

FIGURE 2
DIRECT/INDIRECT CONFLICT STYLE

Direct Conflict Style Patterns	Indirect Conflict Style Patterns
Meaning “inside” the verbal message <p>Direct culture patterns focus attention on the words that people use (the verbal message), as the primary place in which individual's interpret what one another actually means. In direct culture systems, it is important to verbalize what you want or need to the other person.</p>	Meaning “outside” the verbal message <p>Indirect cultures determine what someone means in terms of what is communicated “outside” the verbal message. For example, paying close attention to nonverbal behavior and saying what is expected in the situation rather than what you really believe are common strategies in indirect cultural systems. In indirect cultures, words are more often used to meet social or situational expectations and less to communicate what you actually believe or want.</p>
Precise, explicit language use <p>Direct culture patterns for dealing with substantive disagreements place greater emphasis on using precise and explicit language. It is the responsibility of the person speaking to clear up misunderstanding or confusion when talking about areas of disagreement. In this sense, verbal fluency is associated with linguistic precision in word choice.</p>	Ambiguity and vagueness in language use <p>Indirect culture patterns place greater emphasis on using ambiguity and vagueness in language to communicate disagreements. Such indirect language strategies include greater use of analogies, stories, and metaphors compared to more technical and precise language used by direct cultures. Indirect cultures expect the <i>listener</i>, not the speaker, to assume responsibility for clearing up misunderstandings or confusion when discussing disagreements.</p>
Reliance on face-to-face resolution of disagreements <p>Direct cultures are most comfortable with face-to-face interaction between the parties. From this viewpoint, when both parties can “sit down together,” a process of conflict resolution is initiated and maintained.</p>	Reliance on third parties for resolution of disagreements <p>Indirect cultures place greater reliance on third parties to mediate a conflict situation between individuals. From an indirect culture perspective, meeting face-to-face with the other person increases discomfort by appearing too confrontational and therefore, may actually escalate tensions.</p>
Speaking your mind <p>Direct culture systems view progress in resolving conflict in terms of how clearly and accurately individuals state their own goals, needs and concerns. From a direct culture perspective, “if you do not tell me what you want, how can we ever begin to make progress in resolving this conflict situation?”</p>	Discretion in voicing goals <p>Indirect cultures emphasize discretion and caution in voicing goals, needs, and concerns for fear that the act of verbalizing these differences may fracture the harmony that needs to be maintained throughout a conflict situation.</p>

“Say what you mean and mean what you say.”

American proverb



“Nothing done with intelligence is done without speech”

Greek proverb

FIGURE 2 CONTINUED

Direct Conflict Style Patterns	Indirect Conflict Style Patterns
<p>Verbally assert difference of opinion</p> <p>Direct cultures value verbally assertive strategies for voicing disagreements. Further, direct culture systems positively evaluate verbal defense of a position or opinion in the face of opposition.</p>	<p>“Talk around” disagreements</p> <p>Indirect cultures are less comfortable with verbally assertive strategies and therefore value strategies that “talk around” disagreements. When faced with verbal confrontation, indirect culture systems tend to verbally “yield” in order to maintain relational harmony.</p>
<p>Persuasion through reasoned argument</p> <p>Direct cultures base influence on the speaker’s ability to support his/her position through logically ordered arguments that are based on factual evidence. With direct cultures, it is felt that the “facts can speak for themselves.” In this sense, direct cultures employ a more “linear” form of argument in which major points are supported with evidence that leads logically to specific recommendations.</p>	<p>Persuasion through facework</p> <p>Indirect cultures frame logical arguments and evidence in terms of “facework”—publicly supporting the reputation of the other party. Thus, influence is wielded in indirect cultures relationally and incrementally rather than by overtly presenting “factual” evidence. Indirect cultures tend to use a “nonlinear” form of argument, whereby major points may be hinted at, evidence suggested, relational connections reinforced, and conclusions “adjusted” depending on the response of the other party.</p>
<p>Substantive disagreement focus</p> <p>Direct cultures are particularly sensitive to dealing with substantive disagreements through a problem-solving process in which the basic issue or problem is articulated, causes are identified, solutions generated and the “best” solution selected based on an agreed upon set of criteria. Compromise on substantive disagreements is a common solution in direct culture problem-solving efforts.</p>	<p>Relationship repair focus</p> <p>Indirect cultures facilitate resolution of substantive disagreements through an emphasis on relational repair strategies. This is often done, for example, by reviewing and reinforcing the cooperative history between the disputing parties and taking on deeper relational commitments that involve increased obligation toward one another.</p>

“It is good to know the truth, but it is better to speak of palm trees”

Arab proverb



“Hear one and understand ten.”

Japanese proverb

FIGURE 3
EMOTIONAL EXPRESSIVENESS/RESTRAINT CONFLICT STYLE

Emotional Expressiveness	Emotional Restraint
Overt display of emotions <p>Emotionally expressive cultures value discussion of disagreements with full and overt displays of emotions. Feelings of frustration, anger and other emotions are comfortably expressed to the other party.</p>	Disguised display of emotions <p>In emotional restraint cultures, disagreements are expected to be presented in an emotionally calm manner. Strong feelings are hidden in order to avoid upsetting the other party.</p>
Control emotions by “externalizing” <p>Emotionally expressive cultural systems maintain control in conflict situations by “letting out” or externalizing emotion. Attempting to hide or contain feelings during a conflict can escalate conflict rather than decrease tension. Humor may be used to regulate tensions and defuse escalating conflict.</p>	Control emotions by “internalizing” <p>Individuals from emotional restraint cultural systems are able to control emotions by “internalizing” them. Emotional restraint patterns value masking expression of feeling to maintain harmony during a conflict interaction. Humor is “risky” when tensions are high because it may be negatively interpreted by the other party.</p>
Visible display of feelings through nonverbal behavior <p>Emotionally expressive cultures integrate <i>more</i> visible nonverbal displays of emotion through increased body movement, facial expressions, eye contact, hand and arm gestures, and use of touch.</p>	Minimal display of feelings through nonverbal behavior <p>Emotionally restrained cultures value greater control and <i>less</i> display of emotion through body movement, facial expressions, eye contact, hand and arm gestures, and use of touch.</p>
Expansive vocalization <p>Emotionally expressive cultures share feelings through more expansive vocal characteristics that accompany the words people use when communicating with one another. These vocal characteristics include greater variation in speech rate, volume and pitch.</p>	Constrained vocalizations <p>Emotionally restrained cultures value more suppressed vocalizations which are reflected in less variation in speech rate, volume and pitch levels.</p>

"What is nearest
the heart is
nearest the mouth"

Irish proverb



"After a storm, fair
weather, after
sorrow, joy"

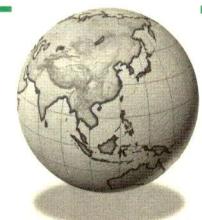
Russian proverb

FIGURE 3 CONTINUED

Emotional Expressiveness	Emotional Restraint
Sensitive to constraints on expressing feelings	Sensitive to hurting feelings of other party
<p>Individuals in emotionally expressive cultures resist constraints placed on their ability to express their own emotional reality when conflict arises. Emotionally expressive cultures are most comfortable with a conflict resolution process that incorporates overt emotional displays as an essential element in effective conflict communication.</p>	<p>Emotional restraint cultures are uncomfortable with overt expressions of emotion and sensitive to hurting the feelings of the other party. Emotionally restrained cultures tend to impose more constraints on appropriate expression of emotion in order to insure that the other party is not confronted with a display of emotion.</p>
Relational trust through emotional commitment	Relational trust through emotional maturity
<p>In emotionally expressive cultures, relational trust is developed (and lost) depending on the perceived affective commitment each party has toward the goal of resolving or managing the conflict situation. Affective (emotional) commitment cannot simply be stated, it needs to be demonstrated through vocal and nonverbal behaviors. For example, in emotionally expressive cultures, it is not enough to say you "care," you need to more overtly display this emotional commitment.</p>	<p>In emotional restraint cultures, trust is developed through emotional control. Emotional control is demonstrated by keeping emotions "in check" or even hidden from observation by the other party. Further, relational trust is enhanced through "affective reliability" which involves face-honoring behavior between parties. In contrast, mistrust arises around issues of "affective unreliability" which is generated through loss of "face."</p>
Emotional information necessary for credibility	Emotional suppression necessary for credibility
<p>Conflict situations oftentimes create issues of credibility and sincerity between parties. In emotionally expressive cultural systems, credibility and sincerity are established and maintained through affective or emotional displays. That is, each party is expected to verbally and nonverbally demonstrate their believability to one another through more intense emotionally expressive behavior. In emotionally expressive cultures, conflict is de-escalated and resolution processes begin after the personal credibility and sincerity of each party is established.</p>	<p>In emotionally restrained cultures, credibility and sincerity are established by maintaining tight control over displays of emotion. Overt display of feelings in emotionally restrained cultures communicates insincerity, questionable intentions, and suspicious motives. Emotional control and suppression are critical in maintaining credibility and de-escalating conflict.</p>

"Silence produces peace, and peace produces safety"

Swahili proverb



"The first to raise their voice loses the argument"

Chinese proverb

Intercultural Conflict Styles

The intercultural conflict style model presented earlier identifies four cross-cultural conflict resolution styles.

Discussion ▲ Direct ▲ Emotionally Restrained	

Discussion Style. The *Discussion* style describes an approach to conflict resolution that emphasizes a verbally direct approach for dealing with disagreements and a more emotionally restrained or controlled manner for communicating with one another. The *Discussion* style emphasizes precision in language use and generally follows the maxim, “say what you mean and mean what you say.” Further, this style views more intense expressions of emotion as potentially dangerous and generally inhibitory toward “effective” conflict resolution processes. Talking about the disagreement directly to one another is a comfortable approach for this style, yet this “discussion” should be based on objective facts if possible and each person should be cautious in injecting their own personal feelings into the process.

	Engagement ▲ Direct ▲ Emotionally Expressive

Engagement Style. The *Engagement* style emphasizes a verbally direct and confrontational approach toward resolving conflict that is accompanied by an emotionally expressive demeanor. This style views the overall sincerity of each person toward resolving disagreements as grounded in the concern that is demonstrated through more intense, verbal and nonverbal expression of emotion. This style is more comfortable than the *Discussion* style with personal confrontation between the parties where disagreements are directly addressed and emotion is “put on the table.”

Accommodation ▲ Indirect ▲ Emotionally Restrained	

Accommodation Style. The *Accommodation* style, emphasizes an indirect approach for dealing with areas of disagreement and a more emotionally restrained or controlled manner for dealing with each party’s emotional response to conflict. This style emphasizes ambiguity and circumlocution in language use in order to insure that a conflict does not “get out of control.” Maintaining emotional calm and reserve is essential to this style because it enables interpersonal harmony to counter relationally damaging disagreements among the parties. This style views intense expressions of emotion as potentially dangerous and generally inhibitory toward “effective” conflict resolution processes. Indirect speech, use of stories and metaphors, reliance on third party intermediaries, and minimizing the level of conflict present among the parties are all specific *Accommodation* style strategies.

	Dynamic ▲ Indirect ▲ Emotionally Expressive

Dynamic Style. The *Dynamic* style involves the use of indirect strategies for dealing with substantive disagreements coupled with more emotionally intense expression. This style may involve such linguistic devices as hyperbole, repetition of one’s message, a more “associative” argument structure, ambiguity, stories and metaphors, humor, and use of third party intermediaries. The *Dynamic* style is comfortable with more emotionally confrontational discourse and expression. The credibility of each party is grounded in the degree of emotional expressiveness toward the other party.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Four Conflict Styles

What are the strengths and perceived weaknesses of the Discussion, Engagement, Accommodation and Dynamic intercultural conflict styles? Below are listed “strengths” and “weaknesses” of each conflict style. The “strengths” reflect the viewpoint of the conflict style “insider.” That is, the strengths represent self-perceived characteristics. The “weaknesses” reflect the perspective of the “outsider,” people whose intercultural conflict style is different from the style being described.

Discussion Conflict Style

Self-Perceived Strengths:

- ▲ Confronts problems
- ▲ Elaborates arguments
- ▲ Maintains calm atmosphere

Weaknesses as Perceived by Other Styles:

- ▲ Difficulty in reading “between the lines”
- ▲ Appears logical but unfeeling
- ▲ Appears uncomfortable with emotional arguments

Engagement Conflict Style

Self-Perceived Strengths:

- ▲ Provides detailed explanations, instructions & information
- ▲ Expresses opinions
- ▲ Shows feeling

Weaknesses as Perceived by Other Styles:

- ▲ Appears unconcerned with the views & feelings of others
- ▲ Appears dominating & rude
- ▲ Appears uncomfortable with viewpoints that are separated from emotion

Accommodation Conflict Style

Self-Perceived Strengths:

- ▲ Considers alternative meanings to ambiguous messages
- ▲ Able to control emotional outbursts
- ▲ Sensitive to feelings of the other party

Weaknesses as Perceived by Other Styles:

- ▲ Difficulty in voicing own opinion
- ▲ Appears uncommitted & dishonest
- ▲ Difficulty in providing elaborated explanations

Dynamic Conflict Style

Self-Perceived Strengths:

- ▲ Uses third parties to gather information and resolve conflicts
- ▲ Skilled at observing changes in nonverbal behavior
- ▲ Comfortable with strong emotional displays

Weaknesses as Perceived by Other Styles:

- ▲ Rarely “gets to the point”
- ▲ Appears unreasonable and devious
- ▲ Appears “too emotional”

Cultural Conflict Resolution Styles

Understanding cultural differences is the first step in effectively resolving conflicts.



Figure 4 presents a summary of how disagreements are managed and emotions expressed across cultures based on intercultural research and writings. This information is presented with the intent to stimulate discussion rather than rigidly categorize particular cultural systems in terms of the four conflict styles. Further research is currently underway that specifically examines cultural differences in direct and indirect approaches and emotionally expressive and emotionally restrained styles for resolving conflicts across particular cultural communities.

Cultural Difference In Conflict Style

The identified regions and countries presented in Figure 4 are not intended to be comprehensive. Selected countries within specific regions are highlighted only. It should be noted that some regions are more represented in the literature while other regions (e.g., Africa) are far less examined in terms of the two dimensions of direct/indirect and emotionally expressive/restrained cultural patterns. In general, the following regional cultural differences have been identified in previous literature. However, specific countries and specific ethnic groups within countries may evidence different conflict resolution styles than indicated below.

- ▲ *North American* (United States, Canada) cultural patterns are predominately within the Discussion style.
- ▲ *European* patterns are located in the Discussion style and the Engagement style.
- ▲ *Central and Latin American* cultural patterns are predominately found within the Accommodation style and the Engagement style.

▲ *Asian* cultural patterns are found within the Accommodation style (e.g. Japan, Cambodia), Dynamic or Discussion style (e.g. Pakistan, India), and Engagement style (e.g. Russia).

▲ *Arab Middle East* cultural patterns are primarily located within the Dynamic style while Israeli cultural patterns are characteristic of the Engagement style.

▲ *African* cultural patterns are found in the Engagement style, Accommodation style, and the Dynamic style. However, some African culture groups are more Discussion style, depending on the influence of colonization.

Cultural Variability

Intercultural conflict resolution style differences between and within regions arise due to a number of factors, including: (1) whether specific cultural communities have historically remained fairly homogeneous and isolated from other cultures, (2) the influence of colonization and/or other culture contact, and (3) the historical and recent immigration of culturally different groups. For example, the relatively greater historical influence of African cultural patterns in the Caribbean compared to Central and Latin America has resulted in Caribbean countries such as Cuba developing a more direct and emotionally expressive approach to resolving conflict (Engagement style) compared, for instance, to Mexico which has maintained a more indirect and emotionally restrained approach (Accommodation style). This is certainly applicable to the great variety of cultures within the African continent, thus accounting for a tremendous range of cultural conflict resolution styles within that region of the world.

FIGURE 4
Cultural Patterns across Conflict Styles

Discussion Style	Engagement Style
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ North America <ul style="list-style-type: none"> e.g., United States (European American), Canada ▲ Europe <ul style="list-style-type: none"> e.g., Great Britain, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Germany ▲ Asia Pacific <ul style="list-style-type: none"> e.g., Australia, New Zealand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ North America <ul style="list-style-type: none"> e.g., United States (African American) ▲ Europe <ul style="list-style-type: none"> e.g., France, Greece, Italy, Spain ▲ Central & Latin America <ul style="list-style-type: none"> e.g., Cuba, Puerto Rico ▲ Asia <ul style="list-style-type: none"> e.g., Russia ▲ Middle East <ul style="list-style-type: none"> e.g., Israel
Accommodation Style	Dynamic Style
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ North America <ul style="list-style-type: none"> e.g., Native American ▲ Latin America <ul style="list-style-type: none"> e.g., Mexico, Costa Rica, Peru ▲ Asia <ul style="list-style-type: none"> e.g., China, Japan, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ Arab Middle East <ul style="list-style-type: none"> e.g., Kuwait, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon ▲ Asia <ul style="list-style-type: none"> e.g., Pakistan

All cultural patterns exist in all cultures—but some are preferred more than others.

