

Conflict Resolution in Intercultural Business Contexts: An Interdisciplinary and Reflective Framework

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Abstract: - This paper adopts an interdisciplinary and reflective framework and aims to analyze the parameters and factors involved in conflicts arising in intercultural business settings, such as those of firms employing a diverse workforce, involving people of different cultural backgrounds. First, it presents the main concerns that need to be examined in a negotiation or mediation process (outcome vs. relationship) and proposes approaches and strategies for the resolution of major or minor disputes, to minimize costs and “side effects”. Secondly, based on conflict case scenarios involving intercultural interaction, the paper aims to illustrate the link between the negotiation approaches adopted, the participants’ emotional state, and their verbal and non-verbal communication skills. Finally, it aims to bring to the surface the importance of maintaining a communication climate promoting collaboration and establishing “rapport” to pursue an interests-based, integrative negotiation (win-win). Thus, it becomes evident that in the context of today’s globalized enterprises, it is essential, on the one hand, to take into account the increased need for effective intercultural communication (and, sometimes, mediation) and, on the other, to adopt appropriate approaches and strategies to ensure positive and mutually acceptable outcomes by adhering to a reflective model of thinking. Based on the findings and suggestions of the paper, it is proposed that training in conflict resolution strategies aiming for “integrative” outcomes (by applying the proposed CIIS framework as a pilot) should become a component of corporate policies and business communication, given also that migration flows are constantly changing workforce composition.

Key-Words: - conflict resolution, negotiation, intercultural, business settings, approaches, criteria, strategies, communication, outcome, corporate policies.

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1 Introduction

In the current globalized business environment, contact between people of different origins, languages, and cultures is a common phenomenon. The clash of different views, habits, and approaches can often cause conflicts, especially in the workplace, leading to difficult situations that need to be handled with care, rather than being allowed to escalate and cause damage to relationships. Indeed, long-lasting relationships should be sought after in every kind of business with long-term prospects and goals. Although an outcome can be gained by exercising power, in the “traditional” way, this is rarely the best alternative nowadays, as it can have a

heavy toll on relationships between the different parties and compromise deals and cooperation.

Migration flows, at the same time, have surged during the past few years, mainly due to armed conflicts in the Middle East, causing unprecedented problems in neighboring countries as well as those representing the gate to Europe – mainly Greece and Italy, which are the first stop for refugees from the Middle East, though France and Spain have also been receiving a significant number of people, mainly from Africa. According to the International Migration Outlook 2023, “permanent-type migration to OECD countries reached an all-time record in 2022 at 6.1 million new permanent immigrants. This represents a 26% year-on-year

increase and a 14% increase compared to 2019”, [1]. Also, according to research findings from a project implemented in Greece on the needs of refugees and immigrants arriving in the country [2], an intercultural mediator is often needed in order to solve potential conflicts in such an intercultural context. More specifically, the intercultural mediator can normalize the relations of immigrants in a given social environment by removing linguistic and cultural barriers.

This paper discusses the necessary strategies [3] that can be adopted in negotiating in order to reach a mutually satisfying resolution and examines the parameters and factors involved in different settings and conflict scenarios pertaining to the intercultural, globalized context in which businesses operate and its complex demands, [4]. Intercultural communication, which plays a primary role, “holds the possibility of deepening people’s sense of compassion and connection to diverse others”, [5]. Several scholars and researchers have examined ways to deal with conflicts and negotiate more creatively, [6], [7], [8], [9], [10], [11], [12], [13]. This paper focuses on the importance of approaches and strategies in resolving conflicts and negotiating, aiming to show that success in such communicative events can only be achieved in conjunction with an appropriate (verbal and non-verbal) expression of requests, claims, or demands.

Undoubtedly, Business English as a lingua franca also plays a very significant role [14] in this new “Babel” often encountered in contemporary business settings. People of different ethnicities may have to deal with linguistic as well as cultural barriers, so they need a common language in order to communicate with each other, despite its use in varying ways. Thus, training is necessary in order to establish a communication climate conducive to resolving disputes before entering into negotiating; this also explains the relatively recent trend towards educational programs on conflict resolution, aiming to provide interested parties with the necessary theoretical and practical knowledge that will allow them to cope with the exigencies of the globalized environment, including cultural and linguistic diversity.

2 Intercultural Communication Conflicts and How to Deal with Them

Theoretically speaking, people involved in a conflict should bear in mind that “interests, rights, and power” are the three main elements of any dispute,

[3]. The parties of the conflict may focus on any of these factors while trying to resolve the dispute. The most common way to achieve that is through negotiation when an effort is made to reach an agreement. When that fails, an alternative procedure may be used, involving a third party – a mediator – who provides help to the disputants. Disputes may focus on the interests of each party of the conflict, or on finding out either who is right or who is more powerful. Notably, parties may choose (consciously or not) to use any of the three above-mentioned factors in a dispute.

Therefore, negotiations that are focused only on interests are called “interests-based” or problem-solving negotiations, because they assume that the dispute is a mutual problem for parties and must be solved by them, given that “interests” represent what each party demands or considers a priority. Defining and reconciling such interests is a challenging task. The first step in adopting an interests-based approach is introspection – finding out one’s own goals and establishing priorities. This process involves also research into the other party’s interests and priorities, working on creative solutions and trade-offs in case of opposed interests.

Besides the interests-based approach, there is the “rights-based” one, in which the disputants rely on different, independent standards to determine who is right, such as legal provisions, a contract, or socially accepted behavior (though the latter can vary due to different cultural norms that may interfere in an intercultural context). If this approach fails, parties may seek mediation, which may involve either help by another person (an expert), or a court of law. Finally, the third way to resolve the conflict is by adopting a “power-based” approach, in which the question is who is more powerful or who is less dependent on the other, [3].

2.1 Selecting an Appropriate Approach to Conflict Resolution

To define which approach is preferable, it is necessary to determine the costs and benefits. There are four main criteria to compare approaches: a) transaction costs, b) satisfaction with outcomes, c) effects on the relationship, and d) recurrence of disputes, [3]. After examining carefully and comparing these criteria, participants will be able to determine which approach might be more effective in different disputes.

It is important to note that all disputes have transaction costs: a) time, b) money, c) resources consumed, and, often, d) lost opportunities. Undoubtedly, the interests-based approach can reduce costs as far as possible, because the cost for

this approach will be only the time and, probably, the opportunities lost, while the rights-based approach will also mean having to spend money and sometimes suffering emotionally in case of adjudication. However, the power-based approach has the highest transaction costs. In this case, one may lose money, time, resources, opportunities, or good relations with the opposite party, including emotional costs.

The next criterion is satisfaction with outcomes. Satisfaction may depend on whether the disputants believe that the resolution and the procedure that was followed were fair, [3]. By adopting an interests-based approach, the parties of the dispute may be most satisfied with an outcome, because they are more likely to find a trade-off that may satisfy both of them. In the case of a rights-based or a power-based approach, satisfaction often may be the outcome for only one party. When disputants adopt a rights-based approach and involve a third party in the dispute, they should expect that the resolution might not be in their favor; therefore, a degree of risk is also involved and, possibly, a deepening of the crisis – an argument that corroborates the importance of having competent, transformational leaders [15] who can intervene and create appropriate solutions. Finally, when adopting a power-based approach, the winner is likely to be the party that possesses more power (money, capabilities, respect) – so, the weaker party is going to suffer a loss, unless the negotiation gets back to the phase involving (mutual) interests again.

The third criterion is the effect on the parties' relationships. The approach taken to resolve a dispute may affect the parties' ability to work together on a constant, perhaps day-to-day, basis, [3]. Ongoing quarrels and threats (which are common in a power-based approach) or even adjudication (rights-based approach) may have a serious impact on relations between parties; one of the parties may withdraw and stop cooperating in case of an unfair or questionable result of the dispute, for example. However, by using an interests-based approach, relations between disputants are unlikely to get worse, given that collaboration presupposes mutual respect and empathy, which will help to establish "rapport" and shared understanding.

The final criterion, the recurrence of a dispute, is related to whether a particular approach produces a "durable resolution", [3]. An example of recurrence is when a resolution may fail after a period of time. For instance, two companies may have reached an agreement by means of a rights-based approach, involving adjudication;

nevertheless, one of the parties is not satisfied and, as a result, the dispute breaks out again and now involves a power-based approach. Such recurrence may break out again and again until both parties reach a point representing a mutually acceptable solution.

Accordingly, determining which approach is better in every specific dispute can help one realize that all the relevant criteria are interrelated. Thus, dissatisfaction with outcomes may cause stress in relations between parties, leading to the recurrence of the conflict, which in turn increases transaction costs, [3], [16]. When we choose our approach, we need to predict not only transaction costs but also dissatisfaction with outcomes and possible recurrence.

Ideally, an interests-based approach can guide parties in identifying which issues are more important and can help resolve the dispute underlying these matters more effectively than a rights-based or a power-based approach. The mutual interests of the parties tend to improve their satisfaction with outcomes, so this approach is more promising than determining who is right or more powerful. If parties remain satisfied, the conflict is unlikely to recur.

Nonetheless, it is impossible sometimes to resolve the dispute by adopting only an interests-based approach. Interests and priorities or different perceptions about who is right or more powerful may diverge, so it may not be possible to reach an agreement if parties fail to choose in which way to negotiate. In such cases, rights-based and power-based approaches are used. Thus, for instance, only adjudication can resolve problems of public importance, as legal issues are usually involved, making it difficult to "bridge the gap" based simply on willingness to cooperate.

In conclusion, an interests-based approach would be the least costly and the most effective way to resolve a conflict. By adopting this method, the disputants may solve the greatest problems of the dispute and prevent its recurrence, thus saving transaction costs and ensuring a mutually satisfactory outcome. However, this presupposes a framework of respect and mutually accepted principles; a process in which the human factor remains very important – which points also to the significance of appropriate training, including ethical conduct and a "toolbox" of communicative strategies.

2.2 The Role of Emotions in Conflict Management

Emotions have a special place in negotiations. Venting emotions is essential before beginning the process of reconciling interests. Negative emotions often generate disputes, which, in turn, generate more negative emotions, creating a vicious circle. Specifically, affective events theory explains how conflict events may influence an individual's positive or negative emotions that are fundamental to attitudes and behaviors in an organization, [17].

Therefore, people who approach the dispute with positive emotions are more likely to choose the interests-based approach in order to resolve the conflict. The disputants will cooperate in their discussions and, probably, they will easily resolve any dispute by making concessions and trade-offs, given that with positive emotions it is somewhat easier to understand the opposite party.

In contrast, if negative emotions prevail at the beginning of the dispute, the parties will not be able to resolve the conflict so easily. Overwhelmed by their negative feelings, they may turn to a resolution based on a rights-based or a power-based approach that will not lead to desirable outcomes. However, findings suggest that venting, especially in anger [18], can have useful emotion regulation functions, depending on whether the person involved uses reinforcing or reinterpreting interactions, [19]. Interestingly, an ostensibly "aggressive" behavior can also be a cultural element. For example, vocal change occurs among Tanzanians when conducting business negotiations, during which they speak very loudly, even cutting each other off, [20].

In addition, there is a connection between emotion regulation and the interests-based and rights-based approaches. Undoubtedly, conflict can be detrimental to group performance because it creates negative emotionality and distracts group members from the task. It should be noted that intra-group conflict is closely associated with emergent emotional states, [21]. The rights-based approach is, also, often associated with the expression of anger, which is a very strong emotion [18], as well as tension and other negative emotions. However, an interests-based approach may also involve negative emotions.

It should be noted that, according to research on the strategic use of emotions in negotiations, negotiators who can convincingly display both positive and negative emotions (i.e. those who can regulate their emotions effectively) are able to influence negotiation outcomes and the quality of future interpersonal interactions, [21]. This means that effective emotion regulation will, probably,

increase positive feelings and cooperation in groups and will help both parties to deal with each other in a reasonable manner, using an interests-based approach in order to resolve the dispute. Therefore, when abilities of emotion regulation are exhibited, it is more likely that an eventual resolution of the dispute with an interests-based approach will not evolve into a rights-based approach. It should be noted, however, that this presupposes adopting a stance that will not be prejudiced towards the other party (especially in intercultural settings) and, of course, refraining from using biased language and/or inappropriate non-verbal communication, [22]. More often than not, facial expressions can reveal what one really feels, even if words may contradict them. This is why, during negotiations, Ethiopians prefer face-to-face meetings —because this would allow them to discern the subtle facial expressions that would not be noticed in a phone or an e-mail conversation [20].

In sum, it is essential to understand the role of emotions and rational thinking. Therefore, dealing effectively with disputes should involve emotion regulation, or "modification" of emotions [23], which contributes to resolving conflicts as well as enhancing work performance.

3 Seeking the Best Negotiation Strategy in Different Settings

3.1 Five Possible Strategies

Different strategies apply to different settings. However, a combination is often needed and one ought to be flexible in order to reach the desired outcome and, ideally, keep the relationship intact. The following strategies [3], [24], [25] summarize the methods that can be adopted during most negotiations and/or interpersonal communication:

- A. *Avoiding*: "Lose-lose". This means simply avoiding a person or another party if you are not interested in their offer and know that the outcome will be negative for you.
- B. *Accommodating (obliging/yielding)*: "Lose to win". However, if you are concerned about not ruining a potentially profitable relationship in the future, you can adopt a conciliatory attitude. This means that you can give up something now in exchange for something from the other party in the long run.
- C. *Competing*: "Win-lose". In a competitive environment, you "drive a hard bargain". You make it clear from the outset that you

have no intention of accepting what the other side is offering – at least not without fighting for what you believe is advantageous to you. You focus on a positive outcome and do not really care about maintaining a good relationship with someone who does not respect your own wishes and goals (i.e. your “power”).

- D. *Collaborative* (or “*integrative*”): “Win-win”. This is a strategy that leads to long-lasting relationships, possibly with an outcome that can be positive for both parties, because they have worked on it together, in a friendly atmosphere, full of understanding and respect for each other's interests. On the other hand, if you expect the other side to be competitive when they have no intention of being so, you may create a “self-fulfilling prophecy” [26] and, actually, end up making them competitive, ruining what could have been a positive outcome (and relationship) for both of you.
- E. *Compromising*: “Split the difference”. When a competing strategy proves to be too risky and leads to an impasse, you switch to a different strategy, choosing to meet your opponent halfway and “cut your losses” rather than go home empty-handed and possibly with a ruined relationship.

As [27] suggests, there are definitely clever ways to create a win-win situation, depending on the context, provided that tensions can first be eliminated. The following conflict case scenarios aim at inspiring a discussion about how it might be possible to create satisfying solutions for both sides, thus turning a distributive negotiation into an integrative one. For instance, instead of having to deal in monetary terms, communicators could volunteer to offer each other resources they do not need at the moment, depending on the individual setting and what solutions participants can come up with.

The conflict case scenarios are organized based on the following framework, which is also proposed as a pilot for dealing with intercultural conflicts in a business context:

Conflict → Interpretation → Integrative Solution. This framework (CIIS) could serve as a basis for organizational training in approaching people and situations with an empathic negotiation mindset, which focuses on understanding how the other party is feeling.

3.2 1st Conflict Case Scenario

Conflict (intra-organizational): A young employee from Asia, who is employed at a clothes factory in a Greek city, complains that she is overworked and underpaid – and demands a raise. Her boss refuses to satisfy her claim and threatens her, so she decides to go to the police.

Interpretation: While the boss satisfied his ego by showing dominance/power (and exhibiting, perhaps, some degree of prejudice and racial bias), neither the outcome nor the relationship can be regarded as satisfactory. However, if, instead of focusing on power, he had realized that it would be in his own and his employee's interest to negotiate a deal in order to reach a mutually acceptable agreement, respecting the employee's rights as well, the situation would not have escalated. In terms of “transaction costs”, the employer should also have considered that his attitude might also trigger a strike that would be detrimental to his business and reputation, because of the negative publicity such incidents tend to generate, as they are often associated with “sweatshops” and exploitation.

It should be noted that negotiation “lies at the core of the manager's job”, as managers often have to negotiate even with subordinates who “have their own interests, understandings, sources of support, and areas of discretion”, [28]. Therefore, instead of focusing on “power”, this should be the last option or resort, because it may involve considerable transaction costs. Interests (such as preserving communication climate in the business) and, of course, rights (in terms of workforce payment and working conditions) should come first, while the verbal and non-verbal elements accompanying the strategy adopted can play a primary role, [29]. For instance, a negative effect would be triggered by a stern face and the “either you do that or else” stance, in contrast to a more tentative approach, based on “breaking the ice” by suggesting (not imposing) possible alternative solutions and options in a collaborative spirit, taking into account the interests (and rights) of both sides. Eventually, being able to use the right expressions, taking paralanguage into account [22], can work wonders – and vice versa, while emotion regulation (especially with regard to anger) is also required.

Suggested response of a more integrative type: Taking into account what was previously mentioned, the employer could have come up with a more creative proposal; for instance, offering the employee resources that he does not need at the moment, either in terms of basic accommodation or in relation to other benefits (e.g. extra pay for

secondary or supplementary, but less tiring, duties). Taking into account linguistic and cultural barriers, it might also be wise to seek assistance from an intercultural mediator (or even an interpreter) in order to sort out the problem and avoid escalation; in that case, though, the mediation would probably be based on a rights-based approach.

Analysis of benefits: This resolution offers a) reduced transaction costs (taking advantage of “dormant” resources”, b) mutual satisfaction with outcomes (extra pay for secondary duties), c) long-term positive effects on the employer-employee relationship (and avoidance of a strike or escalation involving legal procedures), and d) reduced chance of recurrence of the dispute.

3.3 2nd Conflict Case Scenario

Conflict (inter-organizational): An offer from an inflexible tour operator from Northern Europe has been sent to the owner of a tourist agency in North-western Greece. The tour operator has been a good partner for many years but now demands to be offered considerably lower hotel prices. In the meantime, the travel agent is offered a better deal by another travel agent from a Balkan country.

Interpretation: In this case, knowing that the first tour operator was unwilling to give in to claims for a better offer (and feeling rather frustrated because of that), the agency owner proceeds to finalize the deal with the second operator. She has the following options: either to avoid the first person, ignoring any possible grievance on his part, or to take that into account and inform him about her final decision, leaving the door open for a future collaboration that might arise under more favorable circumstances. The second option works positively for the other person, too, as getting feedback can certainly help him adjust his offers (and demands) accordingly in the future.

Once again, politeness, openness, and respect cannot possibly be misconstrued as weakness and there is no need to act from a position of fear, assuming a defensive attitude without serious reason. Focusing on the relationship can do no harm and reveals a reliable and trustworthy communicator; something that can leave room for a possible future deal when circumstances may allow it. It should also be emphasized that cultural differences need to be taken into account, [26]. Factors such as the “Mediterranean temperament”, for instance, should also be considered in relation to people from Northern Europe, who do not tend to act so emotionally and would be discouraged by “outbursts” that Southern Europeans are prone to.

This is why it is always safe to display professionalism in one’s relationships and transactions – which, of course, does not exclude a healthy dose of humor or openness, depending on the context and culture of the participants, especially in an intercultural business environment.

In the communicative setting that was previously described, the negotiation with the tour operator from Northern Europe failed because he was rather recalcitrant and exhibited an uncooperative attitude. In this case, however, the travel agent had the option to withdraw because that was more profitable for her. This proves the importance, firstly, of emotion regulation and establishing rapport in order to achieve effective communication; and, secondly, the role that different mentality and cultural issues can play – even though they can often trigger stereotypical behaviors, [30]. Moreover, this case shows the difficulties entailed by not having face-to-face communication.

Suggested response of a more integrative type: It would definitely help if both sides agreed initially to negotiate in order to try to find a mutually acceptable solution by slightly modifying the terms of the offer or attempting to “expand the pie”. For instance, instead of lowering the hotel room prices (which may not have been an option), the travel agent could have offered a different deal (based on a real-life situation): e.g. by allowing business travelers to use a conference room (or other resources) that the hotel did not need at the moment (something that the visitors traveling for business could benefit from), or even an offer of local transfer by means of the hotel van, which might happen to be available during that period of time). Finally, it would help if the communicators could have arranged an online meeting to discuss the issue.

Analysis of benefits: This resolution offers a) reduced transaction costs (time for the negotiation and “dormant” resources, b) mutual satisfaction with outcomes, c) long-term positive effects on the tour operator-travel agent relationship, and d) reduced chance of recurrence of a future dispute, because by “creating a precedent” the two parties have discovered ways to negotiate in an integrative style.

Apart from the above indicative scenarios, there are innumerable other instances in which linguistic and cultural barriers can be a problem. For instance, some employees may not understand company correspondence, instructions during training in the

workplace, or documents written in jargon or obscure language. This could also create potential safety problems, so it would be the responsibility of Human Resources to resolve such issues that may be causing intra-group or even inter-group conflicts in organizational departments, thus affecting performance and productivity.

3.4 Reflecting Upon Conflict Case Scenarios

It is beneficial to examine how a conflict may involve a combination of strategies, moving across strategies and styles. An interesting case, connecting conflict resolution with leadership and politics, as well as crisis management, is the major dispute that emerged in France when the Macron government attempted to impose some controversial pension measures. During that period, in 2023, the country was paralyzed with strikes, protests, and serious riots, which eventually forced Macron to retreat. In this way, the government moved from a “power-based” negotiation (competing style) to a yielding (accommodating style), entering into a “rights-based” (and, essentially, also an “interests-based”) negotiation with the unions and finally adopting a collaborative style that conforms with the “dual concern” model. In this case, the government protected its image and status, by showing to the labor unions that it respects their rights and agreeing to collaborate in order to find a commonly accepted outcome. At the same time, turmoil and disruptions were terminated and this meant reduced transaction costs for the economy and the overall business activity.

It is essential to demonstrate the importance of applying such a reflective framework: a) in business training for effective organizational communication; b) in leadership training and management of issues in the workplace; and c) during transactions between companies. The following example highlights the dilemmas leaders are faced with and pinpoints the importance of ensuring that they have the right methodological tools in order to be able to apply theory to practice and come up with solutions that will both promote business and value long-lasting relationships with partners and stakeholders:

Conflict (inter-organizational): Two teams of representatives of two companies are negotiating the terms of the merger of Firm A with Firm B. Firm A has acquired Firm B and the team of negotiators of the latter firm is anxious to make a deal in order to ensure that Firm A will keep some members from their staff. Team A disagrees on the number of employees that should be kept after the merger. This and similar conflict scenarios could serve as case studies for training sessions in organizations on

conflict resolution, aiming to show (or create) “win-win” solutions.

As an indicative experiment, the authors presented the above-mentioned scenario to two classes of postgraduate students. The vast majority of them were able to come up with creative (“integrative” type) solutions, as alternative options that could serve as catalysts for finding common ground. Specifically, 24 out of 30 students at the University of Attica (80%) and 15 out of 20 students at the University of Ioannina (75%), at the postgraduate level (MBA), were able to “expand the pie” by creating win-win options, taking into account the “dual concern” model and aiming to resolve the conflict without serious tangible or intangible transaction costs. In this way, students have realized that “getting to yes” [31] is actually possible.

4 The Benefits of Integrative Negotiation

As it was previously pointed out, negotiation between two or more parties aims at resolving a perceived difference of interests, and it is a prevalent form of interaction for managing everyday social conflicts, [32]. Negotiations almost always include contentious and competitive processes for getting and maximizing individual gain. This may be due to the fact that negotiation involves uncertainties about the negotiation task or the other party’s priorities. Therefore, the negotiators’ personal understanding of the conflict and the opponent is an important factor in the negotiation process and its outcome. Sometimes, negotiators assume that their opponent’s interests are diametrically opposed to their own and that the more one side gains and satisfies its goals, the less the other side does so.

On the other hand, in the so-called “integrative” (win-win) negotiation the parties’ mutual gain is not necessarily fixed, and it is possible to increase it by means of a trade-off, [4]. Some negotiations involve problem-solving and cooperative processes associated with outcomes and trade-offs of increased mutual gain (managing, sometimes, to “expand the pie”). Understandably, groups perform more effectively when their members share a common view of what the task is and how better coordination can be achieved. In the same way, negotiators may easily manage to resolve the dispute when they have common purposes and, hopefully, end up having the desirable profits

through collaboration that involves appropriate verbal and non-verbal communication, [29].

Successful negotiations maximize mutual gain and involve the development of a shared understanding (“metacognition”), which is more likely to develop when negotiators are given the opportunity to discuss among themselves and collaborate on how they would approach the negotiation, [32]. Finally, best practices seem to tap into the vast resources of emotional contact, relying on a humanistic perspective and seeking to get the best out of each individual, in a spirit of dignity and humility – rather than oppression and humiliation, as was perhaps the case in the not too distant past. It becomes therefore evident that character, values, and virtues are the true catalysts that can help adopt an ethical approach and manage to resolve a conflict (even when there seems to be a “cultural clash”) and, in doing so, safeguard communication climate (and overall organizational performance and conduct) in the current intercultural workplace of contemporary businesses.

Taking into consideration the above-mentioned approaches and settings, it is proposed that parties should first attempt to approach a conflict in a collaborative spirit, aiming to generate mutually satisfactory solutions of an “integrative” type, taking into account both parties’ interests (and rights). This is a “win-win” strategy that, firstly, can leave both sides satisfied; secondly, has low transaction costs; and, thirdly, allows business operations to run smoothly, without the recurrence of disputes. Yet, it remains an “idealistic” challenge that requires ethical and transformational leadership, including a collaborative mindset - especially when a crisis emerges, [15].

5 Conclusion

With increasing migration flows, which entail a more diverse workforce, businesses need to adapt to the new circumstances by training their organizational members, so that they can deal with conflicts and learn “the art of win-win negotiations” [25] in order to negotiate effectively and resolve or, better, prevent conflicts by acting proactively. Each different negotiation situation needs to be examined by means of the above-mentioned approaches, factors, criteria, and strategies, in an attempt to have optimum deals – rather than allowing tension to escalate. Focusing on common interests in an ambiance of mutual respect (“dual concern” model) proves to be the best option, as it leads to satisfactory outcomes and long-lasting relationships with clients and business partners, thus minimizing

transaction costs and preventing the recurrence of disputes.

Negotiation and/or conflict resolution involves interactive communication and is multidimensional: it requires preparation at mental, emotional, and behavioral levels. It is important to clarify that, in most negotiation or conflict resolution situations, a common language is necessary (unless a qualified intercultural mediator is involved). In most intercultural settings, English as a lingua franca is usually the vehicle of communication, in terms of verbal exchange of messages, which may also be accompanied by non-verbal cues.

In such multi-dimensional communicative events, the actual expressions used, which can be tentative or more declarative – in combination with the non-verbal elements, such as body language, gestures, and movements, or even tone of voice – can make the difference in terms of effectiveness [33], [34] when, for instance, the negotiator intends to look and sound unyielding and demanding or, in contrast, friendly and collaborative (depending on his or her strategy). It should be noted, however, that the negotiators’ approach and overall attitude are sometimes influenced by whether they come from a culture that is, for instance, individualistic or collectivistic; monochronic or polychronic; low-context or high-context (which affects how direct they might be with their demands), etc. [22], [26] – and this should be taken into account by both parties, in order to avoid unnecessary misunderstandings.

Finally, it should be noted that the above-mentioned strategies can be effectively employed by negotiators or mediators in order to “create solutions” (as shown by applying the CIIS framework), aiming for “integrative” negotiations, in order to resolve disputes and conflicts arising in an intercultural business context. As [3] support, sometimes it is unnecessary to employ a power-based or a rights-based approach that could lead both sides to a court of law, when an interests-based (collaborative) approach can be used, instead. Moreover, the adoption of appropriate strategies should be skillfully combined with pertinent non-verbal communication as well as the appropriate use of language (either directly or through a competent mediator) in order to lead to the intended outcome.

Regarding the limitations of this study and suggestions for future research, it would be interesting to examine the cultural or even linguistic barriers, and the peculiarities of interactions between particular groups of people from different pairs of nationalities or ethnicities, [35]. This can also be achieved by examining potential responses

and reactions to scenarios and dilemmas such as the above-mentioned conflict cases in order to determine how different perspectives may affect the possible outcomes or the possibility of an integrative solution.

The reflective and interdisciplinary framework proposed in this paper could, therefore, be used as a pilot for training organizational members, including executives and professionals, in intercultural negotiation (or mediation) skills and conflict resolution in a business context, by using “experiential techniques”, [36]. Given the importance of human capital in business development [37] and taking into account that the future seems to be promising nothing more than an ever-increasing wave of population transfer and migrant flows towards the West (affecting mainly European countries, but also the USA and Australia) from Asia and Africa, corporate policies also need to adapt in order to cope with an increasingly diverse and intercultural workforce and promote intercultural cooperation, [38], [39]. Therefore, this is a “fluid” process that requires a multi-dimensional, reflective, and interdisciplinary approach. This involves management of people and issues by means of “caring leadership”, “from the top down” [40], effective business communication, and an ethical mindset [41] that ensures mutual respect and emphasizes commonalities between the parties, aiming either to find or to generate alternative solutions to conflicts.

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Contribution of Individual Authors to the Creation of a Scientific Article (Ghostwriting Policy)

- Grigorios Gikas has contributed to the theoretical presentation of the topic of conflict resolution and its approaches and criteria, including the discussion of transaction costs and benefits.
- Periklis Tagkas has analyzed the negotiation approaches and strategies in relation to the communicative aspects of the intercultural business environment, including the conflict case scenarios examined.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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