991; Vollmer and Wolf, 2015).

Research on national culture suggests that organizational factors in a country influence how the people of different nations collectively embrace certain values and principles (Hofstede *et al.*, 1990). For example, in countries where individual effort is highly valued, the efforts of the individual will be more generously rewarded than in countries where collectivism is highly valued. Thus, organizations headquartered in the USA may tend to define success (Katz *et al.*, 1999) in different and predictable ways from those in more collectivist countries (Pagell *et al.*, 2005). It has been suggested that factors defining national culture will result in systematic differences in creativity, innovation and social acceptance (Florida, 2005; Kim *et al.*, 2004; Morris *et al.*, 1998; Ristic *et al.*, 2020). We believe examining the use of CMS cross-nationally within a single generation of workers will make a value-added contribution to the literature on conflict management.

Based on the preceding discussion, we ask five research questions believed to provide potentially useful additional evidence for the study of CMS in a global context. With respect to cross-national differences in the use of CMS, our study is designed answer the following questions:

- Q1. Are there significant country differences in CMS?
- Q2. Are there significant differences in CMS based on the gender of the worker?
- Q3. Are there significant differences in CMS based on the gender of the supervisor?
- Q4. Are there significant two-way interactions of gender, genders and country on CMS?
- Q5. Is there a significant three-way interaction of gender, genders and country culture on CMS?

## Method

### *Measurement*

For more than 40 years, one of the most popular and repeatedly validated methods for assessing the five strategies for handling interpersonal conflict with a supervisor (integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding and compromising) has been the 28-item Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory–II (ROCI–II), Form A (Rahim, 1983a, 1983b). The items of the ROCI use a five-point Likert scale (5 = strongly agree to 1 = strongly disagree) to measure the CMS of subordinates. A higher score indicates greater use of a strategy for handling interpersonal conflict with a supervisor.

In a large-scale study validating the five-factor Rahim dual-concern model, Rahim and Magner (1995) used five different samples ( $N = 2,076$ ) that provided empirical support for the convergent and discriminant validities of the ROCI–II and the invariance of the five-factor model across referent roles (i.e. superiors, subordinates and peers), organizational levels and four of the five samples. Numerous studies have supported the criterion validity of the ROCI–II (Hammock and Richardson, 1991; Kim *et al.*, 2004; Landaela and Grun, 2011). Rahim (2011) reports the ROCI–II subscales are not associated with social desirability response bias.

Most studies assessing strategies for managing conflict primarily used domestic subjects and/or did not control for work experience, age or genders. Thus, we believe to advance the study of conflict-management approaches in organizations, the global context as well as the gender of the employee and employees' supervisor along with the work experience of the worker, must be considered. The ROCI–II samples of items for CMS are as follows:

- “I try to integrate my ideas with those of my supervisor to come up with a decision jointly” (integrating);
- “I usually allow concessions to my supervisor” (obliging);
- “I use my influence to get my ideas accepted” (dominating);
- “I try to stay away from disagreement with my supervisor” (avoiding); and
- “I usually propose a middle ground for breaking deadlocks” (compromising).

### *Sample*

We used the mailing list of the International Association for Applied Management that was founded in 1990. The list is mainly composed of 2,400 business administration faculty and doctoral students. We used this list to invite scholars from outside the USA to collaborate with us for data collection. We received positive responses from 14 countries, but scholars from 10 countries completed data collection on a timely basis. Each research collaborator agreed to administer the ROCI–II, Form A to employed undergraduate students who were millennials. We used the data from the ten countries for our study. In addition, the questionnaire included demographic information regarding the respondents.

The average age of the respondents was 27.55 ( $SD = 5.14$ ). The average work experience of the respondents was 5.01 ( $SD = 4.36$ ) and the average work experience with the present supervisor was 2.73 ( $SD = 2.63$ ). Overall, 42.5% of the respondents were female and 31.8% of the supervisors were female. The data were collected from industries such as manufacturing, transportation, hospitality, finance and the service industry.

## Analysis and results

We analyzed the data from the ten countries to check the psychometric properties of the CMS measures. Next, our data analysis was focused on finding answers to the five research questions. SPSS 26 and LISREL 10.3 statistical packages were used for data analysis.

*Validity assessment*

To assess the validity of the ROCI-II, Form A, confirmatory factor analysis of the CMS items was computed. Results show acceptable fit indexes (Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.08, standardized root mean square residual (RMSR) = 0.02, normed fit index (NFI) = 0.96, comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.96, incremental fit index (IFI) = 0.96, relative fit index (RFI) = 0.93, goodness of fit index (GFI) = 0.96) for the five-factor solution. The existing studies provide evidence of construct validity for the instrument. The present study provides additional support for the convergent, discriminant and criterion validities which are needed to support the construct validity of the ROCI-II. Evidence of this validity was also provided by several studies, particularly the study by [Rahim and Magner \(1995\)](#).

The analysis also shows the results of a single-factor solution. The fit indexes (RMSEA = 0.23, standardized RMSR = 0.12, NFI = 0.67, CFI = 0.68, IFI = 0.68, RFI = 0.58, GFI = 0.71) were all unsatisfactory. In other words, the data did not fit the single-factor model and, as a result, the absence of five dimensions or the presence of common method variance in the measure should not be assumed.

*Convergent validity.* This is measured by the average variance extracted by all the observed variables (items) loading on a given factor. The value for this should exceed 0.50. These values were averaged for all the factors that ranged between 0.62 and 0.90. These coefficients provide support for the convergent validity of the five CMS factors. This validity for the five factors was also assessed by examining whether each item had a statistically significant factor loading on its specified factor. All the factor loadings were significant at 0.001 level which support the convergent validity of the factors.

*Discriminant validity.*

The squared correlations between factors were less than the average variance extracted for each factor. Results show that there is strong support for the discriminant validity of the CMS factors.

*Univariate normality.*

The sample exhibited a high degree of univariate normality with skewness and kurtosis statistics well within the acceptable levels of 1 and 7 for all items. [Table 1](#) reports the means, standard deviations, unbiased estimate of reliability using strictly parallel model, indicator reliabilities, Pearson correlations and variance inflation factor (VIF) for the five variables.

*Reliability assessment*

It is usual to assess internal consistency reliability (ICR) with Cronbach's alpha, but we assessed the unbiased ICR with the strict-parallel model. This a conservative method to assess ICRs and for the present study they ranged between 0.72 and 0.90 which are considered adequate. Each item has a reported  $R^2$  that measures the item's variance

Conflict strategy	Mean	UER	IR	1	2	3	4	5	VIF
1. Integrating	3.98	0.90	0.86	1.00	–	–	–	–	1.96
2. Obliging	3.62	0.80	0.62	0.49	1.00	–	–	–	1.67
3. Dominating	3.28	0.72	0.62	0.22	0.24	1.00	–	–	1.10
4. Avoiding	3.37	0.76	0.87	0.06	0.41	0.75	1.00	–	1.25
5. Compromising	3.67	0.72	0.67	0.64	0.41	0.14	0.06	1.00	1.76

**Notes:**  $N = 2,801$ . UER = unbiased estimate of (internal consistency) reliability, IR = indicator reliability, VIF = variance inflation factor. Correlations  $\geq 0.10$  are significant at  $p < 0.05$  (two-tailed)

**Table 1.**  
Variable means,  
standard deviations,  
unbiased and  
indicator reliabilities,  
intercorrelations and  
variance inflation  
factor

explained by its factor. This measure of indicator reliability (IR) should exceed 0.50 for each of the observed variables. The  $R^2$ s for all the ROCI-II items ranged between 0.62 and 0.82. These reliabilities were judged sufficient. Whereas the ICR measures the extent to which the items in a subscale are correlated with each other, IR measures an item's variance explained by a factor. The VIF that ranged between 1.10 and 1.96 was lower than 10.00 which indicates that multicollinearity was not a problem.

*Multivariate analysis of covariance model*

We computed a multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) to provide answers to the five research questions. The model used job experience as a covariate, respondent's gender, supervisor's gender (genders) and country (the three categorical variables) as the independent variables and five CMS as dependent variables. We computed the main and two- and three-way interactive relations of the three independent variables. The results are portrayed in [Table 2](#).

We used Roy's largest root, a conservative test, to assess the significance of each test. We also computed the observed power (OP) of each of the statistics. The OP for a statistic must be  $\geq 0.80$  before it can be considered as significant. The effect of the control variable (covariate) was significant. The main effect of gender on CMS was not significant, but genders and country variables were significant. The two-way interactions of gender  $\times$  genders were not significant, but gender  $\times$  country and genders  $\times$  country interactions were significant. Finally, the three-way interaction of gender  $\times$  genders  $\times$  country was significant. The three-way interaction suggests that the three variables jointly influence the CMS. There were 50 significant interactions of the three variables on the five CMS. The figures for the interactions are provided in [Figure A1](#) in the [Appendix](#).

*Answers to research questions*

- Are there significant country differences in CMS? Answer: There are significant country differences in CMS.

**Table 2.** MANCOVA with respondent's gender, supervisor's gender and countries as independent variables, job experience as a covariate and five CMS as dependent variables

Variables	Roy's largest root	F	Observed power
Covariate			
Job experience	0.013	7.29***	1.00
Main effects			
Respondent's gender	0.002	0.88	0.32
Supervisor's gender (genders)	0.002	2.76*	0.83
Country	0.413	126.62****	1.00
Two-way interactions			
Gender $\times$ genders	0.003	0.42	0.16
Gender $\times$ country	0.19	5.72****	1.00
Genders $\times$ country	0.08	2.38*	0.99
Three-way interaction			
Gender $\times$ genders $\times$ country	0.011	3.34**	0.99

**Notes:** 1. Gender = gender of respondent; genders = gender of respondents' supervisors 2. Country = ten countries 3. The five dependent variables are: integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding and compromising CMS. \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ , \*\*\*\* $p < 0.0005$



- Are there significant gender differences in CMS? Answer: There are no significant gender differences in CMS.
- Are there significant differences in CMS based on the supervisor's gender? Answer: There are marginal, but significant supervisor gender differences in CMS.
- Are there significant two-way interactions among gender, supervisor's gender and country? Answer: Gender × genders interaction was not significant, but gender × country and genders × country interactions were significant.
- Is there a significant three-way interaction of gender, genders and country on CMS? Answer: The three-way interaction of gender × genders × country was significant.

With respect to research question 1 regarding differences among the strategies for managing conflict used by millennials in different countries, Table 3 reports the mean values for each strategy by country. For example, the integrating strategy is the most commonly used CMS in the USA and Hong Kong, whereas the obliging strategy is most common in Germany, Bangladesh and Pakistan. Dominating strategy is the most commonly used in Italy and avoiding strategy is primarily used in Bangladesh. Finally, compromising strategy is primarily used in China, Turkey, Portugal and Thailand. In confirming question 1, the box test of equality ( $M = 4002.12$ ,  $F = 6.57$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ ) also indicates significant differences in the CMS mean values by country.

As reported in Table 3, the main effects of genders and country are significant. The two-way interactions of gender × country and genders × country and the three-way interactions (gender × genders × country) are significant. As Table 3 displays, there are significantly different levels of CMS components for the respondents based on the countries. That is, for example, workers in the USA reported using the integrating strategy most often, whereas workers in China reported using the compromising strategy most often.

Because the two- and three-way interactions are sometimes difficult to visualize the results reported in Table 2, Table 4 provides additional information. Specifically, Table 4 reports the highest means and lowest means in the use of each conflict-management strategy for each country by supervisor–subordinate pairing. It should be noted that after a three-way interaction is significant, there is no need to analyze the main and two-way interactive relationships.

For example, in the USA, the female millennial worker is more likely to use an integrating strategy for dealing with conflict when supervised by a female (F–F in the numerator), whereas a male millennial worker would be least likely to use an integrating

Country	<i>n</i>	Integrating	Obliging	Dominating	Avoiding	Compromising
USA	430	3.86 (0.61)	3.31 (0.68)	3.31 (0.68)	3.39 (0.67)	3.64 (0.60)
China	312	3.46 (0.72)	3.36 (0.69)	3.36 (0.69)	3.53 (0.69)	3.68 (0.62)
Turkey	249	3.35 (0.55)	2.96 (0.78)	3.12 (0.73)	3.10 (0.71)	3.97 (0.59)
Germany	265	3.01 (0.98)	3.13 (0.80)	3.06 (0.92)	3.05 (0.92)	3.06 (0.92)
Bangladesh	268	3.90 (0.48)	4.42 (0.35)	3.77 (0.56)	4.04 (0.47)	3.88 (0.52)
Portugal	251	3.56 (0.64)	3.76 (0.86)	2.94 (0.79)	3.62 (0.88)	4.02 (0.66)
Pakistan	250	3.70 (0.73)	3.77 (0.72)	2.95 (0.87)	3.64 (0.75)	3.55 (0.71)
Italy	256	3.91 (0.42)	2.78 (0.66)	3.96 (0.69)	3.17 (0.77)	3.61 (0.47)
Thailand	250	3.91 (0.64)	2.82 (1.03)	3.10 (0.70)	2.82 (0.91)	4.22 (0.72)
Hong Kong	270	3.60 (0.70)	3.21 (0.30)	3.18 (0.36)	3.19 (0.38)	3.16 (0.39)
Total	2,801	3.61 (0.70)	3.39 (0.86)	3.28 (0.77)	3.36 (0.80)	3.67 (0.71)

**Table 3.**  
Means and standard  
deviations of CMS of  
the millennials by  
country

Country	Conflict-management strategies				
	Integrating	Obliging	Dominating	Avoiding	Compromising
USA (n = 430)	F-F M-M	F-M M-FC	M-MC F-F	F-M M-MC	F-F M-M
China (n = 312)	F-FC M-M	M-F M-M	M-MX M-F	M-F F-M	F-MC M-F
Turkey (n = 249)	M-F F-M	M-F M-M	F-F M-M	M-FX F-F	M-F F-M
Germany (n = 265)	F-F M-M	F-FX M-F	F-FC M-F	F-FX M-F	M-FX M-M
Bangladesh (n = 268)	M-MX F-M	F-F F-M	F-F M-M	F-F M-M	F-FX M-F
Portugal (n = 251)	M-M M-F	M-FX M-M	MMX F-M	F-F M-M	M-M M-F
Pakistan N = 250)	M-MX F-M	F-F F-M	F-MC F-F	F-F M-M	F-MC F-F
Italy (n = 256)	F-F M-M	M-FX F-F	M-M F-F	M-MC F-F	M-F F-M
Thailand (n = 250)	M-MX F-M	M-F F-M	F-FC F-M	M-F F-M	F-FC M-M
Hong Kong (n = 270)	F-F M-M	F-MX M-M	M-FX M-M	M-F M-M	M-F M-MC

**Table 4.** Nationality and CMS of millennials and their supervisors

**Notes:** 1. Highest (numerator) and lowest (denominator) displays the relevant marginal means for each conflict-management strategy denoted by the employee gender-supervisor gender pairing. 2. “X” denotes interaction effect present. “C” denotes convergence of effect. 3. Respondent’s gender: n = 2,801, female = 1,212, male = 1,589. 4. Supervisor’s gender: n = 2,801, female = 949, male = 1,852

strategy with a male supervisor (M-M in the denominator). In cases of convergence (denoted with a C) or interaction (denoted with an X), those are also indicated in [Table 4](#).

[Table 4](#) adds the gender of the worker’s supervisor in the three-way interaction of worker gender × supervisor-gender × nationality. For example, female workers having female supervisors in the USA reported the use of the integrating strategy as the most common, whereas the same CMS component was reported to be least commonly used among male workers and their male supervisors. In addition, we found nationalities where the use of CMS components either converged or interacted when examining differences between the workers and differing genders of their supervisors. For example, in the USA, the use of the dominating strategy by male workers was found to be roughly the same irrespective of the gender of the worker’s supervisor. Conversely, in China, female workers were found to be more likely to use a dominating strategy with a female supervisor, whereas a male worker was found to be more likely to use the same CMS strategy with a male supervisor. The former reflects a convergence of CMS in the USA, whereas the latter is characteristic of an interaction (or “flipping of the mean”) in China.

**Discussion**

We began this exploratory investigation hoping to extend the recent work by [Rahim and Katz \(2019\)](#) and [Jassawalla and Sashittal \(2017\)](#) by examining the use of the strategies for managing conflict in different national contexts within the gender and genders relationship for one important generation of workers, millennials. Along the way, we sought to include the valuable lessons provided by [Doucet et al. \(2009\)](#) regarding the importance of cross-

national differences in conflict management research as well as the work by [Ismail et al. \(2012\)](#) regarding the supervisor–subordinate relationship in workplace conflict.

The design of our study considered evidence provided by prior research addressing national culture and its potential influence on how workers perceive their roles in organizations and how those perceptions potentially affect their CMS ([Kozan, 1997](#); [Morris et al., 1998](#); [Ting-Toomey et al., 1991](#)).

In particular, [Rahim and Katz \(2019\)](#), in a study covering 40 years of collected data, reported that gender and the generation of worker are key aspects for understanding the use of CMS. We chose to focus on millennials as the primary subjects of our investigation because of their importance to the current and future global workplaces and their unique views of the work environment ([Perna, 2020](#); [Howe and Strauss, 2000](#)). Using a consistent and widely recognized inventory to measure conflict-management preferences allowed us to begin assessing how those preferences, or strategies, systematically vary by national context and gender of the worker as well as the gender of the worker's supervisor. To assure we were capturing similar levels of experience, the work experience of the respondent was controlled in our analysis.

What we were surprised to find was the three-way interaction among the genders of the worker and the worker's supervisor across the countries included in this study. While we initially assumed the integrating strategy of conflict-management behavior would be universally used across the countries studied, we quickly learned that obliging, dominating, avoiding and compromising strategies were the most likely approaches in certain countries as [Table 1](#) displays. Overall, our study confirms the benefits of the five-factor model for analyzing conflict-management approaches.

#### *Implications for management*

*At the microlevel*, interventions are needed to improve employees' CMS competencies with education and specific job-related training. Training can help improve employees' understanding of the situations where each strategy is appropriate or inappropriate. [Rahim \(2011\)](#) has suggested a list of situations where each CMS is appropriate or inappropriate. He has also provided exercises and cases that can be used for conflict-management training.

[Table 4](#) is a potentially useful source of information for training programs, particularly for global managers to better understand how the gender relationship between worker and supervisor may impact the choices for managing conflict. In particular, diversity and awareness training for management development programs will benefit from our work in support of the work by [Kristof-Brown et al. \(2005\)](#) and [Chen and Tjosvold \(2002\)](#).

*At the macrolevel*, organization leaders should consider adopting the policy of recruiting employees who are likely to possess the CMS competencies. This policy shift would involve changing their traditional criteria for selecting employees. Also, at the macrolevel, organizational leaders should consider implementing a culture of learning that will promote using the CMS appropriately. Another useful area for change will involve creating a somewhat flat and flexible organization structure that will promote constructive use of the CMS.

#### *Strengths and limitations of the study*

This study brings much-needed focus on factors impacting on the choice of CMS. This study provides affirmative evidence to accept our research questions and answers but more work is clearly needed. Specific dimensions regarding national and organizational culture contexts would provide potential prescriptiveness to the topic. Further researchers may be interested in industry factors, size of the firm, organizational level and the work groups as

variables to extend the findings reported here. One of the strengths of this study is that the measures of endogenous and exogenous variables were collected from one group of employees who are educated millennials. Limitations of this study, include collecting data from collegiate samples, might limit the generalizability of the results.

#### *Directions for future research*

Further research is needed to enhance our understanding of the relationships of CMS and the effectiveness of employees in various industries. This study shows whether CMS influences differ among managers and employees. Other criterion variables for future research should include some indicators of leadership effectiveness, creativity, job satisfaction, organizational citizenship behavior and organizational justice. Organizations should also study the antecedents of CMS, such as organizational culture, structure and leadership which are neglected areas of conflict management research. We are also suggesting that there should be empirical studies on [Rahim's \(2011\)](#) taxonomy of situations where each strategy is appropriate or inappropriate.

An important area of future research concerns carefully designing and evaluating the effects of training in CMS in enhancing the aforementioned criterion variables. Field experiments are particularly useful in evaluating the effects of CMS training and changes at the macrolevel on individual, group and organizational outcomes. There is also a need for scenario-based and laboratory studies that control some of the extraneous variables to better understand the effects of employees' CMS.

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### Further reading

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Appendix

Managing conflict of millennials



**Figure A1.** Plots of five conflict-management strategies by the gender of respondent (gender) and gender of the respondent's supervisor (genders) for each country

(continued)

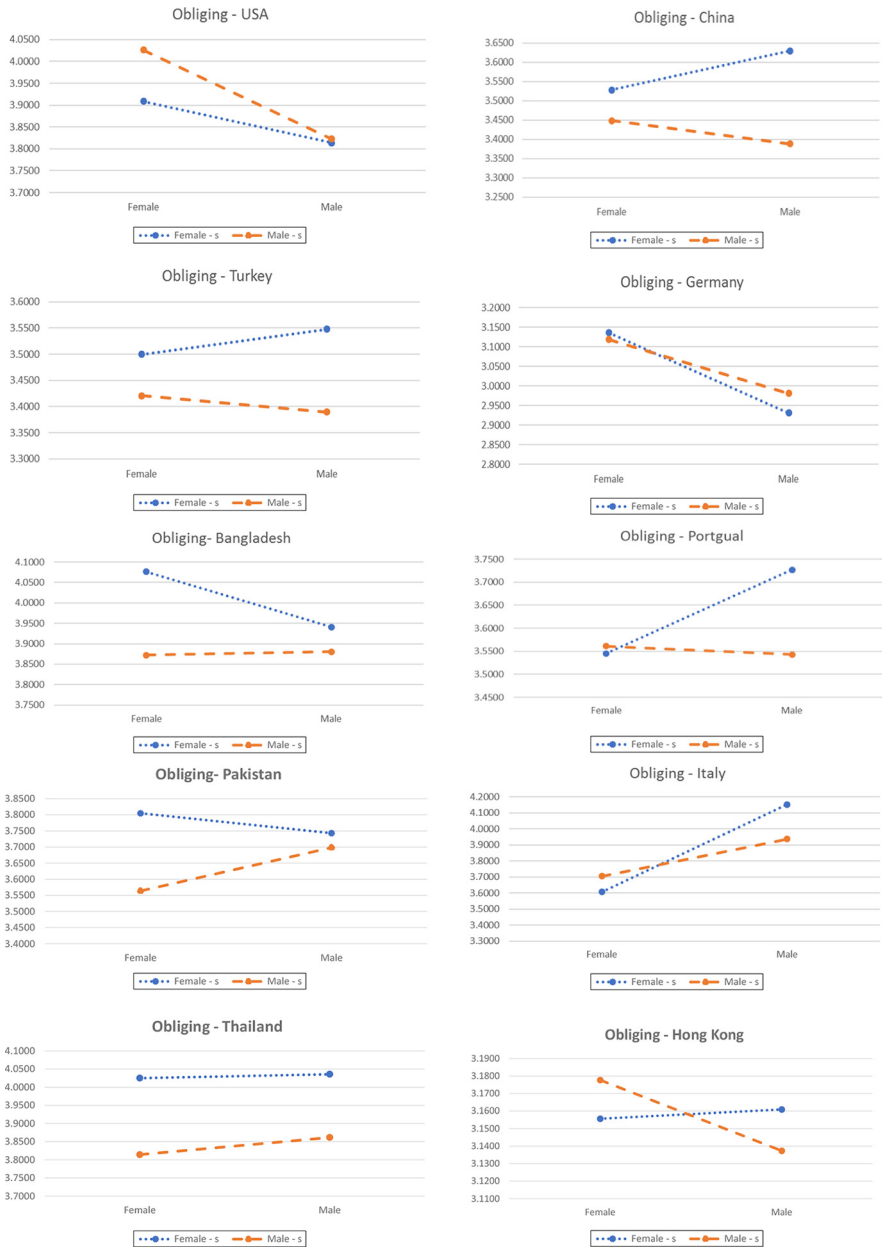


Figure A1

(continued)



# Managing conflict of millennials



(continued)

Figure A1



Figure A1

(continued)

# Managing conflict of millennials



Figure A1

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